

REPRESENTATION OF STRESS ON THE CONTEMPORARY BODY

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ABSTRACT

What emerges through the interaction between the individual and the socio-technologically enhanced society can be seen as the “contemporary body”. This body is perpetually being shaped by its transaction with society, triggered by various stimuli determined by a culture of technology and consumption. Computers and other digital devices used in making new media arts are in the very center of this stress-culture while other media are at its periphery. This indeed gives computer based new media arts vast possibilities in the artistic expression of the contemporary body and stress. While initiating our primary discussions on this topic we have set off by arguing that art forms framed within “new media arts” have the potential of representing the confrontation of our bodies with the socio-technical changes that have been apparent after the turn of the century and reached its zenith during the peak of consumer culture in the 80’s.

During the course of research and composition of the dissertation however, field studies were made in various centers of new media culture and extensive research carried out in New York. As a result of these lived experiences and close examination of the international art world we have gradually come to agree that new media arts is still remotely interested in the social concerns effecting our bodies. But the crucial aspect of this survey has been to examine the resistance of the individual to being leveled down and

worn out by social-technological mechanisms. In this aspect media like video and performance which we refer to as “elder new media arts” stand out as more elaborate ways to represent stress on the contemporary body, which is a social phenomenon. The artists who work with these media are more articulate about the positioning of their own body inside the stressful world. Computer based new media artists on the other hand tend to focus on the possibilities of extending human being’s technological and digital abilities, and elaborate on the utopia of cyber reality, finally promoting virtual bodies. In other words they choose to ignore rather than deal with to the socio-technological changes in human life, and transcend into the dream world of cyber culture.

We shall see in due course that computer based new media arts does not use to full capacity the potentials offered by new media. Therefore, to support our argument we have aimed to investigate how technology is used in all of the above-mentioned media: either as a tool or as a purpose. It will be seen that video and performance art use technology as a tool while computer based new media arts use it as a purpose. However, the world we live in is technologically enhanced but still social; it uses digital technology as a tool for development and well being, but it does not let cyber culture prevail over the current social and physical culture. Likewise we cannot yet expect the dominance of digital solutions over social ones. Therefore, a social phenomenon like stress is best examined by artists who are socially aware and use those mediums, which can position a critical approach to stress.

OZ

“Güncel vücut” dediğimiz olgu sosyo-teknolojik olarak gelişmiş toplum ile birey arasındaki etkileşimden ortaya çıkıyor. Bu vücut toplumdaki teknoloji ve tüketimin etkileri ile sürekli olarak değişmektedir. Yeni medya sanatları bu stress kültürünün merkezinde dururken diğer sanat formları sınırında kalmaktadır. Bu nedenle yeni medya sanatları güncel vücut ve etkileşim içinde bulunduğu stresi temsil etme konusunda bir çok olanağa sahiptir.Yeni medya sanatları çerçevesi içinde konumlandırılan sanat formlarının 20. yüzyilin ilk yıllarında başlayan ve 80'li yıllarda doruga çıkan sosyo-teknolojik değişikliklerin vücudumuz üzerindeki etkilerini en iyi yansıtan sanat formları olduğunu öne sürerek çalışmalarımıza başlamistik.

Ancak öncelikle yeni medya kültürünün merkezlerinde yapılan araştırmalar, ve daha sonra tezin yazarının tezin yazılma süresinde zamanının büyük bir çoğunluğunu New York şehrinde geçirmesi sonucunda elde edilen tecrübeler ve yapılan gözlemler sayesinde yeni medya sanatlarının vücudumuz üzerindeki sosyo-teknolojik etkiler ile aslında pek fazla ilgilenmediğini gördük. Fakat tezimizde bizi asıl ilgilendiren bireyin

sosyo-teknolojik deęisimlerden nasıl etkilendięini ve buna nasıl tepki verdięini incelemektir. bu bağlamda sosyal bir fenomene olan stresin "yaşlanmış yeni medya sanatları" diye adlandırdığımız video ve performans tarafından daha etkin olarak temsil edildięini gördük. bu medyumlar ile çalışan sanatçılar vucutlarını yaşadıkları dünyayı saran stresli durumu daha iyi irdelemektedir.

“Yeni medya sanatları” kapsamında tanımlanan sanat biçimleri kullandıkları araçlarla bağlantılı olarak zamanımızın ve zamanın vücudumuzun içinde bulunduęu durumu yansıtmakta avantajlı bir konuma sahiptir. Bu tür işlerin aynı zamanda televizyon ve bilgisayar gibi popüler gereçler ile kolayca dağıtılabılır olması günümüzde teknolojik olarak yayılmış vücudun en iyi yeni medya sanatları ile temsil ediliyor olup olmadığı konusunda bizi araştırmaya sevk ediyor.

Ne var ki, araştırmamız sırasında özellikle bilgisayar temelli yeni medya sanatlarının bu konuda karşılaştıkları problemlere şahit olduk. Bu aslında yeni medya sanatlarını ‘yaşlanmış yeni medya sanatları’ diye adlandırdığımız sanat formlarına yeęleyen ilk hipotezimizle çelişmektedir. Ancak bilgisayar temelli yeni medya sanatları hala sosyal içerikli konuları irdelemekten uzaktır. Bunun yerine özellikle dijital teknolojinin gelişmesine odaklanmışlardır. Başka bir deyişle sosyo-teknolojik deęişikliklere eleştirel bir bakış yöneltmek yerine bütünüyle göz ardı etmeyi yeęlemişlerdir. Öte yandan video ve performans yapan sanatçılar hala sosyal eleştiriye ön planda tutup bu konularda daha fazla soru sormakta, yeni medya sanatçılarının aksine transandantal kaçış yolları ile ilgilenmemektedirler.

**REPRESENTATION OF STRESS ON THE CONTEMPORARY
BODY**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.LANDSCAPE WITH STRESS.....1
1.2. MY PERSONAL ATTRACTION TO STRESS.....7

2. ON THE HISTORY OF THE BODY AND TECHNOLOGY

2.1. PROCESS OF INDUSTRIALIZATION AND DIGITALIZATION.....10
2.2. ARTISTIC APPROACH TO THE NEW BODY.....11
2.3. TECHNOLOGICAL EXTENSIONS OF MAN.....15
 2.3.1. FUTURISM.....16
 2.3.2. PERFORMANCE ART.....21
2.4. OBSOLETE BODIES AND THE NEED TO DEVELOP EXTENSIONS.....23

3. STRESS AND THE CONTEMPORARY BODY

3.1. THE AGE OF STRESS.....28
3. 2. STRESS.....32
 3.2.1. DEFINITIONS OF STRESS.....32

3.2.2 AMBIENT AND CHRONIC STRESS.....	34
3.2.3. CONSUMER SOCIETY AS A STRESSOR.....	35
3. 3. THE CONTEMPORARY BODY.....	37
3. 4. MEDIA AS STRESSOR.....	38
3.4.1. TELEVIZED STRESS.....	38
3.4.2. SPEED OF MEDIA, SPEED OF THE WORLD.....	40
4. THE ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION OF STRESS	
4.1. THE STRESS OF THE ARTIST.....	44
4.1.1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF ART AFTER THE 70'S.....	44
4.1.2. ART AS COMMODITY.....	46
4.2. RESPONSE OF THE ARTIST.....	49
4.3. MEDIA USED TO REPRESENT STRESS ON THE CONTEMPORARY BODY.....	52
4.3.1. PERFORMANCE.....	53
4.3.2. VIDEO.....	54
4.3.3. NET ART.....	57
4.4. HOW 'NEW' IS NEW MEDIA?.....	60
4.4.1. PROBLEMS IN DEFINING NEW MEDIA ARTS.....	60
4. 4.2. POSITIONING VIDEO INSIDE NEW MEDIA ARTS.....	63
4.5.THE DICHOTOMY OF NEW MEDIA ARTS IN THE REPRESENTATION OF THE STRESS ON THE CONTEMPORARY BODY.....	66

5. REPRESENTATION OF STRESS IN THE “ELDER NEW MEDIA ARTS”	
5.1. CONSUMING HEROS: THE WORK OF PAUL MCCARTHY.....	69
5.2. TERRORISM AS STRESSOR: THE WORKS OF JUAN GRIMONPREZ, ANRI SALA.....	74
5.3. COMPUTERIZED CORPOREALITY: THE WORK OF SIMON TEGALA.....	78
5.4. FEMALE STRESS: THE WORKS OF MARINA ABRAMOVIC, JENNY HOLZER, MARTHA ROSLER AND EIISA LISA AHTILA.....	79
5.5. REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL STRESS IN TURKEY.....	83
5.5.1. KUTLUG ATAMAN: <i>WOMEN WHO WEAR WIGS</i>	83
5.5.2. STRESS ON THE ISLAMIC PERSONA IN KÖKEN ERGUN’S <i>UNTITLED</i>	87
6. CONCLUSION	
6.1. CAPACITY MISUSED: IMMATURITY OF VIRTUALITY AND THE PROBLEM OF THE VIRTUAL BODY.....	91
6.1.1. PERSONALITY OF THE NEW MEDIA ARTIST.....	91
6.1.2. ISOLATION IN NEW MEDIA ARTS.....	92
6. 2. CYBER CULTURE: TRANSCENDENCE INTO THE FANTASY WORLD.....	95
6.2.1. NEW MEDIA ART AS AN UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT.....	95
6.2.1. THE ABSENCE OF STRESS FOR THE VIRTUAL BODY.....	97
6.3. A POSSIBLE WAY OUT.....	98

APPENDIX.....	100
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	127

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1.LANDSCAPE WITH STRESS

This is primarily a survey of mediums.¹ In particular, mediums of art. Art has almost always been unique in the way it represents certain social, as well as personal concerns, and phenomenon. It has also been one of the few ways to exercise freedom, especially in the highly dependent lives of the 20th (and the 21st century) individuals. One of the key qualities of art is its existence in a variety of forms ranging from visual to aural, from textual to corporeal. In this way it differs from science, which is more dominantly dependent on textual expression, and in turn relies on a series of experimentation and proofs. In art there needs to be no proof, no special necessity to address a truth. Art can be executed independently and abstractly; its existence does not rely on a request, a need or an order. The artist creates not because he has to but by some unknown drive origination from his/her own personality and social standing. While examining a subject, art can use any tool, and any form of expression it needs, sometimes with no concrete sense of how it will finally look or feel like. In art there are no limits for experiments, and no control mechanism that defines its flow. Art can use this independence to maximum especially while dealing with most extreme and fragile conditions.

¹ The plural of medium is deliberately used as mediums here instead of media. Media has a broader meaning and complex connotations, ranging from the medium of art works, to the cumulative expression for news, TV, and radio. Therefore for the sake of this dissertation, which is concentrated on the discussion of different medium in relation to stress, elaborating on subjects such as consumerism, capitalism, technology, virtuality and the media, it would be beneficial to use the plural of medium as mediums in certain occasion. Such is the case with this introduction.

Stress is such a condition. Today more than any other time in history we are surrounded by stress. Stress is part of our daily life, from which we argue that it emerges. It is not a temporary condition but a permanent and stable existence. What we understand of stress today is an existence that came into being with the advance of social and cultural life, carved by individuality and the need to sustain a 'better life'. We have created stress only to target ourselves. In stress there is no *other*. It contaminates all of humankind but at different intensities, different formations. Compared to the broad history of mankind, stress only recently became powerful, so powerful that it can now control our life. It brings us diseases, promotes an industry that feeds from it, decisions centered on it, anticipations forced by it. In other words, we came to materialize a world picture which we might call a 'landscape with stress'.

It would be wise to start looking at this landscape from a very general perspective, at a bird's eye view: Imagine hovering above this earth at night, watching what flies below you. The most immediate visual elements will be signs of what we now call civilization. The strenuous human efforts to adopt the world to mankind in contrast to animals, who adopt themselves to it, gradually resulted in the reshaping of the physical world. Humans are constantly taming nature so that they can accommodate their own culture in it. Thus, what you see below at first glance is the web of electricity that covers a considerable portion of the earth. The invisible sound, which originates from electric power, hits your body, flying over it. This is already your first interaction with stress.

At daytime, at a closer look you can witness machinations: roads, factories, buildings, and towers pointing the sky, possibly the next target. Gradually you are able to construct a picture of civilization in your mind. An even closer look will capture images of constant movement. A movement that from above might seem as pointless, and directionless: mankind flooding into paths and roads that seem to circle around themselves. Inside this perpetually rejuvenating structure they are seen as tiny spots. These tiny spots often arrive at locations where they meet other tiny spots, forming a crowd, invisible fortifications in which they live. This physical and social space, surrounded by invisible fences is what we call a city. This is where our story begins.²

Cities are manifestations of civilization. Whether they fail or cease evolving they have always been programmed cultural practices, in constant flux, where masses can live together and move together. A city is that element of civilization, which produces, consumes, imports and exports, sustaining an economy needed for the well being of culture. What is used as fuel in this constant production has almost always been mankind, the masses. They use their body in full capacity in order to feed the greater body of civilization.

² This narration is inspired by a technique I have been examining while working on *The Man Without Qualities* of Robert Musil, for a new commission I am carrying out at the Schauspielhaus Wien. The opening lines of *The Man Without Qualities* are probably one of the most discussed texts of 20th century novel. Here Musil starts with the description of “a barometric low hung over the Atlantic” which seems days away from the focus of the novel: Vienna. The narrator flies over the Atlantic and reaches the European continent, describing the constant speed and movement in tune with the turmoil of the time and the period it tells. (Musil wrote *The Man Without Qualities* prior to World War II, and the novel tells about the collective stress in the Habsburg Empire just before its collapse with World War I.) a similar narration technique has been used by Lars von Trier in *Europa* (1993)

Until the recent past, the masses living on the surface of the earth have not rose to the sky to your position seeking a way to look down to this structure they made themselves live in. The exception of this case was almost always artists, scientists and thinkers. Like in many walks of life they have always been leaders in the perception of the modern life, and its strenuous consequences. They were also first to see what went wrong in civilization and responded in their own terms. In Nietzsche this perception resulted in a stubborn angst, in Schopenhauer it was isolation, in Wagner this was nostalgia, and more recently in Deleuze & Guattari this has been fragmentation with pastiche, and critique with a touch of irony.³

But the masses living on the surface of the earth had no possibility and consequently no wish to stop for a minute and try to perceive the way of the world, the meaning or the non-meaning of what lies on the surface of this landscape. They were part of a culture, which was created to control them. Being part of a constant flux, which serves more to others than yourself who turns the wheels is possibly the biggest and most generic stress. It could be applied to anyone under this sky that surrounds us. This can also be called the stress of existing in the modern world. This stress had been valid from the start of culture and civilization. But later, with the advance of industry, which used masses to the maximum, those individuals who sought an escape from it managed to detach themselves from the masses, and rose above the surface of things to be able to acquire the 'world picture'. This is a turning point not only in all of history but also specifically for our

³ Certain works in which these characteristics can be found in are: Nietzsche, F. *Will to Power* New York: Vintage Books, 1968, Schopenhauer, A. *Essays and aphorisms* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970, Wagner, R. *My Life* London: Constable, 1994 Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. *Anti-Oedipus: Kapitalizm ve Sizofreni* Istanbul: Baglam, 1990 or *A Thousand Plateaus* Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press, 1998.

survey. Individualism looked at enhancing life standards not for the masses they originated from but rather for themselves. So they fostered a chain of other systems and establishments in order to achieve more comfortable living conditions for themselves and their fellow individuals who altogether formed the middle classes. These new comforting strategies forced even more limitations and stress on the masses, still living on the very surface of the earth. Finally, the world picture took the shape of the pyramid, like in *Blade Runner*, where the most elite are at the top of the pyramid, the lower elite below them, middle classes occupying the big chunk in the middle while the low masses dwell on ground level.⁴ Those who are at the top no longer needed wings to be able to look down on others but a more accessible infrastructure have already been constructed for them by civilization.

Still the bird you are, imagine landing on earth, no longer able to get the broader outside view of life, you are almost encapsulated by its speed which drags the masses, and you with it, preventing to think about the reason behind this speed, as well as the reason why he/she or you are a part of this constant movement. The bird, no longer relying on its wings but its clumsy feet has encountered civilization, and whatever it presents. You are now faced with the stress of being, existing on this surface, the ground level. In this 'civilian' structure, there are but few chances for members of larger masses to breakthrough and become personal, individual. Therefore, every mass, or "crowd" -in Canetti's terms, naturally builds a community within itself in order to stick together and move in unison.⁵ In science, especially animal sciences, one of the major side effects of

⁴ *Blade Runner*: Feature film based on "Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?" by Philip K. Dick, directed by Ridley Scott, 1982

⁵ Canetti, E. *Crowds and Power* New York: Continuum, 1962 pp. 12-88

this kind of encapsulated interior movement forced by a greater mechanism is also called stress: imagine the herds of fish running away from the bigger hunting fishes. Or else the mice kept in cages for experiments, traumatized by their fear of the greater mechanism, being Mankind who will use them for tests. Their stress is ambient, complex. This is not unlike the situation for many human beings living as part of masses of the modern world. What has been shaped for them (for us), systems like Capitalism, Communism, Fascism, religion, consumerism all cause these herds to stick closer to each other, while the people who control them can be free individuals, able to fly over the masses.

But if it occurs, an individual who is detached from a mass may perceive the reason behind being made a part of this mass, his stress intensifies, and shadows over his feelings for independence. Those who can avoid this secondary stress are the ones who chose to ignore such questionings. But in general our very existence in this world brings to mind questions, which are very simple when asked but very complex when tried to be answered. One of the ways to alleviate this stress of existing is through art. Artists use art as a tool either to reply to or ignore such questions, and by doing so at least they alleviate the stress caused by it. Here, we will examine the way they cope with stress.

Mediums used by artists define the flow of their thought and feelings. One can choose to reflect ideas on to two dimensions as in painting, or two three dimensions as in sculpture, but what interests us more in this survey are those mediums which work either directly with corporeal elements such as performance or those which use technological (more

specifically digital) tools such as video or new media arts. As corporeality and technology are primary keywords of this survey we will focus on the latter media of arts.

1.2. MY PERSONAL ATTRACTION TO STRESS

I came to choose this subject soon after 9/11 when the United States and Britain were preparing to attack Iraq. While heated debates over Turkey's decision on opening the Northern Front for the Allied troops were taking place in the Turkish Parliament, trains carrying tanks were passing silently in the dead of night under my window. When I came to realize that these tanks were going to WAR, I was struck by an indescribable anxiety. For the first time in my life, I was going to witness a war. Despite having read a great deal about the First World War in particular, I was frightened by the suddenness of its possible realization at a considerably close location. And having seen what was crafted for 9/11 I could not hold myself from thinking that what comes next could be as sinister as what happened that day in New York. Then the war broke, without Turkey's involvement, but we could still see everything on our television sets, much like but more enhanced than the Gulf War a decade ago. Baudrillard once said that "the Gulf War did not take place" but this one was taking place. Unlike Baudrillard I was at the border of it and my body could already feel the stress of war especially when watching the eerie footage of night attacks by American soldiers to villages in the southern front. This footage was taken by cameras placed on the headgear of soldiers in night vision. This inspired me to do my first video piece.

