

A RECORD
OF AN EXHIBITION
OF
Drawings and Paintings
entitled
<Homeland | Transmissions>
with a
COROLLARY STATEMENT
Hy-METRO-City:
The Story of the Post-Ethno Cyborgs
by
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Figure 1. <Homeland | Transmissions>, MFA Thesis Exhibition, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, April 18th—22nd, 2016. (Installation View).

i. Introduction:

This thesis and exhibition explores a narrative based upon the ethnically-ambiguous. Non-linear histories and patchwork identities inspire this story and corresponding visualizations of hybridity. Building this world is a means to investigate a setting that embodies the emotions of pride, alienation, and solidarity. The development of the transnational identity in a digital age is also questioned.

Images are collected from Google Earth of four cities from which my distant relatives have immigrated: Caraz, Peru; Saltillo, Mexico; and Hiroshima and Matsuyama, Japan. The accessibility of this software allows the possibility of transforming and juxtaposing architectural elements into complex digital collages. Mysticism in the imagery is derived from never having physically explored these locations. Using digital technology as a medium presents the paradox of access to a vast pool of information with little real-life context or experience.

The post-ethnic characters are created from self photo-documented performance. They have distorted features and are adorned in patterns and regalia drawn from their environment. Their unusual appearances are a means to nullify any assumptions based upon racial signifiers or stereotypes. These characters are portrayed in action: deciphering signs and language, building homes, or in social gatherings. Above all, they seek collectivity through their differences.



Figure 2. <Homeland | Transmissions>, MFA Thesis Exhibition, Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, New York, April 18th—22nd, 2016. (2nd Installation View).

This paper will function as a fictitious research document proposing the manner in which this world existed in a potential past-future. Based upon sociological and cultural cyber studies, conclusions are made while considering the issues surrounding the lives of multiracial and multicultural peoples today.



Figure 3. Hy-METRO-City (Panoramic View)

ii. The Story of the Post-Ethno Cyborgs

Framework

The following explores the myth of the enigma and civilization of Hy-METRO-City (Figure 3). Once a rhizomic model of cultural intersections, the city portrayed a hybrid past-future where sense and non-sense coexisted peacefully.¹ A case-study is made of the city's distinct, technologically-inclined inhabitants and of the culture they fabricated for themselves. Recognized as ethnic fusions, their needs and desires are reflected in their constructed environment. Such connections are drawn from developments in urban planning and social behaviors. A compare and contrast is made against the race of Empathetics of No Place.² Both locations of Hy-METRO-City and No Place are investigations of mixed identity and provide insight to the various facets of such identification. Finally, this paper then poses the questions of the historical significance of Hy-METRO-City. What effects can technology impose on culture and mixed identities? What constitutes a utopic or dystopic society? What is gained by the hybrid self? What is left behind? And, where do we go from here?

¹ Brown, Steven T., *Tokyo Cyberpunk: Posthumanism in Japanese Visual Culture*, (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN Publishing, 2010), 8.

² Gleisner, Jacquelin, *Saya Woolfalk's Happy People*, (Art 21 Magazine, October 20, 2015), Web.

Synopsis

When considering the narrative of Hy-METRO-City, we must evoke an empathetic perspective. At its peak, this megacity was a hub of cosmopolitanism, meaning that citizens practiced voluntary affiliations and multiple identities.³ As such, their sense of existing and belonging remained in a state of constant flux. Their origins are arguably the cultivation of rapid anthropological and technological developments. A perfect storm, so to speak. Cohesively, they leave no defining name for themselves. Nor could they find one. For documentation purposes, we shall call the inhabitants the Post-Ethno Cyborgs.

Sociologist Donna Haraway defines cyborgs as amalgamations of human and machine. This involves complex networks of both the body and surrounding environments.⁴ This term is applied due to the inhabitants' relationship with their city and information technology. Also, recognizable cultural forms are traced in these hybrids. This lends to the concept of post-ethnicity, or beyond definitive groups. In this way, these Post-Ethno Cyborgs are representations of a mixture between the past and future.

Historically, little is known of the precise events leading to the emergence of the Post-Ethno Cyborgs. However, contributions by Hispanic/Latin, Western, and Japanese heritages are visibly present in all aspects of their society. This lends evidence to the most favorable theory of a singular moment of intersection. A collision of multiple

³ Hollinger, David A., *Postethnic America*, (Harper Collins Publishers, Inc.: New York, 1995), 3.

