

LOS

Cybrids

By Gabe Ryan



Photo courtesy of Los Cybrids

The Project

Los Cybrids are a self-proclaimed "art activist" group that was formed in mid 1999 by Rene Garcia, Prada Pilar, and John Leanos. To Los Cybrids, art activism is a crossbreeding of performance art, visual art, protest, and research to create a catalyst for change (or at least awareness). They have performed at the Internet 2010 Panel Discussion at El Rio on Mission Street, and in front of the Moscone Center during the National Association of Broadcasters Convention. All of the work that Los Cybrids immerse themselves in is based on looking at the ways in which electronic technology is affecting the individual and society. A few of the questions that they are asking

themselves and others are; how is the human body going to be changed by electronic technology? How is electronic technology being used as a surveillance device? How are new technologies affecting the community with regards to race and economics? How is the notion of a "digital divide" becoming an industry of it's own?

After speaking with the three members of Los Cybrids for a while, one gets the sense that they are as much a think tank, as they are an art collective. Their purpose seems to be to raise important questions to the public awareness rather than to present any definitive solutions, and, just as the present onslaught of technology is based on more than just a single medium, Los Cybrids' approach to the issues they choose is multi-dimensional as well.

The People

John Leanon and Prada Pilar met four years ago at the Galeria de la Raza in the Mission District of San Francisco. They were both Latino artists that had an interest in technology and soon became friends.

Prada is from New York City and is an art educator both for high school classes and after school programs. John is from Pamona, California and also teaches art in high school and middle school. In 1999, Prada met Rene Garcia at San Francisco State University where Rene studying CIA (conceptual information arts) which is a field of study based on the merging of science and art. Rene also works for a non-profit organization called Teaching Intermediate Literacy Tools which focuses on teaching children of minorities to recognize the portrayals of their race and generation in the mainstream media and combat those stereotypes by producing their own videos. Soon after Prada and Rene met, Los Cybrids were formed.

The Myth

So, how is our global community changing through this technological revolution? Prada Pilar uses as an example the movie "The Gods Must be Crazy," in which a Coke bottle, thrown carelessly from the cockpit of an airplane descends into a primitive African community. The empty bottle, being alien and mysterious, is hailed as a gift from the gods and a valuable tool. Before long, everybody in the community feels as though they need the bottle resulting in chaos and fighting. The community, in its wisdom, decides that the best thing to do with the bottle is to throw it over the edge of the world.

To Prada, the bottle represents electronic technology. "It's become a big myth that this technology is needed everywhere in a world where only 19% of the population has telephone service," she says. "So why is there so much importance being placed on the 'digital divide,' that notion that one portion of the world will understand this emerging technology while the rest of the

world will be in the dark? Why is the United States using millions of dollars to insure that computers are introduced into poor communities? Why is the U.N. spending billions for the same purpose?"

Los Cybrids see a few possible explanations. First, the World Wide Web is one of the best surveillance devices ever conceived. Many of the transactions that take place via e mail and e commerce are easily readable to an interested third party. In most cases, that third party is a corporation that wants to know your buying habits and lifestyle.

As Noam Chomsky says, "Corporations are private tyrannys," and Los Cybrids see the globalization of electronic technology as a newer and more sterile version of old world colonization.

By insuring that more of the globe is involved and "on-line," both government and corporation alike can keep better track of their stake in the world. So, are George Orwell's "big brother" predictions accurate?

No says Pilar. What makes this different is that we, as a world population, have voluntarily joined in this surveillance — and instead of being forced by an authoritarian government, we have been persuaded by special interest groups. Also, by involving lower classes and minorities in the world of electronic technology, the more affluent in the industry are assuring themselves a good sized labor pool for the lower echelon positions such as data entry.

How is the human body being changed by technology? Rene Garcia says it's too early to tell for sure although devices such as cell phones and PDA's which serve as an extension of our body should be monitored closely.

A new branch of technology known as Nanotechnology conjures up all sorts of either apocalyptic or utopian visions depending on how you look at it. Nanotechnology is the study and development of microscopic electric devices, which can actually self-replicate and be used in large numbers to work as a team and form solutions.

For example, someday we may be able to ingest

a colony of these tiny devices in order to repair internal bleeding, or fix our immune system. Will we slowly be turned into cyborgs? As daily life begins to resemble science fiction more and more, we shall see.

What Now?

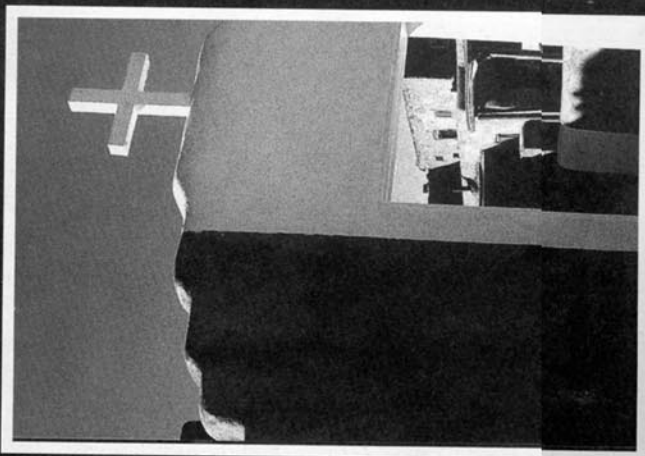
Los Cybrids don't know for sure when they will be performing again, although they will be showing a collection of their digital murals at the Galeria de la Raza on 24th and Bryant in San Francisco from thru July 2001.

Los Cybrids will continue to look deeply at the question of technology and what effect it is having on society. They are striving to find new and enlightening ways to promote awareness to this enormous sea of issues which is still in it's infancy.



Photo courtesy of Los Cybrids

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