For *Untitled Trauma*, I have chosen two female dancers in Istanbul, and started discussing with them the reaction(s) of the body to trauma, ranging from trauma of war, to private trauma of love, from financial hardships to medical conditions. My subjects were ideal for such a survey, as one of them was a Hepatitis C patient, successfully undergoing treatment; the other was suffering from severe depression. I have asked them to remember and collect any kind of stress on their body, any memory of past trauma. We then placed them naked inside a dark room, with their heads connected to each other with an elastic material. In this isolated environment I have asked them to burst out all the stress and trauma they have been collecting for me, and show their 'late reaction' to these trauma. In post-production, with the help of digital editing software I have adjusted the image so that it would look as if it is night vision like that eerie footage shot involuntarily by those soldiers in Iraq. The rather disturbing electronic sounds, which accompanied the work added further to the stress that is being represented, creating a secondary stress on the body of the viewer. In *Untitled Trauma*, I was arguing that the contemporary body was not able to react to trauma immediately at the time of their occurrence, but in order to keep up with the rest of daily life our reactions to these stressful conditions would be delayed, and kept with in the body until it finds a suitable time and way out. I tried to imagine what it would be like if a force would allow everyone to exorcise their late reaction to trauma, all at once.

Following this work which was exhibited at the *3rd Istanbul Performance Days* in 2003, I have started my research about the topic, not only in New York and Istanbul, two cities I had been living in during the course of preparing this survey, but also in London, Berlin,

Karlsruhe, Linz and Vienna where I have attended exhibitions and festivals of new media arts. Later, while carrying on with the preparations of the first chapter, I came to realize that being a practicing artist myself, I should also be feeling stress on my body, instead of representing the stress of others in my work. Thus, in relation with the research I have been carrying out I started to develop a new video work that dealt with the stress on the female Islamic persona in relation to the limitations of turban in secular societies. This work will be examined in the final chapter. Although my initial feeling was in favor of new media arts, I gradually came to realize that despite all the capacity that it holds, new media arts is unable to introduce a serious critique of social life, let alone the examination of stress emerging from it. But this revelation has to wait till the end of the dissertation.

2. ON THE HISTORY OF THE BODY AND TECHNOLOGY

2.1. PROCESS OF INDUSTRIALIZATION AND DIGITALIZATION

The interaction of technology and the arts is the initial concern of this chapter. Therefore, this brief history of the body in art will focus on the periods when the artists thought and produced about the interaction of the technological and the corporeal. By doing so we will see that the concerns of the artists and/or writers from the first such period are not dissimilar to the contemporary ones in terms of the effects of stress on our bodies.

Under close examination it will be seen that the period of industrialization and the period of digitalization both have created significant change in the body of the individual and the public. The 19th century industrial revolution introduced technology to man's daily life, established an early system of consuming, re-located the individual inside the public and thus encouraged a re-definition of both the public and the individual body. The decades after the initiation of the industrial period have mastered these significant changes in industrialized societies. As McLuhan elaborated in his *Understanding Media* the 'electric speed' of progress swiftly spread the effects of the industrial revolution throughout the world until much later in the 20th century, when all countries in the world have been somewhat introduced to the notions of modernity. While these 'newly-modern' societies were interacting with the effects of technology and capitalism (especially after the fall of Communism), the rather advanced countries of the modern world were being amazed at the emerge of a new period: the information age. Hence, the information age, which

contaminated the world through different kind of ‘electrical speed’, quickly embraced every society and culture in the globe. The inflation of visual culture continues to re-shape the contemporary body at a pace faster than any previous period. As the electric speed mutates with the digital speed, the image is constantly distorted. This new confusion of images do not let the consumers/users to take time to digest it but it digests them instead, establishing the domination of the visual over everything. As Heidegger said we are living in a “world picture”, where every subject becomes a viewable object in “a framed scenario of visual pleasure”.⁶

From Leonardo da Vinci’s *Anatomical Studies* (1510-3) to Duchamp’s *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) Western Art sought to find one perfect method of representing the human body in order to overcome the weakness of the physical body against its ever-changing surroundings. But the gradual domination of the technological has challenged visual representation to a great extent. As Nicholas Mirzoeff argued “the failure of visual culture to achieve this task has endangered a palpable sense of disease about the bodyscape”.⁷

2.2. ARTISTIC APPROACH TO THE NEW BODY

During the period of industrialization, as a result of the fast changes in the urban environment, the human body became surrounded by more dynamic elements in everyday life. As the static gave way to the dynamic, and the capital shaped up the lives of the new man, modern body came under the pressure of the ‘modern condition’. The

⁶ Heidegger, M. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays* New Haven: Perennial 1982 p. 27

⁷ Mirzoeff, N. *Bodyscapes* London: Routledge 2000 p. 9

metropolis created in itself a new man, who moved faster and thought faster and perceived dramatically different than the rural man. Thus, a new society of man emerged: the urban man, hence the urban body, which we shall see in due course. Most of our contemporary concerns and anxieties have been introduced to the urban man in this period: Consuming, speed, corporate bodies, technophobia, fashion, the stress created by the markets, the media, inflation in all aspects of life, 'body beautiful' concerns and a constant rivalry fed by the capitalist system.

Similar to the first phases of our information age, the changes in society and in the life of individuals were happening at a pace faster than their interpretation. The artists who tried to interpret this flood of changes were standing on unstable grounds. At the beginning of the industrial revolution a great deal of 'fine artists' dully embraced this modern condition by simply painting of tall brick buildings and river canals in the same manner as conventional landscapes. On the other hand, the 'muscular' body of the locomotive compared with a hare could be the subject of an Impressionist painting -Turner's *Rain, Steam, Speed*, 1844, as well as the famous fog of London -Monet's painting series on the Charing Cross Bridge, 1903-4. While Turner was celebrating the speed achieved by man in machinations, Monet slightly and ironically hinted to the stress imposed on his own body and the body of the urban man by the pollution caused by industrialization.⁸ Hence, the initial amazement of the artist with technology would gradually turn into a more critical and even a negative approach. Modernity and its consequences were seen as a

⁸ As the fast progress shifted human perceptions and daily life in the Western world in developing countries like Turkey, writers like Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar elaborated the modern condition with his usual ironic touch in works such as *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü* or *The Acibadem Villa*, emphasizing on the sarcasm of the literate man to the fast changes in technology. On the contrary Tanpınar's contemporary, communist poet Nazım Hikmet promoted industrialization with his activist poems like *Makinalasmak*.

series of hardships to the individual who for so long lived at a slow pace and did not critically question his/her corporeal existence. Naturally, these fast changes simply meant the re-definition of their everyday life. Conservatism on all races of life had been challenged by science and arts. And the ‘old man’ was forced to react to these changes.

Frustrated by the advance of technology, the inevitability of the first world war and the rise of capitalism, the German Expressionists and the *Die Brücke* movement turned to primitivism and searched for naivety via the cultures of the ‘Pacific’ – recently colonized by their state. Opposers to this ‘fake naivety’ would accuse the Expressionists of not following their own historical tradition, and argue that their art did not represent the complicated spirit of the modern times.⁹ Indeed, such a retrieve to mystic awareness can be viewed as a denial of the stress imposed on the body by modernity. A similar ‘escape from confrontation’ was formulated by the Surrealists in a different way. They gave up the material world completely and turned to the dream world. Inspired by the teachings of Sigmund Freud, the Surrealists would seek refuge inside the human psyche. It will be interesting later to see the similarities between this type of transcendentalism and the transcendence into the body of the computers in contemporary new media arts.

In time, the individual gained a new importance and art started to look to the inside, seeking solutions for the “next emergence” of the individual body.¹⁰ The fact that many artists frequented the use of the self-portrait series in this period might help us realize

⁹ In 1912, Max Beckmann spoke in opposition of the expressionists. *German Expressionism: Primitivism and Modernity*, Lyold, J. 1991 New Haven & London p. 85.

¹⁰ After Yuko Hasegawa’s use of the term in the context of the 7th Istanbul Biennial in Hasegawa, Y. *7th Istanbul Biennial (Cat.)* Istanbul: Istanbul Foundation For Culture And Arts, 2001

how important the self became to the self. In other words, ignorance of the modern stress by way of transcendence into nature was gradually replaced by a confrontation with the realities of the new life of the individual, and thus the artists embodied the stress caused by their confrontation with modernity. This is also the time when artistic representation developed a new approach to sexuality that opposed to the suppression and the veiling of the body under modernism. Indeed, modernist art history and criticism, derived from Kantian aesthetic discourse, are predicated upon the suppression of the particular, embodied, desiring subject. In other words, the artist and the critic must remain transcendent rather than immanent, that is embodied. On the other hand, the transcendental concerns of the modernist artist are also predecessors of contemporary artists such as Pollock who transcended through bodily action, McCarthy who transcends into the fantasy world of Hollywood and American consumerism. Meanwhile, Nietzsche argued for the “ruthless struggle between the individuals” as a way to achieve the full development of ‘the self’ in this period.¹¹ Conversely, Socialism has promoted the suppression of competition by the same reason. But whether it is the case of philosophers or artists of the period, one of the founders of the modern sociology, Simmel found in all these positions the same basic motive at work:

“The person resists to being leveled down and worn out by a social-technological mechanism.”¹²

¹¹ Nietzsche, F. *Will to Power* New York: Vintage Books, 1968 p.180

¹² Simmel, G. “The Metropolis and Mental Life” In *Art&Theory* London: Blackwell, 2002 p.130

¹³ Benjamin, W. *Reflections*, Frankfurt: Schocken Books 1986 p.127-8

Speaking from the generation of the First World War, Walter Benjamin also announced:

“A generation that had gone to school on a horse-drawn street car now stood under the open sky in a countryside in which nothing remained unchanged but the clouds, and beneath those clouds in a field of force of destructive torrents and explosions was the tiny fragile human body”¹³

2.3. TECHNOLOGICAL EXTENSIONS OF MAN

Art in the modern period has changed not only due to the new understanding of the human body in relation to its surroundings but also due to the technological inventions. It was these new technological inventions that introduced new tools to the art world and in return helped to create new forms of art. The emerge of the first commercial cameras in the third quarter of the 19th century, attracted the artists and opened way for a new medium in arts. Muybridge’s fascination with the mathematical qualities of his images introduced to art issues such as the division of the images per seconds. Finally, photography developed rapidly and became a new art form. Painting was to be challenged by the exactness and ‘brutality’ of the photographic imagery and re-described itself by new forms and movements. Thus, Cubism rejected major techniques of art such as perspective, foreshortening, modeling, not only in opposition to the conservative painting but also to the front eye view of photography. Photography -at least at that time- was seen as a tool that could diminish the artist’s point of view to insignificance and replace it by a machine’s point of view. The Cubists resisted this new technological medium by creating paintings, which represented the different points of view of the artist on a single layer; something which photography could never achieve at the time.

¹³

2.3.1. FUTURISM

But it was not until the Futurists that arts fully appreciated the modern world and wanted to ‘flourish’ together. Led by Marinetti, the Futurists tried to appreciate modernity and its consequences by embracing what modernity could give to mankind and vice versa. They used the mediums of the modern world and technology while executing their art. For instance, the founder of the *Art of Noises*, Rusollo would argue that “in antiquity there was only silence, but with the invention of the machine (...) noise was born”.¹⁴ And he used the machine parts to make music. Thus, Rusollo and the Futurists openly celebrated the new medium and made it their message. Another Futurist, Balla executed a performance with no actors but only sets and lighting in his *Fireworks*, a five minutes piece based on the music of Stravinsky.

The integration of new media into their art is one of the points that make them crucial to our research. We will soon analyze whether new media arts is using the mediums of its times just as fresh and as enthusiastic as the Futurists did, a quality which helps to express the concerns and reactions of the contemporary body.

In her cyber-culture work *Manifesto for Cyborgs* Donna Haraway yearns for the integration of the human and the technological bodies, but does not rule out the fact that the contemporary body is in fact still behind in time and cannot compete with the other bodies she/he created: “Our machines are disturbingly lively and we ourselves are

¹⁴ Apollonio, G. *The Futuristic Manifestos* London: MFA Publications, 1968, p. 44

frighteningly inert”¹⁵. The same concern was shared and elaborated at a great extent by the Futurists decades ago. In the Futurist performance, the body is often described as a part of the machine. Balla’s *Machina Tipographica* simply interpreted the printing machine by human bodies.¹⁶ Twelve people, in other words machine parts performed the motions of the printing machine, creating a different type of a climax, a mechanical orgy. Marinetti himself applied the excitement of the war on his own body when he performed as a Turkish general in his poetry-performance *Zang tumb tumb*.¹⁷ In this piece he used his body and voice to imitate the sounds of artillery and machine gunfire. Today artists such as Stelarc (*The Third Hand*, 1976-80) or Lee Bul (*Cyborgs*, 2001) use computer parts in integration with the human body, while performers like Orlan (*Omnipresence*, 1993) and Moriko Mori (*Miko no Inori*, 2000) represent biomechanical sub-bodies inside their own body.¹⁸

Although the Futurists have set off denying the past, they looked upon the world with the same eager expectation as the transcendentalists. But the world they saw was “not the quieting realm of tree and sky”; or the dream world but “it was the world of modern science that triumphed over nature, promising always something new in its rapid development towards an undetermined end”¹⁹. This technologically driven dynamism was at the heart of their ‘case’. Dynamism for them signified the difference between life and death. Therefore, theirs was transcendentalism founded on a whole new universe. In their

¹⁵ Haraway D. J. “A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology And Socialist-Feminism” In *The Late Twentieth Century*” In Haraway, D.J. *Simians, Cyborgs And Women: The Reinvention Of Nature*. New York: Routledge, 1991

¹⁶ Figure 1 (Appendix)

¹⁷ Figure 2

¹⁸ Figures 3-4

¹⁹ Taylor, J. C. *Futurism*. The Museum of Modern Art New York, Exhibition Catalogue 1961, p.

manifestos the Futurists would boast: “We are the primitives of a new, completely transformed sensibility”.²⁰ This way they emotionalized the machinated world and devoted their bodies to it. They sought to humanize the machine rather than the mechanization of the human body -as often referred to them, unjustly.

It is interesting but not surprising to find major similarities between the teachings of McLuhan and practices of the Futurists. McLuhan discusses the difference between the literate Western and the Western of the ‘Electrical Age’ as the difference between the reactions given to actions in daily life. According to him:

“The Western man acquired from the technology of literacy the power to act without reacting. In the electrical age, when our central nervous system is technologically extended to involve us in the whole mankind and to incorporate the whole mankind in us, we necessarily participate in depth, in the consequences of our every action’.²¹

That is to say the ‘electrified man’ reacts immediately to actions. Such is the argument put forth by Marinetti and friends: they claim that the ‘passeist theatre’ created a passive audience, and presented them with a naïve and nostalgic view of the world on stage. By doing so, it prevented both the actors to represent the new man on stage and the audience to use their ‘mechanical sensitivity’ to give accurate reactions. Instead, they continued on the tracks of the old dramatists and represented the world of the literate man much like what Broadway or Hollywood is still trying to do today. The Futurists stated that:

²⁰ Apollonio, G (1968) p. 90

²¹ McLuhan, M. *Understanding Media: The Extensions Of Man* Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994 p.253

“...in daily life we nearly always encounter mere flashes of argument made momentary by our modern experience, in a tram, a café, a railway station, which remain cinematic in our minds like fragmentary dynamic symphonies of gestures, words, lights and sounds.”²²

And they elaborated this doctrine in their performances and happenings. This shows how Futurists applied the modern condition of the electrical speed to the human body. Especially using the term ‘cinematic’ reminds McLuhan’s positioning of cinema as the most important perceptual change for man in the age of electrical speed. Also Virilio once said that “cinema is war pursued by other means”.²³

The Futurists were a group of artists who dared to go against the stream of conservatism. Sadly enough, a similar conservatism and preservation is valid even in our digital age. The nostalgia for the period of literacy is still valid in many art forms, which try to ignore the modern condition. Today’s contemporary arts, as much as it gets commercial, often ignore the necessities and limitations of contemporary culture and find refuge in other forms, spaces. However, new media arts operate on a similar philosophy of the Futurists and supports the integration of arts and technology. In due course we will see that this support is in fact an ‘exchange of favors’ as the survival of new media arts is strongly based on the digital tools that is bred by the technological progress.

Stress, as will be explained in the coming chapter is a new form of disease as well. It is the disease of the electrical age, which was introduced by the industrial revolution but did

²² Marinetti, F. *The Futuristic Synthetic Theatre*, from Apollonio, G. *The Futuristic Manifestos* London: MFA Publications 1915

²³ Virilio, P. *War and Cinema: Logistics of Perception* London: Verso, 1997 p. 102

not exist during the period of literacy. The complexity of stress is based on the inability of the body to give the true reactions to traumatic actions. Hence when the body fails to canalize the right form of reaction it shows an abrupt reaction, which does not necessarily 'solve the problem' or put an end to the conflict. It rather creates a delay that results in the damage/malfunction of the physical and the mental conditions of the body. What the Futurists referred to as 'the mere flashes of argument', is this stress imposed on the contemporary body. The abstract and un-expected reactions of the performers to their audience in Futurist performance, which is broadly based on improvisation, elaborates how concerned they were already with this notion of the stress on the 'contemporary body'.

From another point of view, when performing arts are concerned with making a 'complete work' to be watched in a convenient stage with convenient seating and ticket sales –as a necessity of the capital of entertainment, its prior concern becomes to produce a full body of work, that can be watched by a certain mass of audience. In other words, such live performances are constructed in the manner of a narrative, like novel or feature film. And this prevents it to demonstrate the adequate reactions of the body but rather tries to incorporate an ideal body that still operates in the nostalgic mode. A body that belongs to the period of literacy. A body that can only function in such an earlier period but when (and if) it goes out of the theatre would not be able to cope with the new world. Therefore, the passeist theatre is the representation of the ignorance of the modern man to his contemporary body. This can be argued as the main reason why contemporary artists chose the medium of performance as opposed to theatre to deal with the issues of the

contemporary body. In this way, they aim to make a fresh start and raise a new awareness in public against corporeal changes. Similarly digital video is an opposition to conventional feature film, which operated on the same basis of conventional theatre.

2.3.2. PERFORMANCE ART

In opposition to the earlier theatre arts, performance works starting from Dada and later into the 60's and the 70's have been done in non-theatrical and non-gallery spaces, mostly integrating the physical space of the city, a space where the urban body belongs to and operates from. This site-specific quality of the performance art made the body of the performer approach closely to the body of the viewer. But the active, participatory body of the artist remained central.

Performance art was a very personal form of developing in tandem with the 20th century developments in philosophy, psychology, anthropology, medicine, and politics. It started to place the embodied subject inside the social and examined social effects on the body. As Merleau Ponty suggested: “(w)e must return to the social with which we are in contact by the mere fact of existing, and which we carry about with us before any objectification.”²⁴ Works of performance art in the radical period of the 60's were closely linked to the problems of subjectivity and sociality, characteristic of the ‘pan-capitalism’ that Amelia Jones suggested. For Jones, ‘pan-capitalism’ is a globally dominant political

²⁴ Merleau Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of Perception* London: Routledge 1962, Trans. Smith, C. p. 362-3

²⁵ Jones, A. in *The Artist's Body* NYC: Phaidon 2000 p. 19

economy that is demanding individuals to submit their bodies so that they can function more efficiently under its obsessively rational imperatives, such as production, consumption and order.²⁵ The political protests and demonstrations in the 60's fueled a new way of artistic representation. One that could incorporate personal approaches to public matters and that could oppose to the inert condition of the body under pan-capitalism. As the rights of the individual (especially women and gays) were discussed and gradually supported by laws, the artists celebrated this mood of free speech and representation. On the other hand, live actions such as the demonstrations mentioned above provided new inspiration for artists to express their personal concerns by way of live actions. Hence the artist's body became a gesturing, expressive body, sometimes an aggressively 'activist body'.