⁴ Haraway, Donna, *Cyborg Manifesto*, (Berkeley Socialist Review Collective, Berkeley, 1985),

historical narratives. A moment of cultural “Singularity”.⁵ We will begin by exploring the possibilities of such a synthesis.

iii. Singularity via Globalization

Postmodernism and the ubiquity of the Internet has allowed previous cultural, language, and physical separations to decrease around the world. The possible interactions between nationalities and ethnicities have multiplied, allowing for relationships to transform on both mass and individual scales. Such information exchange created trends in popular culture through language, music, and art, to in turn saturate business models and product manufacturing as companies sought to channel these wants into profit. Finally, public services, legislation, and government are forced to alter agendas in order to gain favor amongst the growing population who had the leverage for these changes now required by their hybrid ideals. The revolution spun on and on. Ideas were recycled and submerged once again as minds transformed as quickly as the new information cascaded through communication outlets. Eventually, progress became marred by redundancy.

One day, this collection of humanity and cyberspace became nothing. Anthropology and technology had merged and ultimately flatlined. As forewarned by French cultural theorist Paul Virilio, “...at the end of the century, there will not be much left of the expanse of a planet that is not only polluted but also shrunk, reduced to

⁵ *Singularity*, (thefreedictionary.com) Web.

nothing, by the teletechnologies of general interactivity...and the world becomes meaningless now it is no longer so much whole as reduced.”⁶

For a time, it remained this way.

Later, in a period not formally recognized, as time no longer held fixed precedence for humankind, a group of individuals began to recognize their paradoxical situation of having everything and nothing. They began to seek a way to regain a formalized lifestyle of stability, and this collective slowly became what we know recognize as Hy-METRO-City, home of the Post-Ethno Cyborgs.

iv. Architects/Citizens/Residents

History

As with many social groups, the Post-Ethno Cyborgs (PECs) sought community. It is speculated that this is primarily due to their “diasporic” compositions.



Figure 4. Early pre-configured PECs

⁶ Coyne, Richard, *Technoromanticism: Digital Narrative, Holism, and the Romance of the Real*, (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, 1999), 41

Early records document the striking physical similarities between PECs after their “Singularity”. The overabundant mixture of racial features had ironically neutralized their individual appearances. (Figure 4.) These pre-configured PECs were extremely nondescript—however, they are more commonly recognized for their blue-purpleish ambiance, a sign of their slippage from defined individuals and non-placeable organisms. Their features are a comprised of skeletal fragments and distorted faces that struggle to hold physical form. Their white, shapeless garbs are the product of the merging cultural intersection, a possible reference to something or to nothing.

In an effort to restore individual identity, PECs turned to one resource that they had in abundance: technological networking.⁷ They began a rapid, and fruitful exchange of past information based on their known heritages by placing emotional value on each fragment they came across. Over time, the formation of a central location became a basis for a physical and digital home. Hy-METRO-City became a place to serve the purpose of identity and belonging.

⁷ McCarthy, Gaven, *Finding a Future for Digital Cultural Heritage Resources Using Contextual Information Frameworks*, *Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage, A Critical Discourse*. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, 2007), 245

Appearance

As the PECs designed their city, they also began evolving themselves. Rarely did any two PECs compose themselves the same; it is respectful to avoid duplication. (Figure 5.)



Figure 5. Configured PECs

Let a one peer alone wear an ornament of Torii gates. Be mindful if another adorns themselves with a map of Saltillo, Mexico. This is all an effort to avoid further confusion. However, these practices are an important gesture acknowledging each individual. Color and shape are important to PECs. The entire spectrum of hues is needed in order to stand out. By multiplying and repeating various forms, appearances can imitate habitat. Houses are worn as a headdress and also a symbol of a place of residence.

Garment-As-Identity

In the far past, there is similar evidence of the practice of garment-as-identity. Artist Nick Cave developed an expansive series of sculpture work titled *Soundsuits*. (Figure 6.) These full-body outfits are comprised of found fabrics, trinkets such as stuffed animals, socks, and beads, and assembled to create new patterns and to transform or conceal the body of the wearer.



