

FLORIAN CRAMER

I am going to talk about three (rather trashy) pop songs and their relation to electronic media. This lecture has been announced as “cork-dry”,

France Gall, Der Computer Nummer Drei (1968)

Online dating:

Match-making, scientific objectivity: database logic, cybernetic feedback: Man-machine feedback loop.

Norbert Wiener: Cybernetics as study of “Cybernetics, or Control and Communication in the Animal and Machine” (1948)

Feedback loop: discomfort – adjustment

“The Psycho-Structural Cybernetic Model, Feedback, and Problem Gambling: A New Theoretical Approach”, Canada, 2004

Parallel of human functioning and machine feedback loop, “regel lijn”. Behaviorist ideology: human behavior can be modelled after formalisms, machine logic.

Negative media theory, and criticism: information technology and computers as control systems. (Kittler, Foucault.)

Cybernetic art, 1960s/70s: control systems.

End of cybernetics.

Jump into 1983: Trans-X, Living on Video (1983)

Anticipates cyberspace utopias by ten years, and second Life by 22 years. Trans-X: project by Pascal Languirand, degree in communication studies.

Both songs are far ahead of media theory in imagining the possibilities of computer media. The Trans-X vision is less technocratic and cybernetic, but more psychedelic: technology as a means to freedom, as in cyberspace and early Internet utopias. The computer is no longer outside the love relation, but part of it, shaping/filtering perception (“I see your glittering blue eyes – you look at me with a smile”): Turn from cybernetics to media, and more precisely: “interactive” media.

Typical for computer art in total: cybernetic art of the 1960s/70s gets replaced with “new media” art of the 1980s/90s, although they both boil down to the same, as made obvious in the Italo disco song “Future Brain” by Den Harrow in 1985:

Critique of both cybernetic and media utopian dating, with a catholic tint: “you can’t replace my soul”, “you never pray ’cause your soul isn’t even real”.

But there is truth in it: “Interaction” mixes up cybernetic feedback, “touch of a button”, with social interaction. Media and computers are not interactive in a social sense. Frustration with interactive art, that it reduces communication and interaction to push-buttons: The computer make your online dating match, it can provide computer fantasies, but it can’t be a lover. Both the cybernetic control fantasy and the utopia of interactive media fail, the machine is a machine.