Artists such as Carole Schneemann (*Meat Joy*, 1964) and the Fluxus group developed a frenzied, violent and at times excessive approach to the contemporary consensus and trauma.²⁶ On the other hand, while machoist performance-paintings of Pollock and the works of existentialist artist-heroes like Chris Burden (*Shoot*, 1971), Bruce Nauman (*Self Portrait as a Fountain*, 1966-7) or Vito Acconci (*Trademarks*, 1970) aimed towards an exhibition of the 'male self', the aggressive self-enactments of female artists such as Yoko Ono (*Cut Piece*, 1964), Martha Rosler (*Semiotics of the Kitchen*, 1975) and Valie Export (*Feed Me*, 1973) negotiated Modernism's repression of the artist's body, by proposing fully embedded and socially relevant feminist bodies that are also specific 'selves'.²⁷

²⁵

²⁶ Figure 5

²⁷ Figures 6-8

But in all of these works we are able to see a strong reaction to the contemporary concerns that effect the body, including stress, which we argue derives from the socio-technological changes. Whether it is the work of feminist or gay performers, which react to the stress of gender crisis, or it is the ritualistic reaction of the Viennese actionists to the stress of the post world war conditions, they all support Simmel's idea mentioned above: the interaction between the human body and the socio-technological changes.

2.4. OBSOLETE BODIES AND THE NEED TO DEVELOP EXTENSIONS

Another interesting aspect to be elaborated in the following chapters is the difficulty of maintaining a focus in contemporary artistic representation, caused by the inflation of contemporary issues that art wants to react to. The world and its concerns change too quickly to be able to follow. Most issues can be outdated by the time they are interpreted by artistic representation. Therefore, it will not be difficult to examine an inflation of the artistic reactions themselves, in tune with the inflation of the artistic subject. There can be so many representations, especially in new media arts that could be obsolete within short periods of time. This infact, adds another aspect of stress: the stress of the artist while creating works against time. Therefore, it is crucial to underline Merleau Ponty's timeless approach to the notion of time:

“If we re-discover time beneath the subject, and if we relate to the paradox of time those of the body, the world, the thing and others, we shall understand that beyond these there is nothing else to understand.”²⁸

²⁸ Merleau Ponty, M. *Phenomenology of Perception* p.365

If we look once again back to the Futurists; they considered the Impressionists as the founders of modern art, and followed their ideas that ‘no object, moving or still can be seen in isolation, but absorbs its surroundings just as it surrounds them’. Paintings of Balla, Boccioni and Severini demonstrated bodies juxtaposed with the street, buildings and the noises. They were also the first to speak about the ‘extensions’ of man and gave early hints of biomechanical beings:

“Our bodies enter into the divans on which we sit, and divans enter into us: just as the tram by going enters the houses, and they in turn hurl themselves upon the tram and merge with it. And sometimes on the cheek of the person to whom we are talking in the street we see the horse going by a long way off.”²⁹

We are once more encouraged to remember the doctrines of Marshall McLuhan on the extensions of man. McLuhan was pointing out at a later time when the human body will literally integrate with the mechanical and/or digital such as cross-cloning or human tissue technology used in robot sciences. Such is the work of Stelarc who often argued that the body is obsolete, no longer able to cope with its physical environment, as much as it is overloaded by undigested information and intimidated by its own technology.³⁰ In his 1976-8 work *Third Hand*, the artist literally had a third hand produced for him by Japanese robot engineers. It was activated by electrical signals of his abdominal and leg muscles, and was able to rotate as well as hold and release. He said that it was necessary to create a technology to take over what the body can no longer do:

²⁹ Balla, G. *Futurist Manifesto Of Painting* 1914, from Apollonio, G. *The Futuristic Manifestos* London : MFA Publications 1915, p. 235-6

³⁰ Stelarc ‘Von Psycho- Zu Cyberstrategien: Prothetik, Robotik und Tele-Existenz’ in *Kunstforum International* 132 (1996) p. 72-81

“The only evolutionary strategy I see is to incorporate technology into the body... technology symbiotically attached and implanted into the human body creates a new evolutionary synthesis, creates a new human hybrid... the organic and the synthetic coming together to create a new sort of evolutionary energy”.³¹

Auteur filmmaker Cronenberg also applied McLuhan’s above-mentioned theories to his films. The new flesh according to Cronenberg is the integration between the rapidly moving technologies and the rather static human body. For him the new body extends not only in space and but also in physicality. In other words, the body carries in itself both the biological body and the technological bodies. Cronenberg aims to point to a positive unity between science and life by often uniting the human body with other bodies – bodies of the bacteria (*Rabid*, 1979 and *Shivers*, 1975), bodies of the media such as the TV (*Videodrome*, 1981) and the game pod (*Existenz*, 1999).³²

Other artists have used the camera as extensions of their body, as a third eye, or as a conversation partner, to brilliant effect. Dan Graham, rotating and wrapping the camera around himself, as though asking us to believe that the body ‘sees’ the world around it through its continuous surface of skin, also created works in which he stopped and replayed time at twenty second intervals, so that the layering of present tense and past became a visual and visceral conundrum for all who entered his especially constructed spaces. Joan Jonas integrated the equipment of camera, monitor and tripod into her work

³¹ Stelarc *Obsolete Body/Suspension/Stelarc* Artist’s Statement 1980

³² Figure 11

so that hardware and software became the equivalent of a pencil, a note pad, or a mirror for the daily musings that would eventually become a live performance. In Jonas' case, in which every performance contained the video of its own making, she further layered the real and mediated paradigm by having renowned filmmaker Babette Mangolte shoot the work from within the frame of the performance itself.

Finally Matthew Barney in his earlier performative works presented the same concern of the human body being dependent on technology. In his 1991 performance of *Blind Perineum* in New York's Barbara Gladstone gallery, wearing a full body harness and using the latest technology in climbing gear he presented the athletic male body which although powerful in itself is also dependent on the equipment he uses. In his later film works he often juxtaposed the two sexes in one body (*Cremaster 4*, 1995), questioning the conventional sexes and alternative approaches by individuals such as transsexualism and transvestism. Whereas in *Cremaster 5* (1997) and *Drawing Restraint* (1996) he elaborated the animalistic mutant body, relating to the cloning experimentations also taking its reference from the mythology of half animal humans.³³ However, like the earlier Expressionists and the Surrealists Barney also often chooses to transcend rather than embodying the issues of the contemporary world. In his works he often creates a fantasy world, which deliberately ignores the techno-sociological pressures. In due course we will also discuss the media and techniques he used in his

Cremaster film series, and argue that they approach to the conventional film aesthetic, and confront with the commercial aspects of art, rather than elaborating a critical approach to the contemporary society, hence the contemporary body.

³³ Figures 9-10

The same concerns that engulfed the 'passeist theatre' as we tried to explain above might as well be applicable to today's contemporary arts such as the works of Barney. As much as the art is produced by commercial concerns it loses its activist approach to sociological matters, preferring the fantasy world to a confrontation with current conflicts imposed on the body. However, new media arts has the capacity to work from a more 'grass roots efforts' and often ignores commercial values while being extremely active about integrating the new technologies in arts, and discussing the frightening inertness of the self against the digital body. A body that is created to be able to progress on its own and thus creates a massive new environment, which we all live in, as users.

However, in due course we will be able to examine that this actually is not the case and that most of new media arts is too much introvert, and chooses to transcend to technology rather than aiming to innovate a critical approach.

3. STRESS AND THE CONTEMPORARY BODY

“Once upon a time there was a Man who lived in Scarcity. After many adventures and a long journey through Economic Science, he met the Affluent Society. They married and had lots of needs.”³⁴

“The contemporary body is sensorial but not sensitive”³⁵

3.1. THE AGE OF STRESS

Stress is a broad topic. Therefore, it will be plausible to first indicate which kind of stress we are investigating in this survey. The degree and quality of stress that interests us fostered with the domination of consumer culture accompanied with the acceleration of information technologies (IT) in the 80's. What interests us particularly in IT is its relation to new media arts, which we shall see in due course.

When information technologies started to concur with the already-peaked consumer culture, a boost of stress related to the contemporary body occurred. Back in 1964, McLuhan named the times as the “Age of Anxiety”. The 80's were often referred as the “Age of Stress”. As a sign of the media's dominance in culture around the time, the

³⁴ Whitehead, A.N. quoting Galbraith in *The New Industrial State*, New York: Signet, 1967, p. 129

³⁵ Baudrillard, J. *Fatal Strategies* London: Pluto, 1990, p.233

highly circulated and effective *Time* magazine made this expression its cover in June 1983, accompanied with an illustration of a yuppie screaming juxtaposed with giant monetary signs, amidst dense pollution. Why was the 80's called the "Age of Stress"? Was it a mediatic approach by a leading newsmagazine to boost sales on the motto of "bad news is good news", or did it reflect a true concern in society?

To start with, what the 80's had inherited was a full-fledged capitalism, an accelerated communication web, an established global economy, and especially in the Western world, a tradition of democracy, that according to Baudrillard "praised the public so that the public would not oppose [it]".³⁶ The phenomenon that really made its mark in the 80's was the globalization of consumer culture. Consumption is always and everywhere a cultural process, but 'consumer culture' – a culture of consumption – is unique and specific; it is the dominant mode of cultural reproduction developed in the west over the course of modernity. In many respects, consumer culture started as *the* culture of the modern west, then contaminated the world, and it is more generally bound up with central values, practices and institutions, which define western modernity, such as choice, individualism and market relations. As Slater explains :

"Consumer culture denotes a social arrangement in which the relation between lived culture and social resources, between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, is mediated through markets. [It] marks out a system in which cultural reproduction is

³⁶ Baudrillard, J. *Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, London: Sage, 1998 p. 120

largely understood to be carried out through the exercise of free personal choice in the private sphere of everyday life.”³⁷

Even though the infrastructures of consumer culture originated in the early modern period, its full formation coincides with the postmodernist era. It was especially during the 80’s when consumer choice became the obligatory pattern for all social relations and the ‘template’ for civic dynamism and freedom, not only in the western civilization but the parts of the world influenced by it. In the West, Thatcherism and Reaganomics promoted a new type of individualism that dominated almost everything. Thatcher once said “There is no such thing as society, only individuals and their families”³⁸. Thus, collective and social provision gave way to radical individualism. Sociologists have argued that the social and economic changes brought about by the shift to late modernity and postmodernity mean that secure and stable self-identity is no longer automatically derived from one’s position in the social structure. Instead, we are seeing attempts to ground identity in the body, as individuals are left alone to establish and maintain values to live by. As Giddens suggested “we have become responsible for the design of our bodies”.³⁹ This edgy individualism created aggressive and hedonistic individuals in the urban societies of the developed world. Another theorist of the body, Schilling argues that we are witnessing an unprecedented individualization of the body, in which it becomes a bearer of symbolic value.⁴⁰ This idea has resonates with the work of the French sociologist Bourdieu who says that “in consumer society the body is a source of

³⁷ Slater, D. *Consumer Culture And Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997

³⁸ Slater (ibid.), p.10

³⁹ Giddens, A *The Transformation of Intimacy: Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Society* Cambridge UK: Polity Press, 1992 p. 97

⁴⁰ Schilling, C. *The Body and Social Theory* California: Sage Publications, 2003

‘symbolic capital’, less because of what it can do and more because of how it looks.”⁴¹

In most cases we can argue that art responds to life and reflects experiences. Correspondingly, contemporary art after the 70’s, fueled by the broadening discourse of the body has gradually started dealing with stress imposed on the body of such individuals. Artists like Yoko Ono (*Cut Piece*, 1964), Paul McCarthy (*Sailor’s Meat*, 1975), Otto Muehl (*Zock*, 1971), Günter Brass (*Endurance Test*, 1965)

To better understand the development of the corporeal representation in art and the body’s confrontation with the growing consumer culture in the 70’s and 80’s in the western world perhaps we should look at the similar developments that have recently started to happen in countries like China. The development of the personal body happened almost a century later in China immediately following the fall of communism. According to Berghuis, when during a period of rapid economic transition, a nation filled with former patriarchal values and central party ideologies suddenly becomes replaced by consumer society in which individual choices of lifestyles are suddenly accessible for a small, but growing number of people, “it seems that many others are left traumatized by their sudden loss of secure social positions, and struggle to find themselves new identities.”⁴² This current shift in the Chinese society was visible in the Western world much earlier in the last century. But their reactions to it has not been so widely represented by the media or popular culture. However, currently we, as the people

⁴¹ Bourdieu, P. *Masculine Domination* Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2001 p. 59-62

⁴² Berguis, T. “Close Encounters – Performance Art Practices In China During The 1990’s and The Role Of The Mediated Subject Of The Acting Body In Art.” In *Sharjah International Biennial 6 (cat.)* Sharjah: Saharjah Biennial Foundation, 2003, p 347-8

from countries with relatively a longer experience in democracy can witness this shift in the Chinese society almost at a daily basis.

3. 2. STRESS

As we proceed, we will use the terms “ambient”, “chronic” and “complex” for the kind of stress we are examining. Its complexity comes from the fact that it is built on layers and layers of history and culture, thus it has inherited a great deal of initial and major stressors, like the effects of capitalism such as financial survival, career strives etc. all of which are accompanied with new techno-sociological stressors already almost prophetically mentioned by at an early stage by Simmel and more recently by McLuhan and Virilio. In other words, this stress is the ‘middle aged’ sibling of the other stress that originated in the industrial and modernist era. Therefore, while examining this complex stress we shall also use the most complex and interactive stress model in psychology.

3. 2. 1. DEFINITIONS OF STRESS

In modern psychology there are three models for the definition of stress: the *stimulus model*, the *response model* and the *transactional model*. These approaches have been discussed in detail by several authors such as Lazarus and McGrath.⁴³ The transactional model, being the contemporary approach to everyday stress includes both the stimulus and the response models and tries to explain stress as a transaction between the person and their environment and incorporates both the stimulus and response perspectives as

⁴³ Lazarus, R.S. & Folkman, S. *Stress, Appraisal And Coping*, New York: Springer, 1984, McGrath, J. E. *Social And Psychological Factors In Stress*. New York: Holt, Reinhart & And Wilson, 1970

part of a process. It is also referred to as the *process model*. Some accepted definitions of stress in the transactional model are:

“A substantial imbalance between environmental demand and the response capability of the focal organism”⁴⁴

“...Stress is the recognition by the body of a stressor and therefore the state of threatened homeostasis⁴⁵: stressors are threats against homeostasis, and adaptive responses are the body’s attempt to counteract the stressor and re-establish homeostasis”⁴⁶

“Psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being”⁴⁷

“Stress refers to that quality of experience, produced through a person-environment transaction, that through either over-arousal or under-arousal, results in psychological or physiological distress”⁴⁸

“Most definitions of stress emphasize the relationship between the individual and the environment. Stress is the consequence of a person’s appraisal

⁴⁴ McGrath, J. E. (*ibid.*) p.17

⁴⁵ Homeostasis: A term first used by Walter Cannon (1929): The process of regulating internal environments in response to external environments in order to ensure optimum bodily functioning.

⁴⁶ Chrousos, G. P., Loriaux, D.L., Gold, P.W. “The Concept Of Stress and Its Historical Development”. In Chrousos, G. P., Loriaux, D.L., Gold, P.W. (eds.) *Mechanisms Of Physical And Emotional Stress*, New York: Plenum Press, 1988 pages 3-7

⁴⁷ Lazarus, R.S. & Folkman, s. (1984) *Stress, Appraisal and Coping*, Springer, NT. p.19

⁴⁸ Aldwin, C.M. (1994) *Stress, Coping and Development: An Integrative Perspective*. NY, Guildford, p.22

process: the assessment of whether personal resources are sufficient to meet the demands of the environment.”⁴⁹

3.2.2 AMBIENT AND CHRONIC STRESS

In the light of these definitions we see that, the ambient quality of this kind of stress is a result of the perpetuity of the stressors it is caused by. Ambient stressors are events that exert their effect consistently over long periods of time, even an entire lifetime. In environmental psychology, ambient or chronic stressors may include noise, air pollution, and other aspects of enduring physical environment. In McLean and Link ambient/chronic strains are exemplified as persistent life difficulties, role strain, chronic community wide strains etc., rather in sociological terms, ignoring socio-technological conditions as mentioned (also above) in Simmel.⁵⁰ We will take Simmel’s views further by applying the *new* and multi-faceted environments (both physical and virtual) such as the embracing culture of commodities, communication technologies (mobile phones, internet, etc) that are almost extensions of the body, extensive media coverage of life, the effects of global economics on ordinary individuals, etc. Urban life, in particular carries such stressors that are ever-present and variable in their intensity, such as traffic, financial struggles, pollution, career issues, loneliness, boredom, collective and contagious depression etc. As these stressors continue to effect the homeostatis of the urban individual, his/her stress becomes ambient and later in more severe cases becomes chronic. In due course, we shall see that chronic stress can also be the cause of physical

⁴⁹ Taylor, S. E. *Health Psychology* (3rd edition), New York, McGrawhill, 1995 p. 219

⁵⁰ Mclean D. E. and Link, B. G. “Unraveling Complexity” In W.R. Avison and I. H. Gotlib (Eds.) *Stress And Mental Health; Contemporary Issues And Prospects For The Future*. New York: Plenum, 1994, p.23

diseases such as cancer, which finds its representation in the films of Cronenberg or in the photographic works of Hannah Wilke.

What is more striking about ambient stress is that the individual that is subject to it is almost voluntarily attached to the system that triggers it. In other words, being brought up inside this stressed culture, an ordinary citizen has no choice but to accept it and its consequences. By acceptance and adaptation s/he avoids existential concerns and struggles to be happy and successful as the system allows. Rejecting it means alienation, which leads to the kind of depression the Existentialists like Sartre (*No Exit*) or Camus (*L'Etranger*) have portrayed or in extreme cases to suicides. As we have mentioned earlier in our introduction, art can be seen as a way of escape both from this alienation and stress.

3.2.3. CONSUMER SOCIETY AS A STRESSOR

Following this point of view, ironically one can see that while the consumer society is one of the leading originators of ambient stressors, consumption may also become relief for some stressed individuals. After the enormous rise in retailing industry in the 80's shopping has been promoted as a major leisure activity. Popular newspapers or magazines often list shopping as a way to alleviate stress. The reason behind this can be argued as what Baudrillard calls the 'revolution of well-being'. According to Baudrillard "the whole of the discourse on needs is based on a naïve anthropology: that of the natural propensity to happiness"⁵¹ Baudrillard's "revolution of well-being" is heir to, or executor

⁵¹ Baudrillard, *Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, London: Sage, 1998, p. 49

of the Bourgeois Revolution, or simply of any revolution which proclaims human equality as its principle without being able fundamentally to bring it about:

“The democratic principle is then transferred from a real equality before the Object and other manifest signs of social success and happiness. This is the democracy of social standing, the democracy of the TV, the car and the stereo, an apparently concrete but in fact, equally formal democracy which, beyond contradiction and social inequalities, corresponds to the formal democracy enshrined in the Constitution.”⁵²

For this willing man, Baudrillard coined the expression “egos consumons”.⁵³ Similarly, the “Affluent Society” appropriated by Galbraith and Bell was a consumer society in which economic prosperity brought greedy and morally dubious wants; ‘a crisis in values over the work of ethic, a bifurcation of desire between respectable consumption and hedonistic, amoral, non familial consumption.’⁵⁴

The presence of two different kinds of consumption, the ‘respectable familial consumption’ and the ‘hedonistic non familial’ is also important for our present survey. While the familial consumption is restricted to the basic needs of each individual, such as a house to live in, a car to go to work with, food to survive with, money to raise the kids, and some leisure time, which is designated by the society as either the weekends, or certain holiday allowances by the employers. This type of consumption does not go into excess, while the hedonistic one consumes more than necessary, sometimes without

⁵² *ibid.* p.50

⁵³ *ibid.* p.78

⁵⁴ Bell, D. *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism* p. 89

reason -or the reason just being to consume for the sake of consumption. The hedonistic consumer goes beyond the routine consumptions shared by the familial/respectable consumer, so the one car becomes two, summer house or weekend house nearly becomes a must, shopping becomes a necessity, not only for basics but also for the prestige of the individual in public. The contemporary man and especially woman must remain young and beautiful. This requires an intensive self-care and other extensions of consumer society such as diets and fitness, all of which are obtained with the service of other structures and in the very bottom line with money. Likewise, because of the speed of consumer culture time becomes money, money buys time. But whatever happens “consumer culture lives in a perpetual year zero of newness.”⁵⁵ It always creates new gadgets, new attractions to excite and even *hypnotize* the consumer, forcing him/her to keep buying, to keep changing the old with the new, which can sometimes be no different from the old. *New* becomes the most frequently used word in advertisements, arts and the media. What really changes is disputable. Hence this ‘pornographic’ (after Baudrillard) culture of commodities bears various stressors, fueling a constant rush that creates the complex stress, we have been mentioning so far.