Figure 6. Nick Cave, *Soundsuits*, Installation View

“By mixing cultural forms, Cave has produced new forms of exchange and possibility. They have offered a space of not only imagination but perhaps radical disassociation.”⁸

Performers were encouraged to wear the *Soundsuits* and dance in public places. While in the suits, their identities based upon age, sex, race or nationality was neutralized, leaving only the chosen external appearance. In this manner, visual

⁸ Cave, Nick, *Epitome*, (Prestel Publishing, Munich, London, New York, 2014). 35

assumptions weighed down in sociological and historical context became utterly irrelevant.

The configuration process of the PECs was rooted in these same ideals and practice. However, instead of purely in an art setting, their new appearances carried on throughout the rest of their daily lives and practices.

Because language is muddled in their origins in Hy-METRO-City, PECs have developed a solution. Useful symbols, signs, and characters become a part of a PEC's composition. One only need collect significant ideograms from the network of historical material. The PEC can chose to add these pieces to their physical assemblage. For example, “go” means “go” equals “行<” is also a green light. PECs can utilize mostly elementary signals to navigate basic social interactions.⁹ More complex communication may require multiple and creative symbol combinations.

Below is a discovered image of the garment-making process. (Figure 7.) Two PECs are depicted hard at work at the Configuration Villas, creating garment patterns. These special Conversion Engineers have the distinguished task of assisting those who are looking to change their wardrobe to better reflect a mood, emotion, or for general communication purposes. The engineers work exclusively in pairs, sorting through such pre-existing signs and symbols in order to create a pattern for a garment that is “given a voice” by that corresponding signifier.

⁹ Tsuda, Takeyuki, *Disconnected From The “DIASPORA”: Japanese Americans and the Lack of Transnational Ethnic Networks*, (Journal of Anthropological Research. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.) 103



Figure 7. Configuration Villas

Debate takes place as they both attempt to decide which symbol best satisfies the need of the client in the background. The engineers are expected to have a vast knowledge of references in order to make their choices, however, it is known that these signifiers had a tendency to alter in meaning as engineers have accidentally made incorrect selections. In a sense, it was common for meanings to be “lost in translation”.

In this particular image, the two engineers make their choice of use of the logo “On” from an available cache of symbols and signs. The material is multiplied and channeled into a wearable artifact. The garment-making process is complete as the client, who waits patiently and comfortably in a Villa, is clothed in its new attire.

Ultimately, the most important component in the PEC's physical make-up is the gold lens universal to all. This lens is a camera and screen that links the PEC to the vast technological knowledge, allowing them to engage their senses with digital information. While PECs do not generally have any shared features, the gold lens is the commonality that unifies these disparities. (Figure 8.) The lens resembles the form of a gold crown or necklace, evoking an appearance of wealth and prosperity. The reception of the gold lens by a newly-configured PEC by its peers is considered the highest honor as they have found acceptance in their individual identity. (Figure 9.) We can liken the symbolism of this reception to the Post-Ethno Cyborg's attainment of "Enlightenment", meaning that "reason (or the freedom in the digital) takes over from the obedience to authority and tradition (limitations of the analog)" and where "we can make possibilities rather than discover them or have them imposed on us."¹⁰



Figure 8. Golden Lens

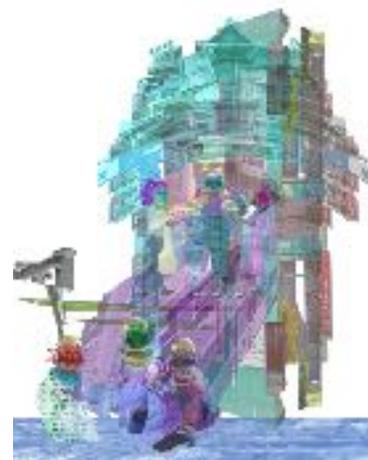


Figure 9. The Crowning Reception

¹⁰ Coyne, Richard, *Technoromanticism: Digital Narrative, Holism, and the Romance of the Real*, (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, 1999), 23

v. Hy-METRO-City



Figure 10. Hy-METRO-City Entrance

Construction

The city reflects Post-Ethno Cyborgs' limited access to ancestral knowledge. In many ways, they mimicked past architectural design. However, ultimately, planning decisions were based in emotional attachment and instinct. This is all of course while considering the inclinations of others. (Figure 10.) One PEC may chose to construct a residence of adobe and cinder brick, or styled with a Japanese Hidden Roof. If their

neighbor would like enjoy the same, the project becomes collaborative. Under assistance of a third-party mediator, transparent planning is carried out.¹¹ (Figure 11.) The image on the left depicts a scene from the architectural building process.



Figure 11. Home Building

A group of PECs are working together in order to move architectural objects into place. As traditional tools such as hammers, drills, nails, and screws were lost within the swamp of information of the “Singularity”, improvisations must be made. PECs resort to a basic knowledge of shapes to collage their buildings. Architectural fragments are fitted together like puzzle pieces, interlocking into place. Many PECs are necessary in order to adapt to structural challenges, often debating heavily on which course of construction will lead to the safest, most satisfactory outcome for all involved. The designated mediator must oversee this conflict-resolution process, be wary of sensitivity, and help the individuals consider the opposing viewpoints.¹²

Records show that the building process could take a considerable amount of time as negotiations slowed construction. However, there is very little evidence to support the existence of any abandoned architectural projects. PECs would work continuously until they completed

¹¹ Burayidi, Michael A., *Urban Planning in a Multicultural Society*, (Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT, 2000), 161

¹² Burayidi, Michael A., *Urban Planning in a Multicultural Society*, (Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT, 2000), 159, 160

the structure in question. Giving up on a collaboration violates their established ideals of empathy because it demonstrates a lack of compassion. As such, all the buildings in Hy-METRO-City, despite their jumbled appearance, are symbolically unified. The city itself represents a desire for cooperation and understanding.¹³

There are few known public policies on record. The most important states all PECs must have a place of stable residence. This is a symbolic PEC practice of solidarity. They worked to ensure common threads can be traced in their city.¹⁴

Public Spaces

Post-Ethno Cyborgs are described as exuding particularly strong social practices, and therefore public realms hold significant importance in the city. Prior psychoanalysis has concluded that relationships are treated with significant value, for on their own, a single PEC stands in entire isolation, out of context and unidentifiable. PECs gather in various communal areas in the city primarily for the purpose of public forum. Information is digitally or physically shared at these locations. Here, PECs are invited to practice their fragmented language exchange and explore traditions or customs. They may likewise resort to downloading or uploading new information at the various hubs. (Figure 12.)

¹³ Silver, David; Massanari, Adrienne, *Critical Cyber-Culture Studies*, (New York University Press, New York and London, 2006). 182

¹⁴ Burayidi, Michael A., *Urban Planning in a Multicultural Society*, (Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT, 2000), 3



Figure 12. Cultural Information Hubs

These hubs are both physically and digitally amorphous constructions, and have the ability to expand or shrink in mass. Meaning, their forms can alternate depending upon trending topics, consensus or disagreement. Communication activity is available and the level of complex themes are advised. This allows for PECs to select when and which hubs to engage with. However, all citizens are free to participate at all times. No voice is discouraged, nor is limited by any manner of hierarchy.¹⁵

In the past we can liken these public realms to Internet forums and search engines that evolve into cultural knowledge spaces. “Virtual access provides an immediacy and proximity to cultural heritage. The benefit of being ‘closer’ to cultural heritage, or making it more accessible, is the increased opportunity to relate to one’s own culture (nationalism) or other cultures (globalism).”¹⁶

¹⁵Brown, Steven T., *Tokyo Cyberpunk: Posthumanism in Japanese Visual Culture*, (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN Publishing, 2010), 8, 29, 185.

¹⁶McCarthy, Gaven, *Cultural Information Standards—Political Territory and Rich Rewards*, Theorizing Digital Cultural Heritage, A Critical Discourse. (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, MA, 2007), 223

Social Engagements

Leisurely gatherings were known to be chaotic, yet lively affairs. Much like with engagements at the information hubs, PECs use fragmented language with an emphasis on physical interfacing. This practice includes animated hand-gestures in order to help speed along a conversation.

Hosting a party is considered a great honor. A house can be re-configured specifically for such an event or certain restaurants will undergo meticulous color changes in order to match the vibrancy of the occasion. Physical food is substituted by imagery of various ethnic dishes mashed together. Guests are at times overwhelmed by the amount of options available through menus and advertisements.

To the right is an image of one such party where guests sort through overbearing transparencies of ceviche menus or wave about a sign saying “gorditas” as a means to encourage on the overindulgence. Hosts never run out of “visual food”.



Figure 13. Dining Hall Party

****END SAMPLE****