3.3. THE CONTEMPORARY BODY

We shall now indicate what we refer to by ‘the contemporary body’. This is not a previously used expression. However, the body has been frequently classified according to the chronological periods before, like in the works of Shilling, Turner and later in Baudrillard and Foucault as the “modern body”. Our expression does not stick to one period or era but rather prefers to concentrate on the immediate and current conditions.

⁵⁵ Slater, D. *Consumer Culture And Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997 p.3

Contemporary, meaning ‘in existence now’, differs from modern which has a very similar meaning in dictionaries or every day use, but is haunted by Modernism, the period. Therefore, the “modern body” ceases to be truly contemporary. Similarly, the reason we are not using an expression like “postmodern body” is also because of its attachment with a period. And since we are dealing with representation of stress in art, the word contemporary has a similar use in art; where modern art is already considered as outdated, and contemporary art embodies more originality and innovation. Our concerns about the contemporary coincides more with the writings of McLuhan and extended by Virilio on the one hand and new media theorists like Haraway, Levy and Weibel on the other.

3.4. MEDIA AS STRESSOR

3.4.1. TELEVIZED STRESS

In the 80’s the media became an integral part of the human body, affirming the extension theories of McLuhan, later represented by Cronenberg. Starting almost as a gadget -just like mobile phones, which then became an indispensable part of human life, TV quickly emerged as both the most effective media instrument, and the most popular electronic device in history. According to the work of Morley “watching television is also a complex process of domestic consumption.”⁵⁶ TV gradually created a world of itself and went beyond being a physical matter, almost becoming virtual in a short time, heralding

⁵⁶ Morley, D. *Family Television: Cultural Power And Domestic Leisure* London: Comedia Pub. 1986 p. 187

the coming of internet decades later. Presently, even our living habits are accustomed to TV. A high percentage of households in the world have at least one TV around which every other furniture and hence the house folk are centered. News of the world is constantly being fed to the viewers, at times creating unnecessary panic, in order to raise the attention of the viewers, to keep them attached to the screen, in other words forcing them to accept the TV as a part of their body. Like in *Videodrome* (1984) the viewer is absorbed into the TV, and to the greater network that operates it.

There is a considerable amount of stress imposed by media as in TV. One example of this is the floating news bar: first commonly used during the 9/11 attacks, the floating news bar is a remarkable gadget that indirectly imposes instantenous stress on the individual. We can argue that the news programs on TV are already eager producers and promoters of stress by way of applying the newsgiving technique based on the motto “Bad news is good news”. News of war, catastrophe, market crashes, new epidemics, political crisis all sit on the top of headlines everyday, constantly creating a pessimistic world picture. Added to the this ambient stress imposed on the viewer, the amount of information simultaneously flowing through the screen in the shape of floating news bar is overwhelming and forces the perceptions of the individual, affecting his/her homeostasis, regardless of the good or bad news it carries. Mobile phone providers apply a similar kind of technique and can update their customers about news -“Bird flu attacks humans in China”, results of sport events -“Besiktas scored against Galatasaray: 1-0”, or even celebrity gossip -“Kylie Minogue is diagnosed breast cancer”, based on the choice of the user. These insert alert subscriptions have been extremely popular in many countires

affirming the demands of the customers to remain constantly updated. Similarly, those who use e-mail as the preferred communication technique feel obliged to get online at least two times a day to continue their communication with the rest of the world. This is certainly more frequent in other circles like academic life, bussiness etc. who rely heavily on this cheap and safe communication device. Consequently, the user feels attached to his/her computer in other words to the network almost like an addiction.

3.4.2. SPEED OF MEDIA, SPEED OF THE WORLD

In computers –via the internet the the users attachment and his/her subjectivity to information overload is even more intensified. Information can be acquired instantly with the updating of the net in the matter of nanoseconds. Then user witnesses the changes immediately on the net, and further techniques like the pop up windows can add to the information flow. These pop ups are also used for another sinister purpose: the commercials, another aspect of consumer culture which creates the consuming stress. One will recall the “world picture”, that Heidegger originally thought of in filmic terms and described it as a world in which individuals are defined as as visual objects in a scenario of visual pleasure. In the world of IT, the world picture can be described as composed of users who are defined as data.

Commercials, and logos are integral parts of the egos consumons. A whole system relies on them to survive. According to Lepecki everyday the average Western citizen sees, assimilates, and recognizes 16,000 different logos:

“These are so many light-houses gliding us in our experience of the world. As graphic equivalent of the compass and as modern derivative of medieval heraldry, the logo first of all tells us where we stand. Its inscription on every landscape recasts space as the site of perpetual recognition. Its presence on every piece of garment recasts subjectivity as tribal.”⁵⁷

Like we extend our bodies in technology, consumer culture extends out such signifiers for its own existence. In fact without logos or commercials consumer society cannot exist. The wheel of consuming is turned by the power assembled from commercials and other mediums of promotion of spending. Our bodies feed from the information let out by these commercials and they in turn define our needs, designate a considerable portion of our time, in other words how we should spend time.

The speed eminent in commercials is another stimulus affecting the homeostasis of the contemporary body. Because of the costs calculated by time (in seconds) commercials need to transfer information to the costumers in the shortest possible time limit. Unlike internet which prefers to have speed for the comfort of the user, commercials apply speed because of necessity. But this does not mean that they oppose to speed, they are mingled with the speed of the IT world, knowing that speed is also a new mode of survival in the age of consumption. Example of many commercials seen in Turkish TV may prove our point: all subjects (models and/or actors) move in great haste in tune with the information overflow in commercials like *Bonus Card*, or *Coca Cola*. The commercial for *Tofita* (a

⁵⁷ Lepecki, A. “STRESS” in G. Brandstetter and H. Völckers *Remembering the Body* Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, c2000 p. 282

sugar gum) on the other hand, represents a more aggressive desire of consumption, in the embodiment of a sexually aroused female subject, something which could find its critique in the feminist works of Mona Hatoum's or Marina Abramovic's that opposes to such acts of commodification.

In short, the new world order and all media tools supporting it rely heavily on speed. Similar to the industrial revolution when development was affiliated with speed, the electrical revolution also functionalized speed, and finally the electronical revolution increased speed. Currently the strength of a tool or even a human being in the capitalist sense is measured by its speed or ability to transfer information in the fastest possible way. According to Virilio speed of technological innovation is also the exhaustion of the world:

“Speed is ageing the world, it is wearing out the world. Speed is at the source of decomposition. What is decomposing is the geographical space and the physco-physical space of being. What is decomposing is the social body, how we connect with each other and with ourselves on the physical and the societal plane. People become part of this speed and are in a constant state of anxiety, unable to pace themselves, ‘keep up’ or ‘catch up’ -phrases we use for the race we run against the speed of space and time.”⁵⁸

The contemporary body is surrounded by all these stressful elements, and plays dual while coping with it. That is to say while he/she resists to certain stimuli, he/she also accepts the effects of others for he/she knows that to resist it altogether is no longer

⁵⁸ Virilio, P. *Speed And Politics*, New York: Colombia University, 1989 p. 56-7

possible except in non-existence in the physical world. This can either be solved by death, or transcendence to a different mode of reality, the virtual reality.

4. ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION OF STRESS

“I mistrust a lot of what has been conjured up in this culture. At one point I mistrusted reality completely. Suddenly the experience of being confronted with my existence was overwhelming. I was confronted with nothingness, why was there anything, why was there something, an object, an inanimate or animate object?”⁵⁹

4.1. THE STRESS OF THE ARTIST

4.1.1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF ART AFTER THE 70’S

In the first chapter of this paper we have argued that art produced during the first quarter of the 20th century had certain similarities with today’s art especially in terms of its interest in the correlation between the human body and the socio-technological developments. In both periods artists have been occupied with representations of stress on the contemporary body. We have argued that what provoked the imagination of the artists at the former period had been the interaction between technology and humans. In the second chapter, we tried to show that the stimuli that triggered critical theory as well

⁵⁹ Paul McCarthy in an interview with Kristine Stiles, in Rugoff, R. Stiles, K, Pietrantonio, G. *Paul McCarthy* London: Phaidon Press, 1996 p.20

as arts of the later 20th century were initiated greatly by man's interaction with consumer culture and information/communication technologies.

Before embarking on the main argument of this paper as whether new media arts best represent the stress on the contemporary body, we shall abstract a 'recent art history', extract and briefly scan the rapid changes in the arts after the 70's – the periods which interest us most for our present survey. This will allow us to identify with the personal condition of the contemporary artist.

In tune with the inflation of styles and mediums of the period, after the 70's, art intersected into branches and initiated various new trends and styles with the use of new media. Thus, new art forms like installation, performance, video and sound developed during the early 70's, enriching the possibilities of representation. The 80's saw the advance of art forms produced in the digital environment revolutionizing art distribution. Finally by the end of the 90's, it felt like almost all the possible forms and media were consumed. Today there is still the lingering tendency to announce the 'end of art', or the 'pornographic' winding down. This pessimism is not without reason, for it is not because of the inflation in the art world that boosted production and variety but it can be argued that it is more because of the *raison d'être* of this inflation.

4.1.2. ART AS COMMODITY

In all these three decades, a shared non-aesthetic factor was almost adamantly made visible: the commercial value of art. Art after the 70's advanced in tandem with the developing culture of commodities and also became a commodity itself, and a 'commodifier', in interaction. In fact, art always had a commercial value, but never before so primary and immediate. It started to be consumed, owned, shared, reproduced and distributed easier, echoing Benjamin's concerns in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*⁶⁰ at a different level – the digital rather than mechanical, and provoke Baudrillard's almost subjective anger towards Pop Art in *Consumer Culture*⁶¹. This new 'banally fetishized' art was backed by a (now-unbreakable) system of galleries, museums, collectors and finally art schools, which fast became the desired destination for many young creative minds of the developed world. With the wide use of new mediums such as photography, digital video, silk-screen, c-prints etc. art no longer became the outcome of a strenuous practice of fully committed and at times alienated creators, but the relatively easier practice of 'normal' individuals, trained to be artists in schools, residencies and similar arts facilities. Hence, as a result of all these, art finally became a

⁶⁰ Benjamin's 1935 essay about mechanical reproduction in the form of posters, magazines and newspapers was a landmark essay in the history of art. In this essay the author introduces the argument "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be." In "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in Harrison, C & Wood, P. *Art In Theory 1900-1990*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1992

⁶¹ Following an excellent study deep into the schematizations of consumer culture with its evident signifiers and signifieds, Baudrillard criticizes pop art as even unable to achieve the status of being banal (something he says is what the pop artists are trying to argue for their practice), and further investigates: "Is pop the form of art contemporaneous with the logic of signs and consumption, or it is merely an effect of fashion, and hence itself a pure object of consumption? There is no contradiction between the two. We may accept that pop art transposes an object-world, while at the same time issuing (by its own logic) in objects pure and simple. Advertising shares the same ambiguity." In Baudrillard, *Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, e London: Sage Pub. 1998, p.115.

profession, and dependent on certain mechanisms, probably the most undesired consequence for an existence that along with science has been believed to free man/woman.⁶²

Alongside with this professional art production, there is also the amateur production of common people who can have access to tools similar to what artists of today are using, and this situation creates a different kind of concern, almost a confusing duality. Hence, at least in wealthy countries, now a considerable amount of people owns digital tools, which can produce art. One could celebrate this situation and say that, since there are more venues for creative expression on a global scale, the beleaguered context of art is rapidly expanding to a much more inclusive and democratic realm. Even business people – intoxicated with the revolutionary spirit arguably lost by the avant-garde and the creative impulse for “thinking outside the box” – consider themselves artists today. While no one would deny the need to for creative outlets, there is a danger in subsuming all artistic activity into a vast expressionistic soup. If everything is art – design, business, streamed videos, advertising, lifestyle (“the art of living”) - what exactly does it mean? The efforts spent while aiming to reply this question might as well create an exhaustion that drives one to total condemnation of art and find expression in new ways and mediums, in a way closer to the critique of Baudrillard who finally stated that art no longer can function as it once promised, and that one shall do something else. But there

⁶² The concerns of art becoming a job serving a greater market is most evident in the work of curators working from the more peripheral geographies who are not part of the greater institutional system, and also unlike artists do not heavily rely on the support of the art market for their survival. Turkish curator Vasif Kortun suggests: ‘Art is not a job, and being an artist is not a profession. It is one of the few openings for exercising freedom; nobody asks you to practice it’ <http://www.deappel.nl/nederlands/exhibition/unlimitednl4/vasif.html>

are accusations and statements and there is also the reality: Whatever happens art is still functioning one way or another, obviously in very different conditions from half a century ago, but isn't sustaining perpetual change and adaptation one of the defining qualities of art? It is with a sound reasoning that thinkers like Baudrillard argue about the 'near end of art' which adopts itself too much and too conformist to modern society but this shall not necessarily mean to try to abolish or ignore it all together.

Therefore, even if certain circles of the art world itself try to deny it, we must accept that the art market exists and functions according to the same law as any other business. This being the case, artistic practice lost its quality of social appraisal at great intensity. In particular, our present decade, 'the 0 years' can be seen as the zenith of art's commercial stronghold, when the art world finally (and I think positively) came to accept the fact that the most dominant character of recent art is its commercial value. The growing popularity of art fairs in the world, and their cardinal position in setting the trends of art production proves this point. This position has been previously occupied by art biennials. However, after decades of 'the dictatorship of the biennials' as decision-making-mechanism in arts, and a device to present it to the greater public, the leadership flag has been passed on to art fairs, making art spectatorship once again in the territory of the elite, who are present at the fair location the more stylish and exotic, the better, not for being an audience but to be a buyer.⁶³ As the curator of the upcoming 2007 Venice Biennial Robert Storr argues, the art fairs are "creating a culture of spotting rather than looking", engulfing the artist in

⁶³ "Dictatorship of Biennials": After Francesco Bonami's curatorial concept "'Dictatorship of the Viewer" of the 50th Venice Biennial, 2003.

a competitive market.⁶⁴ Indeed as more and more private collections became small museums, individuals started acquiring artworks, generating an inflation of the art market and creating a greater demand for art production. Thus the ‘professionalized’ artists finds themselves in a contemporary dilemma: while art’s new condition as commodity more clearly defines itself, the artists on the one hand aspires at exercising (their own) freedom by doing art, but on the other hand rely on the commodity aspect of art for their own survival. This dichotomy certainly affects the body of the artist: To produce (artworks) and be produced (by galleries or commissioners), to create as an extension of feelings and to be marketed as an extension of business, and finally to oppose the market that feeds them. Thus, an important aspect of stress is introduced: the stress on the body of the artists who create the works dealing with stress. In general, a mirroring, a different kind of *panopticon*. Looking from a wider point of view, mimicking the Existentialists, one can even say that the whole of the art world is a stressful condition. This, then, is the state of mind of the individuals who are examining stress in their works, and in turn will be examined by this present survey.

4.2. RESPONSE OF THE ARTIST

The first to react to this condition of the arts were naturally artists of the developed countries. In relation to the art world of the late 1960’s, and in particular to its tendency to call in question traditional concepts of the nature of a work of art, the British duo

⁶⁴ Former senior curator of painting and sculpture at New York’s Museum of Modern Art, and next curator of the Venice Biennial. Storr in his writings of recent years criticizes the buzz of art fairs such as the ultra stylish Art Basel, Art Basel Miami Beach and Frieze Art Fair organized by the magazine he is regularly writing for. In Storr, R. “View from the Bridge” in *Frieze Magazine*, issue 89, London, January 2005, p. 61

Gilbert & George based their unusual ‘living sculptures’ on a logical development rather than a quantum leap. Their prevalent argument ran like this:

“When [the artist] can no longer produce anything original or individual, because everything has already been said and discovered, the only recourse left open to [him] is to declare [himself] and [his] life to be an artwork.”⁶⁵

In *Singing Sculpture* (1970) the duo –already look-alikes in real life, dressed in ordinary identical suits, had identical haircuts, and avoided any hint of personal individuality or originality.⁶⁶ Their accessories were a walking stick, a rubber glove as they accompanied with the recording of the popular British song, *Underneath The Arches*. Thus equipped they would stand on a table, which served as a pedestal, singing along to the words of the song. When the music stopped they exchange the sticks for the glove and get started again, performing the same loop for eight hours a day, for up to fourteen successive days. Banal and surfaced it may seem at first but it is a direct critique and also embodiment of the exhaustion of the arts and the artist, and a way to exorcise the stress of the artist resulting from this exhaustion. In a world where the artists who make the artworks are regarded as the creators of those ‘objects of desire’, Gilbert & George utilize banality in the process of creation and ridicule the system while alleviating their own stress. Similar techniques have been exploited at length in their stage shows both by the late performing artist Leigh Bowery, and most recently Chix on Speed. The absurd aesthetic qualities of these artists’ works are not unlike the earlier plays of Beckett such as *Waiting for Godot* (1963) or the *Happy End* (1961). While some contemporary artists choose not to oppose

⁶⁵ Gilbert and George in Jahn W, *The Art of Gilbert and George or an Aesthetic of Existence* London: Thames & Hudson, 1998 p. 67

⁶⁶ Figure 12

to the art market that feeds them, and live in perpetual stress of being liked or accepted we see that the likes of the artists mentioned above posit a serious objection against it.

Native of Serbia but living and working in Amsterdam and more recently New York, Marina Abramovic embodied the stress on the artist's body in her 1975 single channel video work *Art Is Beautiful, Artist Must Be Beautiful*. With a strong disbelief to both of these expressions the artist is seen naked in front of the camera under plain white light.⁶⁷

The artist explains the action of the work as thus:

“I brush my hair with a metal brush in my right hand and simultaneously comb my hair with a metal comb in my left hand. While doing so, I continuously repeat “art must be beautiful, artist must be beautiful” until I hurt my face and damage my hair.”⁶⁸

At the end of the one-hour long performance the artist significantly destroys her initial beautiful looks, and in the form of a ritual exorcises the forced notion of beauty on arts that is ever present. In fact most of Abramovic's works are timeless or with little chronological and political connotations, and she focuses on the limits of the human body, in particular of her own body. In *Art Is Beautiful...*, she tries to do both, embodying the stress of the individual and the ‘public’, herself and other artists, who in themselves form a small community. Her opposition to the notion of beauty both of the artwork and the artists is striking also because of her nudity performing to a live audience. By doing so, she also introduces the question of gender and provokes a certain sexual tension also

⁶⁷ Figure 13

⁶⁸ Abramovic, M. *Artist Body* Milan: Charta, 1998, p. 106

apparent in the earlier works of Carolee Schneemann (*Meat Joy*, 1963), Yoko Ono (*Cut Piece*, 1964).

Also an influential teacher, Abramovic in a recent lecture given at Tate Modern, quoted another artist Pier Manzoni on the beauty notion of the artwork: "I don't care if my art is beautiful, It has to be true".⁶⁹ This reminds us John Baldessari's ironic video "*I'm Making Art* (1971), which shows the artist standing bearded and shabby in front of a ordinary wall wearing plain clothing, saying "I'm making art" with any movement he does, such as bending over, or touching the elbow etc. By doing so Baldessari is both ridiculing the stardom of artists by presenting himself as the 'creative superman', who is doing most banal things, and also art production in general.

4.3. MEDIA USED TO REPRESENT STRESS ON THE CONTEMPORARY BODY

A brief survey of media that have been used in stressful corporeal representation is necessary at this point. These media can roughly be collected in three groups: media that existed before the socio-technological shifts became visible being painting, sculpture, theatre, dance, and opera. Media that emerged after socio-technological stimuli became effective in society such as photography, performance (early examples as in Dada and Bauhaus) and cinema. And finally, media that emerged after the 60's, and 70's -still ongoing: installation, video, performance (covering also body art and happening), sound art, net art, and new media arts in general.

⁶⁹ Artist's talk at the Tate Modern Symposium: *Live Culture: Performance and the Contemporary*, 27-30 March 2003. Archive of complete lecture <http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive/abramovic.htm>

4.3.1. PERFORMANCE

Among all these media, performance at a first glance seems to stand out as the most applicable for the embodiment of contemporary stress. In this aspect, the most crucial characteristic of performance is that it deals directly with the body of the artist, and is performed mostly out of the context of earlier theatrical performances, allowing a more open communication with the audience/viewer. Hence, it is a truly personal act. Moreover, by mixing different mediums such as theatre, music, video, and dance it is a perfect amalgamation and survey of previously practiced media, therefore representing true contemporary attributes. A medium is best described by the artist who uses it. When asked why performance seemed to be the best medium through which to engage himself in the questions mentioned at the very top of this chapter by artist McCarthy, he replies:

“It is a physical process, making an object while in character, in persona. It is related to everyday life, the passing of time. The mediums of action/performance and object/sculpture get confused. I am interested in images produced during the performance.”⁷⁰

McCarthy refers to characterization in performance, something which is inherited from theatre. But unlike theatre, which usually functions from a pre-written text, and almost always deliberately conceived to be performed by different actors at different times, in other words to be re-staged or revived in time, performance lies primarily within the existence of the artist who performs it. Thus, on many occasions the artist is the object and even the subject in performance. The audience is confronted with the representation of the artist's concerns and qualities in a very direct conditioning, stripped from such

⁷⁰ Rugoff, R. Stiles, K, Pietrantonio, G. (1996) p.20

theatrical limitations as stage, lighting, costumes, dramaturgy, etc. Therefore, unlike theatre it can be more direct, sincere, and because of the shorter time and fewer efforts needed for its creation, it can quickly monitor social or technological changes in society, without needing to wait for the completion of other factors or supportive elements that is needed for its creation. To give an example, a critique of 9/11, or the prisoner abuse scandal in Iraq could be represented in a performance work as early as one week after it took place, or a day after, or even immediately following the event. But in theatre or film this takes months or years before it can reach completion, because these media cannot be executed individually and needs preparatory processes such as scripting, casting, funding, staging, etc. before the work can be exhibited or viewed.

4.3.2. VIDEO

Similarly, video art can be easily produced, distributed, reproduced, multiplied and exhibited.⁷¹ Being the grandchild of cinema, by origin it is an extension of new technologies, which we argue that created stress. Apart from being an art medium video is embedded very well into our everyday life. On the one hand, it is seen as a surveillance technology that eliminates the concept of private act – at least in dominant capitalist cultures intent on maintaining property as evident in the works of Dan Graham (*Video Piece for Two Glass Buildings*, 1976) and Blast Theory (*Uncle Roy All Around You, Can*

⁷¹ One of the main reasons for witnessing a rising ratio of video art pieces in international group shows is because works of video (in the final shape of DVDs) are much easily transported, as opposed to sculptures and paintings. All this is also in relation with funding issues. As funding for arts diminishes rapidly in most countries, when organizers of such group exhibitions plan to include artists from other countries to their show, they usually tend to choose video works as it is less of a burden to their budget.

You See Me Now, 2003), and on the other hand it is seen as a way to value, through preservation and ownership, ‘private events’ – from birthday parties to sex acts.⁷²

However, despite its centrality to contemporary culture, video is still viewed with some skepticism in large portions of the art world. After a century of breathtaking achievement in cinema, an achievement often less celebrated than it might be because of the compromises it has often made with an industry devoted to producing largely mediocre and absurdly expensive entertainment, video often plays the role of the “not yet blessed bastard”⁷³. It is slick, it is cheap, it is fast, and above all it is common. The same is true for still photography, although in recent years it has gained more status and respect in the art world; in fact video has taken up the role still (35 mm) photography formerly held. More than the consequence of the elitism still rifle in large portions of the art world, the hesitation about video’s claim to artistic merit may come from its ‘once removed’ relation to light. Cinema and still photography are both still developed and projected in relation to the physics and chemistry of light. Video and digital photography are seen as electronic interpretations of the effect of light, inciting a discussion about the ‘fine art’ qualities of works executed by such media.

⁷² New York based artist Andrea Fraser approached her gallery to arrange a commission with a private collector on her behalf. (*Untitled*, 2004) The requirements for the commission were to include a sexual encounter between Fraser and a collector, which would be recorded on videotape, with the first exemplar of the edition going to the participating collector. The resulting videotape is a silent, unedited, sixty-minute document shot in a hotel room with a stationary camera and existing lighting.

Blast Theory is a Sheffield based British group, who produce work in new media arts and performance. They often use interactive elements such as mobile phones, computers and video surveillance. The group have been regulars of the Ars Electronica Festival, as well as performance/theatre festivals such as KUNSTENFestival des Arts (Brussels), LIFT (London International Festival of Theatre)

⁷³ Phelan, P. “Opening up Spaces Within Spaces: The Expansive Art of Pippilotti Rist” in Rist, P. *Pippilotti Rist* London: Phaidon, 2001, p.34

Contrary to this general concern of the art market, the present survey sees video as another appropriate medium to represent the consequences of socio-technological developments on the human body. Digital video in particular is an outcome of the digitally informed culture, and is one of the most accessible technological gadgets.⁷⁴ The user-friendly quality of digital video makes it appropriate for fast and easy production by many individuals who are not necessarily artists. Then, in digital video the artist no longer needs to be the ‘Prometheus’ that carries the torch of information but takes on the qualities of the boy/girl next door. Swiss artist Pippilotti Rist prefers video because she can do most of the work herself, giving her complete control over the subject and the aesthetics, and affirming the qualities of video as outlined by Phelan above:

“I opted for video because I can perform all the steps myself, from the camera work to online editing, and that suits me. I can work all by myself or in a small team... video has its own particular qualities, its own lousy, nervous, inner world quality, and I work with that.”⁷⁵

In fact, self-sustainability is a crucial factor in contemporary art practice, especially in our argument. This condition strengthens the role of performance and video, as they differ from other arts dependant on a larger collaboration and teamwork, with considerably higher financial burdens as in the case of theatre, dance and film. Performance and digital video can be produced quickly, it gives room to intensity and

⁷⁴ After Baudrillard’s coinage in *Consumer Society*

⁷⁵ Rist, P *ibid.* p. 39

improvisation, both are open channels for the representation technique of the body and the self.

More recently, digital video's intensity dominated over other practices such as 35mm film. In the mid 90's a number of filmmakers started to use inexpensive digital cameras (DV) to create films characterized by a documentary style, for instance *Timecode* of Mike Leigh, *Festen* of Thomas Vintenber, and *Iki Genç Kiz* by Kutlug Ataman. Rather than treating live action as raw material to be later re-arranged in post-production, these filmmakers placed premier importance on the authenticity of the actor's performances. DV equipment is small enough to allow a filmmaker to be literally inside the action as it unfolds. In addition to adopting a more intimate filmic approach, a filmmaker can keep shooting for a whole duration of a 60 or 120 minutes long DV tape as opposed to the standard ten-minute film roll. This gives the filmmaker and the actors more freedom to improvise around a theme, rather than being shackled to the tightly scripted short shots of traditional filmmaking. In fact, the length of *Timecode* exactly corresponds to the length of a standard DV tape. This intimacy is also evident in the works of Kutlug Ataman (*Never My Soul*, 2001), Isaac Julien (*This Is Not An AIDS Advertisement*, 1987) and Brice Dellsberger (*Body Double X*, 2004) who use DV for the intimate portrayals of people living on the edges of life. On the contrary the digital video pieces of Shirin Neshat (*Logic of the Birds*, 2002) or Matthew Barney (*Cremaster Cycle*, 1997-2003) still work with the techniques of 35 mm feature filmmaking, with tight scripts, impressive cinematography, visual effects and big production budgets.⁷⁶ Therefore, the medium of

⁷⁶ Both Neshat and Barney work extensively with High Definition video.

DV itself does not guarantee intimacy or directness, but it is the artist who uses it that makes the difference.

4.3.3. NET ART

Another medium that interests us is net art. Net art can be simply defined as the form of art that is produced and distributed by computers to be exhibited in computers. Net art feeds on the internet and can reach any monitor connected to the network, which makes it a truly unique medium in terms of accessibility. Users become avatars and the computers their playing fields. From this point of view, the computer can also be seen as a tool for language, which in turn makes it an extension of the technology of writing. This also reflects Foucault's idea of language and his reading the human as a linguistically determined thing. Like Merleau-Ponty, he sought to establish human not as a complete thing in itself, but as a field of relations, of actions and reactions. He deduced the importance of language as a primary expression of these relations and as the medium through which they came into being. As such, Foucault did not argue that language is a paradigm for the human, but that it is the means and expression of the human. If we were to adopt this argument to the field of computing especially the human factors involved in computing, we shall see that what is being established is not a mapping between computer and human, but rather a dynamic of relations. And if we were to introduce Deleuze and Guattari's theory of "Desiring Machines" to our argument, we can finally state that computers are also language machines.⁷⁷ And if the computer is part of language, then it must per se, be part of the human, and thus speak of the human. Consequently computers, as extensions of men/women also can reflect the anxiety and

⁷⁷ Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. *Anti-Oedipus: Kapitalizm ve Sizofreni* Istanbul: Baglam, 1990

concerns of men/women. Then any form of art using computers would hold a great opportunity to deal with human concerns. However, we shall see that this is not used to full capacity in new media arts but finds a more satisfactory appliance in other mediums more conventional in comparison.

Net art emerged as an avant-garde medium, that preserved itself in a safe haven away from the claws of conventional art, until it was given its place at museums or institutions in Europe in the 80's and later in other parts of the developed world.⁷⁸ Manovich sees this as a dichotomy:

“Consider the dichotomy, an art object in a gallery setting versus a software program in a computer. On entering an exhibition of media art we encounter signs that tell us that we are in the realm of Art: the overall exhibition takes place in the dark, each installation is positioned in a separate, carefully lit space, each accompanied by a label with the artist's name. We know well what to do in this situation: we are supposed to perceive, contemplate, and reflect. Yet these initial signs are misleading. An exhibition of media art points us to very different cultural settings such as a computer games hall or an entertainment park (in each of these one often has to wait in line before

⁷⁸ Towards the end of the 80's Europe and Japan remained the best places to see new media works especially net art production, and to participate in high-level discussions of the new fields. United States on the other hand lagged behind Europe in the production of net art for reasons related to the lack of government funding for sophisticated equipment needed to exhibit and maintain such art works, as well as the lack of interest in the art market, which in turn proved the US art world to be the most conservative cultural force in contemporary society. A more detailed argument on the different development of net art on both side of the Atlantic see Manovich's article “New Media from Borges to HTML” in *The New Media Reader* Wardrip-Fruin, N. (ed.) Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003 (2003)

getting a chance to “try” a particular exhibit) and also to a different type of cultural object (and, correspondingly, a different set of behaviors).”⁷⁹

What Manovich is arguing about is almost along the lines of ‘putting a bird in a cage’. Such limitations to net art are the biggest obstacles against its advance and its possible fulfillment of a new avant-garde positioning –much applied to net art in the 80’s with no concrete sign of realization yet. The medium of net art is still facing resistance from the art world in general. This resistance is understandable given that the logic of the art world and the logic of the net art are exact opposites. The first is based on the idea of authorship which assumes a single author, the notion of a one-of-a-kind art object, and the control over the distribution of such objects which takes place through a set of exclusive places: galleries, museums, auctions, fairs etc. The second privileges the existence of potentially numerous copies; infinitely many different states of the same work; author-user symbiosis (the user can change the work through interactivity); the collective, collaborative authorship; and network distribution, which bypasses the art distribution systems. Therefore, despite all the efforts of the art world in integrating net art into conventional art practices, the world of art and net art is very distinct from each other. This effort of integration is in fact involuntarily and almost dishonest and works on the techniques of advertisement industry borrowing help from visual artists. It is almost like the whole of the art world being a cliché collector who likes to add some avant-garde into his/her rich modern art collection.

⁷⁹ Manovich, L. “*New Media: A User’s Guide*” in Weibel, P. & Druckery T. (Eds.) *Net Condition: Art and Global Media* Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999, p.8

4.4. HOW 'NEW' IS NEW MEDIA?

4.4.1. PROBLEMS IN DEFINING NEW MEDIA ARTS

While we argued above that consumer culture lived in a perpetual year of zero, we aimed to connect it to the application of the word 'new' as well. This is the point in our survey where we shall explore the appropriation of the word in arts –as opposed to the *new* and *neu*'s of the advertisement culture. Because 'new' in art is as disputable as 'new' in consuming.

As a leading new media theorist Manovich argues that the most appropriate way to start discussing a debatable phenomenon such as new media is by compiling its most simple definitions used in popular press:

“New media are the cultural objects which use digital computer technology for distribution and exhibition. Thus, Internet, web sites, computer multimedia, computer games, CD-ROMs and DVDs, virtual reality, and computer-generated special effects all fall under new media. Other cultural objects which use computing for production and storage but not for final distribution – television programs, feature films, magazines, books and other paper-based publications, etc. are not new media.”⁸⁰

Manovich's case is quite just. Indeed, the term new media is a very nondescript, and deceiving word and loose definitions like this demonstrate the problematic of such a

⁸⁰ Manovich, L. (*ibid.*) p. 16-7

confusing and misused term. As Baudrillard said back in 1972, “There is no theory of the media.”⁸¹ Therefore, everyone can say what they please about it. Since both “new” and “media” represent a great deal of other qualities and establishment their unity ends up in a very general statement, almost an appropriation that hardly finds its true target. Equally, certain problems with the definition above will emerge at close examination. First of all, as in the very concept of “new media” such definitions have to be revised every few years, as yet another part of culture comes to rely on computing technology for distribution. For example the shift from analog to digital video or the shift from film-based to digital projection of feature films in movie theatres, etc. Secondly, we may justifiably suspect that eventually most forms of culture may use computer distribution, and therefore the term “new media” defined in this way will lose any specificity. Rather than reserving the term “new media” to refer to the cultural uses of current computer and computer-based network technologies, some authors have suggested that every modern media and telecommunication technology passes through its “new media stage.” In other words, at some point photography, telephones, cinema, and television each were “new media.” Present moment shall be the key element in any discussion of new media arts. Therefore, when new media is being discussed one should always remember the time of the discussion rather than the chronological position of the mediums discussed: The person who makes the argument should always be aware of the current time they are

⁸¹ In *Requiem for Media* Baudrillard criticizes McLuhan and followers as follows : “There is no theory of the media. The ‘media revolution’ has remained empirical and mystical as much in the work of McLuhan as with his opponents. McLuhan has said with his usual Canadian-Texan brutality, that Marx, the spiritual contemporary of the steam engine and railroads was already obsolete in his lifetime with the appearance of the telegraph. In his candid fashion, he is saying that Marx, in his materialistic analysis of production, had virtually circumscribed productive forces as a privileged domain from which language, signs, and communication in general found themselves excluded.” Baudrillard, J. “Requiem for Media” in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, Saint Louis: Telos Press, 1981 p. 164-8

speaking from, knowing that this or that argument may not be valid in the near future, as well as for the near past. This demonstrates the problem of positioning new media arts in a general framing. 'New' gets old very easily therefore we could even avoid using it altogether and be more specific, such as using net art, computer animation, graphic art, as 'net art', 'computer animation' and 'graphic art' instead of uniting them all under one roof in 'new media arts'. Same can be applied to other media that can be placed under this classification, such as video art.

4.4.2. POSITIONING VIDEO INSIDE NEW MEDIA ARTS

Video is a medium that has long been confusing the writer of this survey whether it can be called new media art or an "elder new media art". Before discussing whether video can still be seen as new media, we shall keep in mind that this medium can be defined in two ways according to the technology used for its production. As briefly mentioned above, analog video is video that uses the analog tools, and can be seen as an extension of 35mm photography, and digital video is video that uses digital tools such as DV or HD for its creation. Digital video creates video files that appears in the computers as simple numbers, and can be manipulated/developed/edited also by numerical computing software such as Final Cut Pro or After Effects, two key programs that also changed the way of art & design production of our times.

Although digital video or in digital filmmaking relies heavily on computer technology in its production it does not necessarily use computers for its distribution and/or exhibition. A digitally created film like *The Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow*, or any Pixar

feature, can be viewed in movie theatres or by home entertainment. But on the other hand, these films can be downloaded –legally or illegally, and watched using various media players like Quicktime, or Windows Media Player.⁸² A film or video is then executed as a ‘file’ with a name extension like .mov, .avi, .wmp, etc. Therefore, to try to include digital video into a new media category with the use/guidance of the popular definition above also proves our case wrong, and further demonstrates the inaccuracy of defining or pigeonholing such media. Like the example give above, it might as well be more convenient to use video as ‘video’ and avoid placing it within the terms ‘new media’

But let us continue to elaborate on the inaccuracy of the term ‘new media arts’. Confusion about video’s new media position is not only seen in popular culture or academic circles but also in art circles, especially in our country. A good example of this is the approach of Istanbul Modern. Wrongly attributed as a ‘Museum of Modern Art of Istanbul’, rather than a large private collection, this young museum divides its building rigidly into two floors, reserving the larger upstairs section for *peintures*, canvases hung almost edge to edge with no clear curatorial concentration. Downstairs, next to a pathetically poor art library designed like an aquarium, in which only a few books but more idle staff float, a curious section is devoted to that thing called “new media arts”. However, the works exhibited here are solid single channeled video works by Sener Özmen, Nasan Tur and Haluk Akakçe -being the strongest link in this group in terms of

⁸² Founded in 1984 Pixar Studios quickly emerged as one of the leading animation companies. Late 90’s and the 00 years Pixar reached the peak of its success with films like *The Ants*, *Finding Nemo* and *Incredibles*. The word Pixar became an expression for a special aesthetic of computer animation.

approaching new media arts, because of its animation qualities. It is true that other works have been shot in DV but only this cannot mean that they are new media arts products. This misinformation about new media arts in such a determined institution is sad but not surprising, if one takes into account the amount of time that passed for art institutions in the West especially in the United States to register the true meaning and importance of new media arts. It would then not be unjust if one would apply the popular saying “Turkey is a small America” to this situation. Thus along with many categories and walks of life we can argue that even art institutions of our country also tend to copy and paste, even the mistakes.

Murray argues that “new media in any age are always distrusted media”.⁸³ The basis of the much popular and academic discourse on the media of later decades began in the 1960’s with its fascination with and distrust of television. As television developed into branches with extending – almost contagious qualities, it caused technophobia among a large public to whom McLuhan referred above as the “literary men”. The level of this consumption makes one ask the question whether we should wait a bit longer in history to see the real and positive effects of new media and its appreciation by the greater publics. The world in general can be slower than we think in socio-technological developments. It may very well be still too early to accept new media, as it should be or as it thinks it should be. The extensions McLuhan had talked about are maybe only accepted in the smaller communities that are more literate than others, and have a profit – either material or career wise, in the acceptance and promotion of this theory. And it may

⁸³ Murray, J. “Introduction” in Wardrip-Frin, N (2003), p.11

not still be the case for these theories finding their true representation in the greater public.

But whatever happens, or however we choose to argue, to better understand the nature of new media and what new media arts actually should be, we first need to go beyond popular understandings, which are generally limited to the use of computer for media distribution and exhibition.⁸⁴ And now that new media arts is still a commonly used term and since the aim of this dissertation is not to find a new term that could replace it, we shall particularly except its use and continue applying it as it is to our discussion about the artistic representation of stress.

4.5. THE DICHOTOMY OF NEW MEDIA ARTS IN THE REPRESENTATION OF THE STRESS ON THE CONTEMPORARY BODY

Arriving at our main argument, we can say that new media art practice focuses on the technological advancements in the field of arts. In other words, they are more concentrated on the tools and the media themselves. In doing so they celebrate the new media technologies, because they rely on them heavily and perpetually aim to invent “new” gadgets. So they fail *yet* to pose serious critique of any stress caused by the socio-technological changes. Video art and performance on the other hand often make use of digital tools but does not feel the need to improve the medium or try to be the

⁸⁴ Manovich defines the central principles of New Media in five main attributes: 1- Numerical Representation, 2- Modularity, 3- Automation, 4- Variability, 5- Cultural Transcoding. Manovich, L. “New Media: a User’s Guide” in Weibel, P. & Druckery T. (Eds.) *Net Condition: Art and Global Media* Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999

creator of a new form, but concentrate more on the consequences of the social and/or technological shifts in society.

New media art is still in the making, still in progress and not as strong as it was first thought to be in the 90's. One proof of it is that most major new media art centers like ZKM, V2 Lab -with the exception of Ars Electronica Center, have lost both public and state interest and slowed down considerably. At schools like MIT, what is more important seems not be art but the *science of art*, or the ability to change the forms and mediums, to come up with new techniques. To face the truth, people working at centers like ZKM, AEC or MIT end up to be nerds isolated from the outside world and its realities, plunged into virtual reality which still is not coming up to the public sphere, and create “art works” that actually do not reach a wide public.

Therefore, we can argue that although new media arts seem to be dealing with the interaction of the body and the socio-technological world, it actually deals with the more bright side of things (with a few exceptions), but the “elder new media arts” are still more interested in filtering the conceptual, political and the technological and come up with art works that pose a serious critique of our complex modern world. In other words, they are braver. They challenge the realities of the “real world”, while new media artist or “the nerds” prefer to challenge the virtual world, and are much more anti-social. But stress as we have seen is a very social phenomenon.

On the other hand, computer based new media arts are obsessed with using the latest technology. But technological progress is too rapid. It changes so fast that a new media art works produced in the beginning of the '0 years may already be outdated in 2005, and can even be seen as a relic. This also prevents it to be a good representation technique of stress, a quality, which we have argued is perpetual and ambient.

5. REPRESENTATION OF STRESS IN THE “ELDER NEW MEDIA ARTS”

To support our argument we shall now look deeper into some examples from different mediums used by artists who are almost identified with the medium they use.

5.1. CONSUMING HEROS: THE WORK OF PAUL MCCARTHY

One of the great themes of mass culture, as analyzed by Riesman and Morin is the theme of the “hero of consumption”.⁸⁵ In the West, at least, the impassioned biographies of heroes of production are everywhere giving way today to biographies of heroes of consumption. The great exemplary lives of self-made men and founders, pioneers, explorers, and colonizers, which succeeded those of saints and historical figures, have today given way to the lives of movie stars, sporting or gambling heroes, of a handful of glided princes or globe-trotting barons. With all these great dinosaurs, who fill the magazines and the TV programs, it is always the excessiveness of their lives, the potential for outrageous expenditure that is exalted (*MTV's The Fabulous Life of the Big Spenders*, *Alem Magazine*, *Televole* etc). Artists like Duane Hanson (*Supermarket Lady*, 1970), Jeff Koons (*Michael Jackson and Bubbles*, 1988), Mattheiu Laurette (*Money Back Life!*, 2001) deal with these heroes of consumption and the culture who supports them.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ Reisman, D. *Conservative Capitalism: The Social Economy* Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999.

⁸⁶ Figures 14-16

Rooted in the pervasive media-manipulated culture of Los Angeles, artist Paul McCarthy explored in the 1970's and 1980's notions of artifice and spectacle through aberrant behavior that had no redeeming political, cultural, or psychological purpose. Rather he still cleverly articulates a critique of consumer culture, with the use of its most deliberate signifiers, like ketchup, hotdog -those that deal directly with the contamination of the body through consumption.

Crandall in his introduction to the Eyebeam publication of *Interaction: Artistic Practice in the Internet* calls our present culture as “the US-dominated, globalized culture”.⁸⁷ McCarthy stands out one of the bravest artists to question and ridicule this all-embracing American culture by employing similar tools such as pornography, Hollywood imagery and perversion –as opposed to the country's conservative majority. His performances and videos are littered with references to children's television shows, with the artist often assuming a clownish and infantilized host enacting a deranged educational program (*Death Ship*, 1981 and *Pinnocchio Pipenose Household dilemma*, 1994). In these dysfunctional pedagogical displays, McCarthy performs a messy autopsy on the airbrushed innocence of family entertainment, a culture not only of Americans but also other developed countries. From performances that transformed the American family's dinner –hamburgers and ketchup, hot dog and mustard –into the raw materials for rituals of force-feeding and sexual mutilation, McCarthy “has gone on to explore the

⁸⁷ Crandall, J. and Scholder, A. *Interaction: Artistic Practice in the Network* New York: DAP, 2001 p.3

authoritarian underpinnings of America's cutesy consumerism, its culture of pervasive infantilization.”⁸⁸

Most of McCarthy's solo performances remind us the earlier bloody sacramental performances of Viennese Actionists and Carole Schemann's renowned *Meat Joy* (1964). In his one time performance of *Hot Dog* (1974), McCarthy invited the audience to his basement, isolating them from any conventional stage reality, as well as from the daily pretty life of the American West Coast.⁸⁹ The action begins with the artist undressing to his underpants, only wearing obvious Oakley sunglasses – a brand popular among young surfers, and shaving his body, including the genital area. One of the guests of this performance was fellow artists friend Barbara Smith. She explains the action as follows:

“He [then] stuffs his penis into a hotdog bun and tapes it on, then smears his ass with mustard...He approaches the tables and sits nearby, drinking ketchup and stuffing his mouth with hot dogs...Binding his head with gauze and adding more hot dogs, he finally tapes his bulging mouth closed so that the protruding mouth looks like a snout... He stands alone struggling with himself, trying to prevent his own retching, it is apparent that he is about to vomit... Should he vomit he might choke to death, since the vomit would have no place to go. And should anyone of us vomit, we might trigger him to do likewise.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Rugoff, R. “Mr. McCarthy's Neighborhood” in Rugoff, R. Stiles, K, Pietrantonio, G. *Paul McCarthy* 1996, p.32

⁸⁹ Figures 17-18

⁹⁰ Rugoff, R. Stiles, K, Pietrantonio, G. (1996) p. 43

In *Hot Dog* stress is defined by the excessive qualities of culinary consumption: being fed to death only with mayonnaise, ketchup and hot dog. All of these food items are results of the poor eating habits of American's but also products exported to the greater world as miracle consumption goods. By using mayonnaise and ketchup almost like a medium in many of his performances, McCarthy is also playing with the notions of cultural imperialism, and his position as an artist to be working from a geographical and cultural location that defined consumer culture. McCarthy wants to abolish reality by deconstructing the dream world supplied by American style consumerism, that decades after his positioning have already contaminated the world, especially our own country. On the other hand, the body beautiful concerns in McCarthy's work are embodied through perversion and pornography, and the body is constantly seen as inclined to deformation, as a result of the use of these fatty and artificial consumer materials.

Similar to Mike Kelley, McCarthy sees a dark world, from a very 'bright' location.⁹¹ Whether erupting in mayonnaise ejaculations and ketchup hemorrhages (*Bossy Burger*, 1991), or ingesting raw hamburger and puking real vomit (*Sailor's Meat*, 1975) McCarthy not only assails taboos but shuffles cultural reference points with disregard for the categories and distinctions that underlie our everyday notions of order.⁹² He often carries out one-man orgies with condiments that substituted for excrement, sperm and blood. He enacts a theatre of regression, close to Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty: smearing his body parts, choking on hot-dog penises, vomiting, fucking mayonnaise jars, he pictures a body whose borders are collapsing, and forming a landscape of garbage in

⁹¹ Also a California based artist, who works on similar subjects with similar mediums Mike Kelley collaborated with Paul McCarthy in video project *Fresh Acconci* in 1995

⁹² Figure 19

which the individual's boundaries are dissolved. Major inspirations behind these actions are low-budget horror films –which are contagious outcomes of the stress-loving, stress-making movie culture. McCarthy's contaminated aesthetic – his use of overlapping and incompatible references- transforms the principle of commercialized unreality into a violent form of criticism. But unlike so much of the supposedly 'critical' art of the 1980's –such as the works of Cady Noland and Richard Prince, typically photo-and-text pieces that straightforwardly announced their disapproval of social evils, McCarthy's art works from inside the structure it critiques; it manipulates the house language as an expressive tool, rather than display it as a straightforward criminal exhibit. He can be described as a modern shaman, extracting bad spirits (in our case the stress) out of the body, healing through exaggerated forms and transcendence by the help of tools, which actually invite or create the bad spirit (stress) almost as in witchcraft. His audience then are confronted with the very action and moment when stress is let out of the body and flees into the environment from which it came. Finally, In McCarthy's work, the human body is pre-eminently a social body, a metaphor for systems and conventions that define our world. This correlates both with Foucault's and Merleau-Ponty's theories of perception and the self, and stands out among other contemporary artists as genuine practices of the exorcism of stress on the contemporary body.

5.2. TERRORISM AS STRESSOR: THE WORKS OF JUAN GRIMONPREZ, ANRI SALA

Terrorism is also another stressful condition that has been present throughout the 20th century, but penetrated into western society even deeper after the 9/11 attacks on the United States. It carries a different kind of socio-technological stimuli, both because of its core social reasoning and also because of the technological –and at times digital tools it is using. Indeed, every terrorist act has its own medium: Old media such as the tiny stones Palestinian children throw to the Israeli soldiers or new media like the mobile phone triggered automated bomb of the 2004 Madrid bombings and the complex computer virus which has recently been discovered having been penetrating the server of Pentagon for over a year. On the other hand terrorism is mostly viewed as a social and collective phenomenon, but the individual aspect of terrorism is also a considerable aspect. Most terrorist acts are executed with the self-sacrifice of individuals for the salvation of a greater community or a case. Hence the terrorist act is not only the outburst of a communal feeling but also an individual positioning. However, since the individual is also blown up/exterminated with the execution of the terrorist act, their stories remain untold. One of the most influential authors of the 20th century, Robert Musil tried to elaborate this individual aspect of terrorism in the character of the *lustmord* suspect Moosbrugger, who killed a prostitute and suddenly became a unspoken hero in the Austria-Hungarian Empire. An individual who opposed the very security of society rolling towards its end with the unknown but rather felt about approach of the First World War. Musil skillfully portrayed the stress on the body of the executioner (Moosbrugger), the executed (the prostitute) and their audience (the Viennese society). A similar

portrayal is evident in the work of the young influential Albanian artist Anri Sala who for his 2001 video work *Nocturnes* made three young soldiers and their stress as executioners his subject. These French soldiers had served at the Yugoslavian War as soldiers in the NATO mission, and they are seen very vaguely through a dirty aquarium placed in the center of a dark room. As the silhouettes speak the audience hears the stories of war and destruction, their experience as “peace keeping” soldiers who were ironically trained to sleep, shower and even make love with their guns. At one point one of them had to shoot down a mixed group of Serbians and Bosnians who were escaping from NATO bombs. While the soldiers recount their trauma, the camera hardly moves and the viewer is forced to look at a few lonely fish elegantly trying to swim in the extremely dirty fish tank, echoing the position of these young soldiers in the Balkans (an aquarium taken away from the larger world), used by an international “peacekeeping” institution, almost as a sinister act of terrorism, against the people it is supposed to be protecting. Looking from this point of view NATO takes the position of the mastermind and the young soldiers are the individual aspect of this terrorism. The strong effect of the work is achieved by the use of a small digital camera placed discreetly in the room they converse with the artist. This proves the strength of the video medium in penetrating into the most intimate moments of individuals, and their stress.

Since 9/11 many examples representing terrorism –mostly corny, have been given in the art world, almost most of them being from outside the United States.⁹³ However, many

⁹³ Robert Storr argues that artist in America are too much focused on commercial success and therefore are highly conservative and isolate themselves from social concerns especially ignoring the hardships their country has been causing the world since 9/11. “View From the Bridge” Frieze, Issue 92, April 2005, p.70

artists coming from the Middle East, or Latin America have already been representing concerns over terrorism and its stressful effect on the contemporary body for decades. While the performance and installation works of Mona Hatoum presented an enlightened approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (*Interrogation Table*, 1981), (*Over My Dead Body*, 1989), the feature film length video work of Johan Grimonprez almost prophesized the coming of 9/11 in *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* (1999).⁹⁴ For this work Grimonprez collected extensive news footage about plane hijackers and mixed them with text compiled from the fictional writings of DeLillo. The large portion of the narrative is taken from his book “Mao II”, which contends that the novelist’s role within society is replaced by that of bomb makers and gunmen. “What terrorist gain, novelists loose” says DeLillo.⁹⁵ Though according to the artist “the film at the end alludes to the fact that the media nowadays might even be outplaying the terrorists”.⁹⁶ Indeed, *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* deals with that we have been arguing about the stress making qualities of the media, in particular the TV: violent and explicit footage always finds audiences, zapping fragments the viewer as well as the information, and causes the brain to work faster in order to be able to perceive truth. The consequent stress that emerges from the juxtaposition of these elements have been skillfully examined in *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*, which communicates to its audience with the same techniques a TV show about catastrophic events might. We have mentioned above in the second chapter that the techniques of subtitle news bar that started to be used in news channels after 9/11 creates a certain kind of stress on the viewer. By appropriating the news-giving techniques used in TV, Grimonprez also portrays the stress imposed on the viewer by TV.

⁹⁴ Figures 20-22

⁹⁵ DeLillo, D. *Mao II* London: Penguin Books, 1992 p. 131

⁹⁶ Grimonprez, J. *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y* Ostfildern: Hatje Kantz Publishing, 2003

Although his subjects have never been interviewed by the artist, the general atmosphere is almost as intimate as a documentary, supported by other material shot by the artist in shanty hotel rooms, airports, favellas, locations which the terrorists either masterminded or performed their acts.⁹⁷ Throughout Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y stories of terrorism related trauma and stress are intermingled to such a complex extent that the overall atmosphere ends up being ironical. Thus by using a filmic narrative and the video medium the artist created himself the opportunity to remain objective and playful, able to portray stress stricken characters at great length, and reserving breathing space for the audience in between trauma stories, via small interludes, or knee-plays, hence creating a sound representation of terrorism, devoid of fragmentation.⁹⁸

This type intensity and intimacy, especially the element of irony is often missing or deliberately ignored in computer based new media arts. Many net art projects as explained above reflect the nerdish quality of their creator who spend less of their daily time in social environments, and consequently have less experiences and interactions to operate from while creating a work. However, irony originates from observation and critical looking, and has to rely on experience. Visual and performance artists base their self-education on these elements while the net art artists tend to focus on technology, and invests in an environment that prefers the digital/technological to the human element, and

⁹⁷ Following 9/11 Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y was re-edited and exhibited with a publication including an essay by Slavoj Zizek

⁹⁸ Knee-play: a theatre term coined by director Robert Wilson, who created interludes in between the acts of his often 4-9 hour long stage works. These knee-plays as in the case of the colossal internationally simultaneous production to coincide with the 1984 Olympic Games could be acted out separately, forming a work by itself: *A Tree is Best Measured When It is Down*, 1985-8

something that values virtuality more than reality. Therefore, we can argue that in many cases of computer based new media arts irony is missing. And when irony is missing the intimacy becomes questionable, and finally the truth of the work becomes all together disputable. One will then remember Pier Manzoni's motto as quoted by Abramovic above: "I don't care if my art is beautiful, it has to be true". If the quality of truth in the way that computer based new media arts represent life is disputable, then how can one say that this is the most appropriate medium for the representation of stress?

5.3. COMPUTERIZED CORPOREALITY : THE WORK OF SIMON TEGALA

Among many computer based new media artists British artist Simon Tegala stands out as one that at least touches irony while representing stress. He doesn't only produce pieces to be distributed by computers but also creates site-specific works for the 'physical world'. For his famous 1998 piece *Anabiosis* the artist often used computer-based technology to monitor stress real time.⁹⁹ For the project he wired himself up to a heart monitor for two weeks and transmitted a reading of his pulse via a mobile phone live to an electronic sign placed in a shop in a central London location, reading "Simon Tegala's heart rate is 125", "Simon Tegala's heart rate is 126", etc. The fluctuating three figure number accords to "beats per minute". The sign updates constantly, in real time, throughout the two-week period while a website runs concurrently, incorporating daily, 24 hours worth of downloaded heart rate data and a diary entry written by acclaimed author, Deborah Levy. The artist in the meantime follows his daily routine, and goes through everyday experienced some of which are stressful and cause his heart rate to

⁹⁹ Figures 23-4

increase, or some romantic turmoil with an ex-girlfriend which creates a certain amount of stress in his body. The artist summons the drive behind his work as follows:

“Every piece I do is related to the body either as a physical, mechanical manifestation, or as a body in a sociological context. In this case it was about an individual being alive, who happened to be named Simon Tegala. It was less about me as a person but touched upon far reaching concerns of mortality and existence, and our relationship to digital technologies”

As verbalized by the artist himself, the work aims to reflect, rather than to discuss. This is one of the common qualities of computer based new media arts, and what prevents it from elaborating social contexts. A representation is far from being complete when it only mirrors or exaggerates a reality, or a fantasy.

V.4. FEMALE STRESS: THE WORKS OF MARINA ABRAMOVIC, JENNY HOLZER, MARTHA ROSLER AND EIISA LISA AHTILA

Back in 1995, Marina Abramovic portrayed a more personal stress in her ‘domestic work’ *The Onion*: Wearing bright red lipstick, for 8 minutes she eats a complete onion, always looking up, and constantly bitterly complaining about her life, which at first hearing seems really her private life, but then leads into the concerns of women, artists and geographically the war-stricken Balkan public.¹⁰⁰ Gradually she starts to shed tears, as the eating becomes unbearable, hardly able to breathe fresh air. The narration is overheard. She turns into an animal, almost puking on the white onion, transcending to a vegetable that is the basic element of many cuisines and which causes tears in the eyes of

¹⁰⁰ Figure 25

the person cooking. In most cases the cook in domestic environment is characterized as women. Such is the grounds *The Onion* operates from, positioning a critique of society's regard of the women, and the conditioning of women artists in the contemporary art world. In this aspect, *The Onion* is very close to the hilarious video performance of Martha Rosler, *The Semiotics of the Kitchen*. Rosler videotaped herself in her kitchen wearing an apron and standing behind the counter, which had various household items and cutlery, pots etc. she starts to show each cooking item, most of which are sharp and dangerous if used for a purpose other than cooking. This is what Rosler does exactly: one by one she shows them to the camera, saying their name in a very bored tone and showing how they *can* be used outside the kitchen context, but at the end placing them inside a pot, almost like making a soup out of these violent materials, so when cooked they can no longer posit a threat. And the stress of domestic violence is portrayed in a very ironic way, identifying kitchen utensils as men.

Both Abramovic's and Rosler's work also has similarities with the work of another woman artist, Jenny Holzer, who works with the medium of digital text, placed in eye-catching locations. Her subjects also deal with the stress at a more textual level, almost disinviting the audience, keeping them at a safe distance. However ironically, Jenny Holzer's present work became far from convincing when she started to get commissions from fashion stores like Helmut Lang, who showed the works inside their highly stylized stores, in the very center of 'consuming cities', almost shrines of consumerism. All of these artists work on the gender-specific stress and choose performance as their medium. Even Holzer's work has a performative narration technique

captures its audience for a longer viewing time, than let us say a painting or a sculpture because one has to continue watching the displays in order to completely perceive her fragmentary arguments.

Finnish Eisa Liisa Ahtila is another woman artist who often deals with the stress of women in society as well as in domestic environments. In *Consultation Service* (2002), a scripted filmic work with actors, she elaborates the problematic relationship between two young adults and by the help of two adjacent delayed projections, she portrays a psychiatrist's session in which the young parents discuss their relationship with each other.¹⁰¹ At one point the psychiatrist asks them to shout out their problems, their stress which has been caused by the lingering problems in their relationship. The camera follows them while they stand up and face each other shouting out simultaneously in a crescendo ending in tears. Meanwhile the psychiatrist has called for the other patients from the waiting room, who discreetly place themselves in the room witnessing the shouting therapy. While some of them get even more stressed imagining what she/he might face when he/she enters this room, others feel relieved to see some techniques can work out for the temporary treatment of stress, or to let out the 'stream of stress' as the psychiatrist mentioned in her opening lines of the scene. In the final scene of the work, the couple is seen walking on the thin ice of a frozen lake, talking about the happier moments of their life and relationship but not forgetting the current turmoil, which they discuss might need to be resolved with a divorce. In the meanwhile, they also discuss –fragmentally, the possibilities of the ice breaking, taking them inside, the cold water disabling their movements, and finally drowning. Suddenly the ice breaks and we see the

¹⁰¹ Figures 26-28

characters fall into the large whole, drowning instantly. The final image is a long take of bodies floating under the thin crust of ice.

As in most of Ahtila's works, the viewer of *Consultation Service* is also put in a stressful situation, while trying to watch the delayed and overlapped projections especially during scenes when the characters get into intense conditions. A similar technique is used in *Hysteria* (2000) of Scottish artist Douglas Gordon, in which we see a historical footage of two psychiatrists' session with an hysterical woman. Suddenly the woman gets into a violent trance, while the two doctors try to capture her. One giant screen shows this sequence in normal speed while an adjacent screen with the same footage goes into a slow motion, delaying the flow on this side. Thus, the viewer is allowed to see the same violent scene in intense slow motion, juxtaposing with the other screen operating in normal speed. Later on the first screen ends its loop and resumes with the calmer conversation between the patient and the doctors, while the second screen continues to show the strenuous struggling of the poor patient and the efforts of the doctors. The audience is then put in a stressful condition. With the help of documentary footage that stresses the authenticity of the incident and the use of overlapping delayed projection in a darkened room, the audience is engulfed in a stress-making environment

The outcome of excessive stress in human body can be various diseases. Stress related diseases like cancer and depression are evident in the works of filmmaker Cronenberg and artist Hannah Wilke. While Roman Opalka (*OPALKA 1965/ 1-00*, 1965-until he dies) worked on the concept of ageing, posing stress on the viewer, by allowing them to see

how aging changes man, more specifically himself.¹⁰² Wilke portrayed herself while she was having treatment for cancer. In 1987 she was diagnosed lymphoma. Until her death in 1993, she documented her struggle with the disease in a final series, *Intra-Venus*, which consists of large-scale color photographs, watercolor self-portraits, and sculptural objects made from Wilke's hair. In the diptych *June 15, 1992/January 30, 1992: #1* from *Intra-Venus* Wilke is seen posing nude for the camera, even though her once thin, youthful body is bloated and ravaged from cancer treatments and medicines.¹⁰³ The trauma she has been going through because of the treatment is evident in her posture and looks, and this in turn employs a kind of stress on the viewer as well. For such a common disease like cancer, attributed to environmental effects and especially stressful lifestyle, the viewer already has ideas in their head before seeing the above mentioned work of Wilke. Thus, when they are looking at these larger than life portraits they may witness the before and after of the disease, and personalize themselves in the experiences of Wilke.

5.5. REPRESENTATIONS OF SOCIAL STRESS IN TURKEY

5.5.1. KUTLUG ATAMAN: *WOMEN WHO WEAR WIGS*

Finally, two recent digital video works attract our attention in terms of their portrayal of stress as well as the use of the medium, also for the fact that their subjects are from Turkey.

¹⁰² Figure 29

¹⁰³ Figure 30

Film and video artist Kutlug Ataman's work in general is poised on the boundary between documentary and fiction. It uses storytelling to explore the fragility of personal identity; his subjects are usually individuals who have become dislocated from conventional social categories and feel compelled to re-invent themselves, therefore embody a great deal of stress originating from their struggles. In *Semiha B. Unplugged* (1996) the subject is an opera singer/artist in her 90's who has struggled for her career and her love affairs not only with politically troubled figures such as Nazim Hikmet but also her private love affair with art, which faced resistance in her contemporary society. His more recent, *Never My Soul* (2000) portrayed the struggle of a transvestite whose role figure has been Türkan Soray, and who had to be self-exiled to Switzerland because of her sexual identity. His *Women Who Wear Wigs* (1999), a video installation with four projections that run side by side simultaneously featuring women who discuss when, where, why, and how they wear wigs, operates at the limits of documentary, fiction, and video art.¹⁰⁴ One of the subjects, has been accused of being a political terrorist during the 70's and has been living in disguise ever since. She is a supporter of a left wing political group and in the tense political atmosphere of the 70's when many young people were classified either as leftist or rightist and hunted down by the security forces. She was later pinned and fictionalized by the "junta" as a terrorist air stewardess, who goes by the name of Hostes Leyla. Having to live with this accusation she has to live in the disguise of a bright blond wig, which saves her from imprisonment for nearly 20 years, to the point when the witch-hunting is over and dealt with in social consciousness.

¹⁰⁴ Figures 31-32

The second woman is a glamorous journalist Nevval Sevindi, who is suffering temporary hair loss due to the chemotherapy treatment of her breast cancer and has to wear wigs. She talks about how she is coping with the disease as well her ‘new beauty’ – thankfully without the loss of her breast, but with the deterioration of her hair, which she thinks alongside with breasts is a woman’s most crucial beauty element. Contrary to Hostes Leyla whose face is intentionally avoided to enter the frame in the first projection, the artist employs a full frontal shot for Nevval, to complement her open fight with cancer and reflect concerns of beauty not only in her character but in general.

The third is an observant Muslim girl who covers her hair with a wig in place of the turban she is forbidden to wear as a student at the university. Fearing exaltation from her university she asked the artist only to use her voice but no image, thus all we see is a black frame, and her story is transferred by her voice. Caught in the dilemma of choosing between her religious belief and the education she deserved as a result of a successful ÖYS degree, she chooses to wear a wig on top of her own hair. By doing so she can both be admitted to the secular environment of the university and also protect her own religious belief by covering her hair by another layer of hair that does not belong to her – in fact she even prefers a synthetic hair rather than a live wig.

The final character is a transsexual who has to wear wigs in order to sustain her living as a prostitute, because whenever she is interrogated, the police shave her head, in order to scorn her and discourage prostitution. Demet simply says “These morons don’t know that there is a thing called wig, what happens if you cut my hair everyday, I go buy a new one

everyday” and buys a different wig every time she gets out of interrogation.¹⁰⁵ However, her story is not as fun as it sounds. She has been subject to numerous tortures by the police not only because of her sexual identity and profession but also because of her political beliefs. Her experiences made her join ÖDP, a left wing party and she is actively working in the local organization of this party.¹⁰⁶

In *Women Who Wear Wigs*, the hand-held camera helps to naturalize the viewer's gaze. It wanders, scans, and drifts around the spaces the women occupy, flirting with the image, as if it, and therefore the viewer, is a direct witness to the captivating stories that the women tell. In addition, it adopts a point of view sensitive to each woman's story; for example, it respects the anonymity of Woman No. 3 -the devout Muslim student, by showing only a black screen. The common concern of all four subjects is their struggle in the Turkish society, and the ambient stress they are suffering either due to the socio-political turmoil or the necessity of maintaining the female beauty, whether it is as glamorous as in the life of Nevval Sevindi, or in the extreme case of the Muslim student who defines beauty as her agreement with God and Islam. Using the intimate qualities of DV as seen above in Sala's work, Ataman is also able to capture the expression of this stress and by posing questions from time to time he encourages them further to recount the most crucial and traumatic experiences in relation with the wigs. However, the wig here is just a signifier of a kind of transcendence, a tool to use while facing a hardship, as in the case of cancer, or abuse or even imprisonment.

¹⁰⁵ Ataman, K. *Peruk Takan Kadınlar* Istanbul: Metis, 2001 p. 99

¹⁰⁶ *Özgürlük ve Demokrasi Partisi* (*Freedom and Democracy Party*) is also one of the few political parties who supports gay and lesbian rights, and has active representation in these communities, in urban areas.

One can argue that *Women Who Wear Wigs* does not directly deal with the technological side of socio-technological changes. In fact this is exactly what we are trying to look for in this survey. We are looking for the representation of the ambient stress caused by the integration of both the social and technological stimuli in modern society, rather than the temporary and time-dependent stress that can be valid today but no longer applicable tomorrow. As we have explained above such conditions are the subject of computer based new media arts who can afford – or in fact choose to do so- to ignore greater social concerns and like the ostrich burying his head into the sand, see only the core of technology, abandoning the side-effects of technology in the periphery of ordinary social life. But works like *Women Who Wear Wigs* operate on a wider perspective, like the works of McCarthy as it filters many different elements and attributes of modern society. It juxtaposes both social (the case of the Muslim student) and the technological (the medical case and treatment of Nevval).

5.5.2. STRESS ON THE ISLAMIC PERSONA IN KÖKEN ERGUN'S *UNTITLED*

A similar reflection of the concerns of general society is one of my recent video pieces, *Untitled* (2004).¹⁰⁷ Although, it came out of the cumulative discussions of the turban issue in Turkish society, it was inspired by a certain incident in 2003. Amidst growing tension between Çankaya and the newly elected parliament with the majority of the Islamic democrat party AKP, president Ahmet Necdet Sezer was holding the annual Republic Day Ball at the presidential palace, which usually brings together all members of

¹⁰⁷ Figure 33

parliament as well as other important state and military officials.¹⁰⁸ Prior to the reception it was announced to the media that the invitations for the night would be for only one person, omitting the chance of me MP's wives attending the evening, who would most naturally turn up wearing turbans. I was enraged by this conservative secularism and wanted to embody the stress on the Islamic body. In this single channel video of seven minutes, I am seen putting on various different turbans, all of which represent a different technique and significance in terms of belonging to a certain community, and gradually burst in tears.

Like the domestic works of Abramovic, *Untitled* at first glance also seems to portray a very personal problem, with the camera concentrated on the face of the subject, who repeats certain movements looking not right into the camera but to a side, so making the moment more interior and less directional. However, the signifier in the work triggers a broad (even enormous) problem in secular societies. It uses the technique of working on/from a widely known subject and recognized image. Indeed, the turban problem is by now known to many viewers of art, globally, as a result of the heated discussions over women wearing headscarves in state controlled spaces in secular countries, like France, Turkey and recently the United States, where after 9/11 "turbanphobia" has been introduced to the Islam fearing American public. In Islamic countries turban has been put in the forefront of radical Islamic movements as the symbol of this insecular ideology. Indeed, the extremists often referred to turban as the "flag" of radical Islam. The blue background used in *Untitled* refers to this general quality of the turban issue, that it can

¹⁰⁸ *Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi (Justice and Development Party)* founded by Tayyip Erdogan, ex-mayor of Istanbul and a member of the Refah Party, which had been closed down by the High Court. The party was selected as the governing party in the first election they have participated.

be applicable to various different condition and communities.¹⁰⁹ It also reminds the viewer of the typical blue/green backgrounds used in keying images in film and/or photography, and indicates that this action might be copied and pasted to any environment, applicable to any time, making the subject more general, expressing also on the immediacy of the problem. Therefore, *Untitled* works from a familiar image, but also deconstructs its meaning by using a male model to wear the headscarf. While this can bring to mind the question of cross-dressing or queer issues, the work is conceived not to be directional in any way, leaving the viewer in confusion. Hence, reactions towards the work in different cultures it had been shown had been remarkably different, and undecided. This serves the purpose of the work, for it demonstrates the complexity of the turban conflict. It is indeed a topic that has not been resolved for many decades in the countries mentioned above, and does not seem to in the near future. So far no secular country has found a significant solution to accommodate turban fully in their society. While this being the case it is natural for an artist working from one of these locations to feel the stress of the Islamic persona in relation to his society. Furthermore, it should not be surprising to see him embody this stress on his own body even though his male body is not meant to be subject to such limitations of dressing. In fact, this intensifies the meaning of *Untitled*: male dominance in every religion but most particularly in Islam is here questioned by replacing the female with the male while applying the most female of religious symbols. When the artist is first seen trying different kinds of headscarves, he vaguely enjoys his own beauty with the addition of this elegant accessory. But later when he is confronted with the consequences of wearing turban in secular countries he also

¹⁰⁹ In fact, when it was first conceived *Untitled* would have daily life images from one of these countries placed instead of the blue background. But during the course of post production I have decided to keep it generic and use the blue background as it was.

grasps the stress imposed on their body, and identifies himself with the female Islamic persona. Here the artist seems to go through the stress of the students who have been expelled from school (as in the case of Ataman's subject above), or of an elder lady who might have lost a job because of her headscarf, or those covered women who are used as the flags of Islamic movements, either radical or liberal. Finally, when he starts to cry we see a 'fine tuning' against the popular macho culture of Turkey: "Men don't cry".

In all the examples given above we have seen the vast possibilities of what we call "elder new media arts" in representing social concerns. These mediums have been proved to be more sensitive also to socio-technological stressors, and in general to the new world picture which we preferred to name as a landscape with stress. Moreover both technically and in terms of accessibility to the general public, the elder new media arts proved to be more effective in transporting private concerns of the artists to a wider audience, who in turn is invited to share their feelings, or experiences. However, the production of works that deal with social turmoil, or stress have been few in computer based new media arts which we have seen preferring an escape from reality and transcendence into the digital fantasy world, the fourth dimension.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1. CAPACITY MISUSED: IMMATURITY OF VIRTUALITY AND THE PROBLEM OF THE VIRTUAL BODY

Throughout this dissertation we tried to demonstrate the inability of new media arts in representing a social phenomenon like stress. This however should not be understood as a kind of conservatism, or valuing old media against the new. Neither, should it be seen as a preference for the elder media arts like video and performance since they are supported by the art market and can more easily find exhibition possibilities. On the contrary, we have also opposed to the art market, while demonstrating how it created stress on the body of the artist. None of these presuppositions have been effective in our survey. Instead we have based our argument on research and observations that covered various international exhibitions and publications omitting any possibility of prejudice. In the end, our concern was to objectively discuss which medium is more attached and integrated into social problems.

6.1.1. PERSONALITY OF THE NEW MEDIA ARTIST

If our primary subject is art, then the personality of the artist must be the defining quality of any artistic representation. Therefore, while giving examples of how art is coping with the social phenomenon we have tried to choose those artists who have been active ‘social players’, interacting with their society, as well as with global concerns. Only through lived experience and perception they had been able to elaborate the topics mentioned

above. Finally and most crucially they have – or they choose to have physical bodies, not virtual bodies that exist in a fourth dimension.

Now, if we look at the artists who produce computer based new media arts, what we see is much less social interaction, a deliberate ignorance of society's problems and a yearning for existence in the fourth dimension. Back in the third chapter I have deliberately referred to computer based new media artists as “nerds”. Although it may seem like a personal critique by another artist who uses other media for expression, it does reflect a popular perception of the ‘genius new media artist’.

6.1.2. ISOLATION IN NEW MEDIA ARTS

The nerdish character of the computer based new media artist can be explained in relation to the ‘market’ of new media arts, in other words its community. As a result of the needs of the medium and its detachment from daily life the new media artists are often functioning from two main locations: either their home, or the isolated institutions which we will examine below.

The needs of the medium are obvious and known to even someone who is not very well informed about new media arts: basic ingredients for a new media art work are a hardware (computer), software, and the network. All they need in order to produce let us say a net art project is present in their computer or on the net as digital files. No further physical tools are necessary. There is even no need to leave the desk or the couch in order to obtain some information about some topic, let alone leaving home for observations.

Google is right in front of them and with one mouse click they can also reach a vast e-library of fragmented information. And because net art prefers to be exhibited over the net, one does not have to leave the very room he/she functions in order to let the final product out to the 'outside world'. Thanks to the abilities of the network, products of new media art can be seen at great accessibility over the net, therefore the audience for these works do not necessarily need to travel outside their home either. We have already discussed the inappropriateness of trying to place computer based new media art works in the conventional gallery/museum environment.

The second type of location for the existence of new media art practice are the isolated communities/institutions which exist outside the net, in the physical space. These are small communities where new media artists can exchange ideas and produce together, interacting physically. In other words these are their galleries and museums. But let us face it: no new media art center in the world is located inside a big, striving city. *Ars Electronica* in "Deep Austria": Linz, *MIT* in Massachusetts, *V2* outside Rotterdam, *ZKM* in the German desert town of Karlsruhe. All these small isolated towns are also known to be relatively wealthy and liberal compared to the other parts of the countries they are located in, as in Massachusetts which is known to be the castle of liberal thinking in the currently extremely conservative United States. Karlsruhe on the other hand is one of the richest small towns in south Germany, which has a surprisingly strong support for the Green Party. In short these are locations where life's pace is slower and changes are not fast. And let us examine their architectural position inside the towns they are located in: all of these centers have impressive post-modern buildings, commissioned to prominent

“star-architects”, with tantalizing designs, but carefully distancing themselves a bit away from the ‘lived’ public spaces, so in relation to the town they are in, they stand like a space ship which just landed on a farm.

It is true that only liberal and wealthy communities can approve their local government to support such ‘outcast’ institutions, which has almost no income for their town— like the income from visitors in the case of conventional museums. But the wealthy and stable qualities of these habitats also result in less social strife and consequently less stressful conditions in daily life. The amount of stress in these isolated communities is less critical than the bigger cities of the western world or those at the periphery of this type of high civilizations – say Istanbul or Mexico City. So naturally the subjects that art might be looking into in the former regions are relatively happier and content. However, the quality of stress we are looking at is more visible in the latter communities. If we were to trace the locations of for instance the artists we have been dealing with above, we will see that all are functioning from more strenuous environments, such as Mona Hatoum of Palestine, Marina Abramovic of Serbia, Johan Grimont of Venezuela, Kutlug Ataman of Turkey and even Paul McCarthy who works from an almost ‘plastic’ world of the highly capitalist American West Coast. They all take their inspiration from the communities they are placed in, either voluntarily or involuntarily. Their body is an integral part of the social and physical civilization, and their corporeal existence in relation to the collective body of society is the crucial element in their life/work.

The most crucial quality of computer based new media arts and their creators is ‘the body’ as well. This form of art is an obvious promoter of the fourth dimension in corporeality: the virtual body. This is one of the main ambitions of net art, or interactive art. In our earthly civilization the virtual body is in ‘inexistence’, it does not define itself in our shared world, it is a breakthrough from this world, a means of escaping the stress of this civilization by transcending to the digital environment. Much like how the Futurists wished to become machines, or how the Surrealists transcended into the dream world. But even the Futurists have elaborated a certain kind of critique of society, while presenting the alternative of an almost impossible transcendence. But as we have seen above artists who prefer virtuality are isolated from the rest of the world, stuck in their rooms or well protected institutions and often do not deal with what is not working in this physical world, but rather choose to discover what can work in the virtual world.

6. 2. CYBER CULTURE : TRANSCENDENCE INTO THE FANTASY WORLD

6. 2.1. NEW MEDIA ART AS AN UNDERGROUND MOVEMENT

I have witnessed this mode of escape in my visits to the ZKM and Ars Electronica Festivals as part of the research for this survey. What one sees can indeed be very exciting at first glance: hundreds of new media art practitioners meeting at a location almost like in the music festivals *Glastonbury* or *Rock n’ Coke*. They come with their laptops and other gadgets, suit themselves in the lobby of these institutions, mingle with other such artists and exchange information, and enthusiasm. This is underground coming

to the surface for a brief moment. True, computer based new media arts has all the potentials of being a strong underground movement, in fact it already is. But it is probably because of this underground quality that it cannot or chooses not to elaborate what is wrong on the surface; in other words, in the culture where we exist.

One is encouraged to recall the story of the bird who flew over the world picture in our introduction, and who was able to perceive the structure and system of what lives on the surface. Conversely, the underground is *not* a place to have a clear and objective view of the surface. It is indeed a different dimension but from the underground it is more difficult, almost impossible to perceive clearly what goes on in the surface world. Preventing from seeing the reality of the surface is the actual reason behind the creation of underground movements. But then how can one expect a true representation of social issues by the citizens of this underground? However, this is clearly not their concern at all. They have escaped from reality to form a virtual reality, a new world picture. One would recall the closing lines of Neo in the film *The Matrix*:

“I am going to show you a world without limits or borders, a world where everything is possible. Where we go from there is a choice I leave to you.”¹¹⁰

Those who try to transcend into this new interactive world picture are not interested in reality in which we are constantly struggling. The artistic representation of this new world picture is equally disinterested in the ‘socio-physical’ world. Likewise, stress,

¹¹⁰ *The Matrix*, Directed by Andy Wachowski, Larry Wachowski; written by Andy Wachowski, Larry Wachowski USA: Warner Home Video, 1999

which we have defined as a consequence of the social/cultural life of the surface world cannot be truly represented by computer based new media arts.

6.2.2. THE ABSENCE OF STRESS FOR THE VIRTUAL BODY

Can one then speak of stress in the virtual world? Artists using performance and video still elaborate on the physical body connected to it. For them stress is dominantly a phenomenon affecting this physical body and the soul attached to it. What type of stress is then applicable for the virtual body?

From the very start of this dissertation we have pointed out that stress is the product of civilization and it is a social phenomenon. The stress we are particularly interested in has taken shape not in the very start of civilization but when it reached maturity. How then are we expected to find such stress in this virtual civilization that has only come to life a few decades ago? The answer is negative, while it is ironically positive: no, there is yet no stress applicable to the virtual body. The virtual body is yet stress-free, because stress cannot exist where fantasy prevails over reality. Only when cyber culture reaches maturity, and especially when it effects the lives of more citizens we can talk of stress in the 'developed cyber culture'. At this present moment cyber culture is still in the making, it is surrounded by enthusiasm, and develops in a positive environment. In cyber culture there is no consumerism, there is no capitalism, there is no fascism, it is promoted and hoped to bring forth true democracy. What is lacking is disputable, as well as to see what is not working. But as we have seen stress occurs after either over-arousal or under-arousal, in other words there must either be something missing, or something in

excess. In short, there has to be a problem. We see that in the fantasy world of cyber culture there are more promises than problems, and because of the lack of problems the need to create responses is few, if only temporary. Unlike consumer culture which lives in a perpetual year zero of newness cyber culture is living its first year of newness. Despite much that has been written or spoken of the virtual body has not yet become a reality for the majority, but it remains in the fantasies of a happy minority who dream of the coming of world as prophesized in *The Matrix*. We must perhaps wait for the time when it needs to go into a loop, or see the first negative consequences of its process. Before this it will be difficult to speak of stress or any negative consequence in the virtual world. And it will equally be hard to speak of true representation of stress on the contemporary body by computer based new media arts. Because the body that relates to the computer based new media arts is not the contemporary body. It is another body: the virtual body.

6.3. A POSSIBLE WAY OUT

However, from its very initiation computer based new media arts had all the possibilities of representing what goes wrong in our technologically enhanced modern world. It could and still can use the very tools that technology uses, the very tools that create the socio-technological kind of stress on our physical body. Finally, because it works on speed, it also has the ability to react very quickly to any stressful condition. However, already from those very early stages it chose to discover new possibilities outside our “old world”. This is why it is difficult for new media arts to come back to what it is escaping from and confront with the reality it is opposing to.

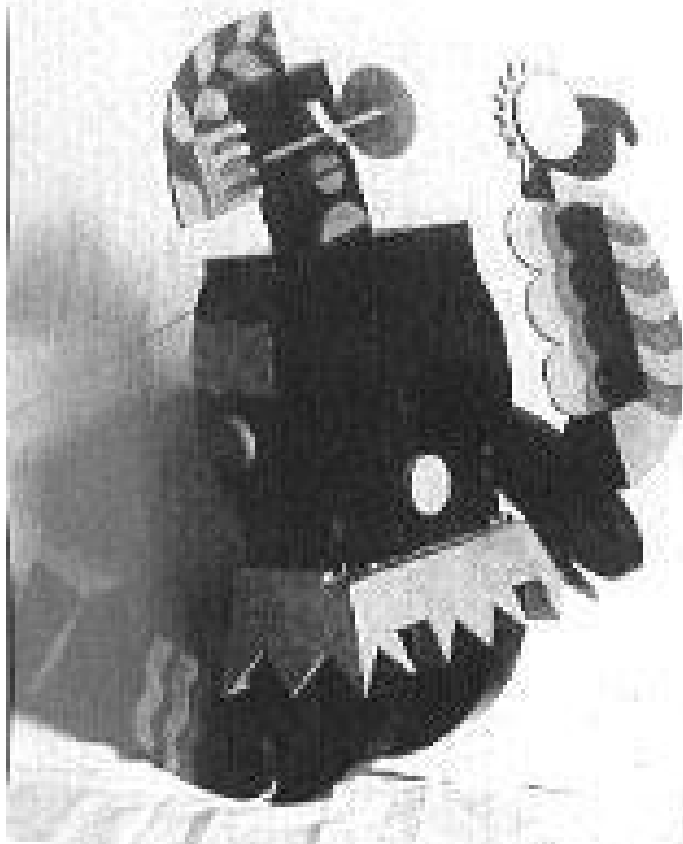
Perhaps the answer to our question lies in the way technology can be used: technology as a tool or as a purpose. In many of the examples we have given above from artists working with video or performance they have used digital technology as a supporting tool. We have seen how digital video can capture instants of stress, and portray stress-stricken individuals in most intimate environments. We have witnessed how artists use digital tools in their performance work, can interact easier with the audience.

Likewise, the world we live in is technologically enhanced but still social, it uses digital technology as a tool for development and well being, but it does not let cyber culture prevail over the social and physical culture. We cannot yet expect the dominance of digital solutions over social ones. Therefore, a social phenomenon like stress is best examined by artists who are socially aware and use those mediums, which can position a critical approach to stress. Recently these mediums have been video and performance supported by the digital tools. Computer based new media arts on the other hand are promoting a culture where technology is the *purpose*, using mediums that are only generated by computers to be presented/exhibited in computers. Furthermore, they support a body, which is not our contemporary body but their proposition of the future body. Only when these media open up more to the social concerns of our daily life, can they represent the element of stress on the contemporary body. There is still a chance for new media arts to use their capacity in full, but this all depends on the personal decision of the artists who practice these media.

APPENDIX

die grande immagine
del testo nel resto e

Radio Pirella Göttsche - Roma - 1968.



Umberto Balthus

Figure 1: Balla, Poster for *Machina Tipographica*,



Figure 2: Marinetti, Poster for *Zang Tumb Tumb*



Figure 3: Stelarc, *Third Hand*



Figure 4: Bul, *Cyborg*



Figure 5: Schneemann, *Meat Joy*



Figure 6: Burden, *Shoot*



Figure 7: Ono, *Cut Piece*



Figure 8: Rosler, *Semiotics of the Kitchen*



Figure 9: Barney, *Cremaster 4*



Figure 10: Barney, *Cremaster 5*

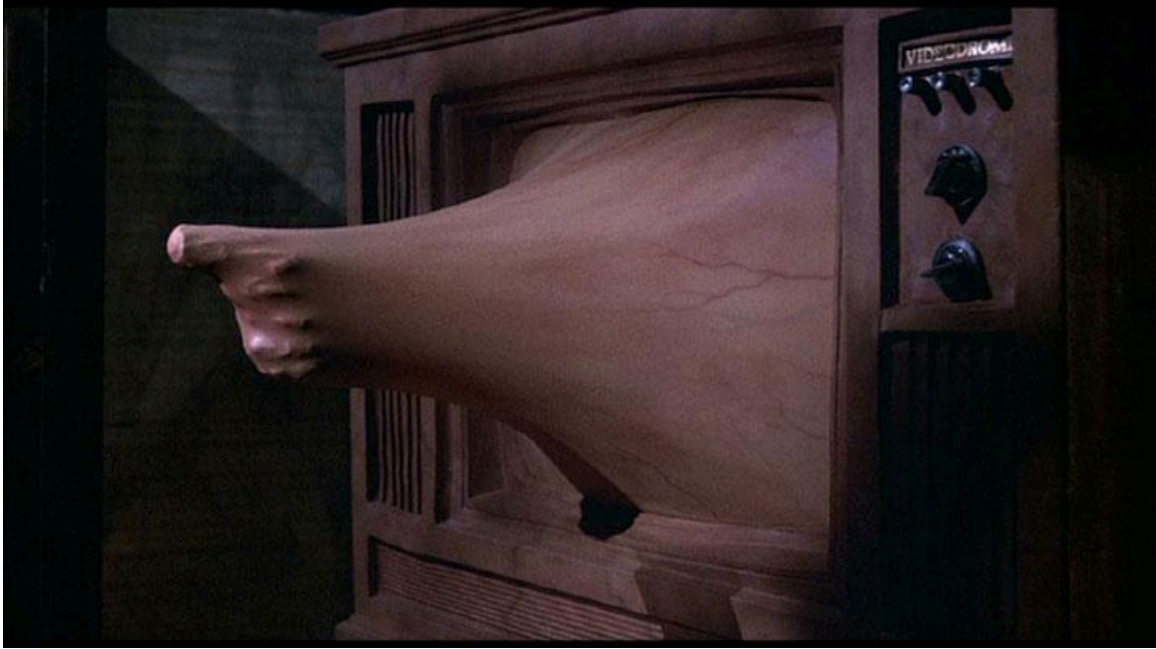


Figure 11: Cronenberg, *Videodrome*



Figure 12: Gilbert and George, *Singing Sculpture*



Figure 13: Abramovic, *Art is Beautiful Artist Must be Beautiful*



Figure 14: Hanson, *Supermarket Lady*



Figure 15: Koons, *Michael Jackson & Bubble*



Figure 16: Laurette, *Money Back Life!*

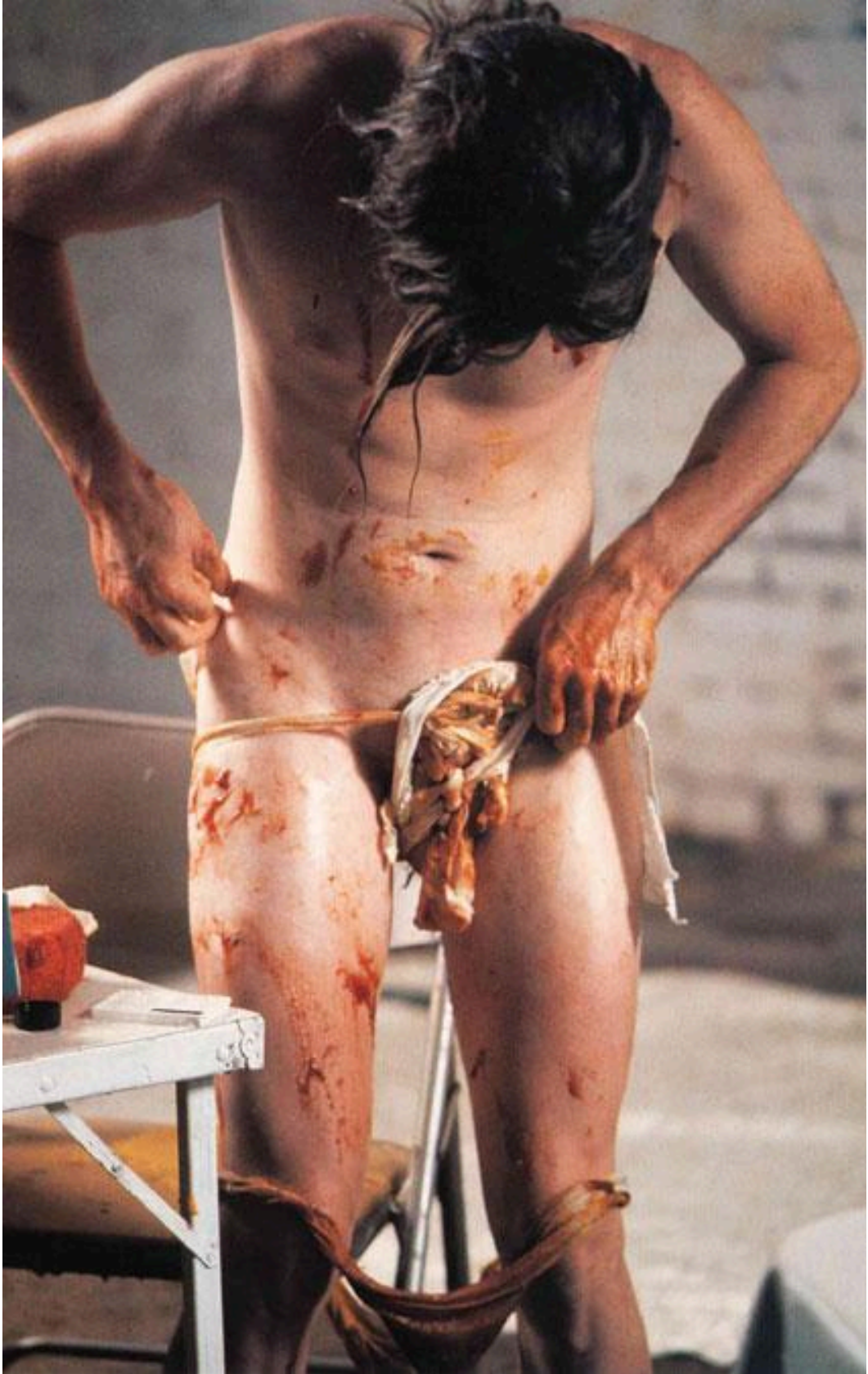


Figure 17: McCarthy, *Hot Dog*



Figure 18: McCarthy, *Hot Dog*



Figure 19: McCarthy, *Bossy Burger*



Figure 20: Hatoum, *Over My Dead Body*



Figure 21: Grimponprez, *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*



Figure 22: Grimponprez, *Dial H-I-S-T-O-R-Y*



Figure 23: Tegala, *Anabiosis*

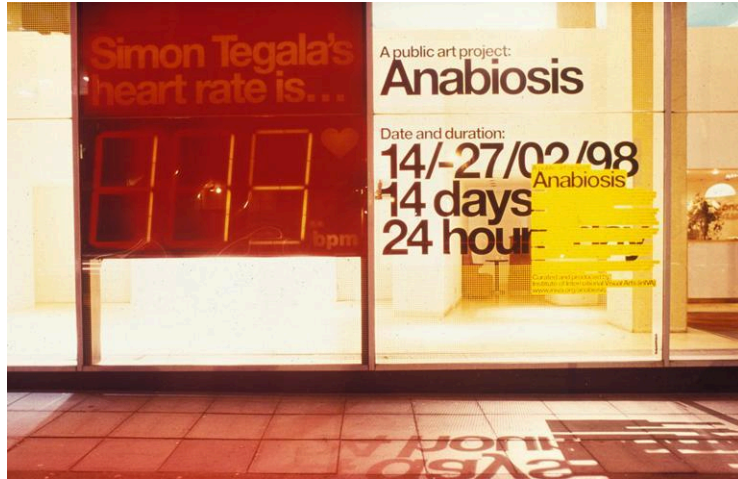


Figure 24: Tegara, *Anabiosis*



Figure 25: Abramovic, *Onion*



Figure 26: Ahtila,, *Consultation Service*



Figure 27: Ahtila, *Consultation Service*



Figure 28: Ahtila, *Consultation Service*

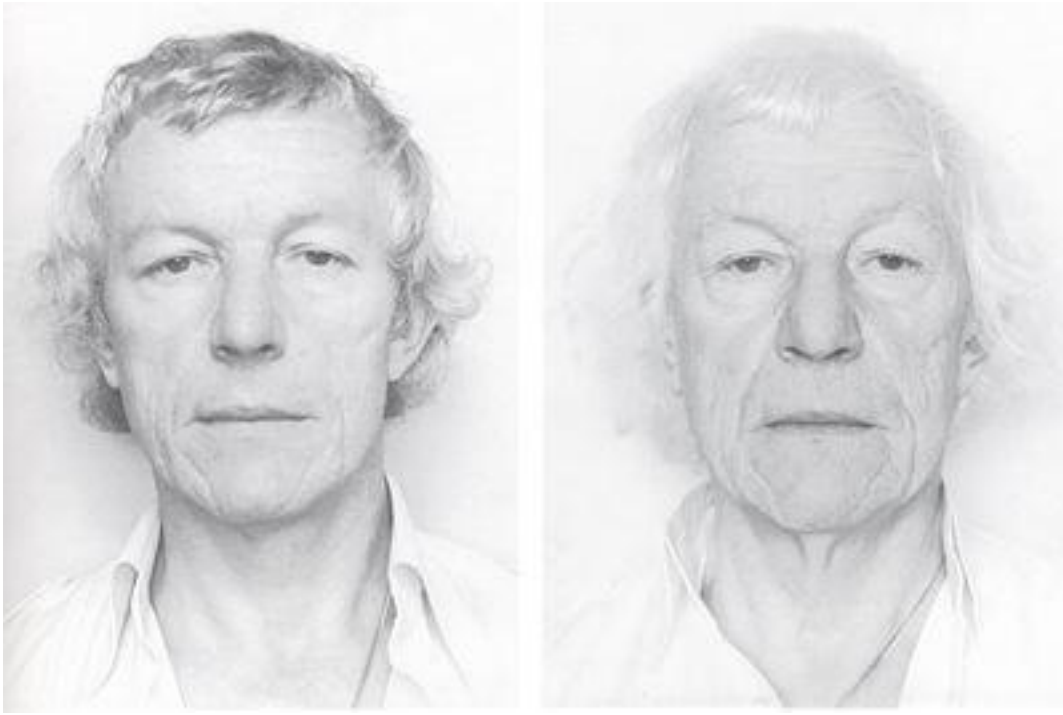


Figure 29: Opalka, *OPALKA 1965/1-00*



Figure 30: Wilke, *June 15, 1992/January 30, 1992: #1*



Figure 31: Ataman, *Women Who Wear Wigs*



Figure 32: Ataman, *Women Who Wear Wigs*



Figure 33: Ergun, *Untitled*

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