

# Critical Art Ensemble

## Tactical Media Practitioners

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*an interview by Jon McKenzie  
and Rebecca Schneider*

To produce this interview, Schneider met with CAE in New York City over the course of a weekend in June 1999, while a few days later McKenzie emailed them a series of questions. CAE responded to these queries, and McKenzie in turn sent a few follow-up questions. After the interview sessions were complete, Schneider, McKenzie, and CAE reviewed and synthesized the materials to produce this text.

McKENZIE: I've always admired how CAE produces works and events with strong critical currents, and theory that involves a certain formal experimentation. Can you tell us about the self-organization of CAE as a group, its formation, its modes of production, and about how you continue to work so well as an ensemble?

CAE: CAE is a collective of five tactical media artists dedicated to exploring the intersections between art, technology, critical theory, and political activism. Each artist in the group has his or her own specialized talents. The pool of skills includes performance, book arts, graphic design, computer art, film/video, text art, photography, and critical writing. CAE generally uses these skills in a tactical manner. We choose a subject matter, place it in a particular context (and hence address a particular audience), and then attempt to construct a meaningful work in relation to the selected context. Because we are willing to address any cultural situation, and are not media-specific in our production (we use the medium that best suits the topic and context), we tend to interact with a wide variety of venues. We have worked in galleries and museums, radio, TV, festivals, bars and clubs, the net, the street—wherever there is a call. Even though our practice is varied and interdisciplinary, there is one constant to it: To produce work that reveals and/or challenges the authoritarian underpinnings of Western culture.

McKENZIE: Can you tell us about how CAE supports itself? Grants? Sugar daddies? Mutual funds? If you work, what's the relation of job work and CAE work? Does one inform the other?

CAE: CAE supports itself by writing articles, doing lectures, performance honoraria, commissions, and book royalties. We almost never get grants. Basically, we get money to be put on display either as an object of curiosity, or as an alibi for an institution's commitment to free inquiry. When involved in autonomous initiatives, CAE is lucky to break even. To pay rent, we all work straight jobs.

McKENZIE: So there's no channel of communication between work and activism? I'm surprised, given the new organizational forms that have emerged, such as the attention given to creativity and diversity, the "detournable" resources institutions offer, and the fact that most people spend so much of their lives in the workplace.

CAE: This comes down to how one negotiates complicity with the system. Everyone has their own way. Some try to do some resistant work wherever they go. CAE members tend not to share this model. We try to spend as little energy as possible on work. In that arena, we do what must be done, get out, and get back into the space where we feel our agency is greatest.

Maybe where you work the environment is creative and diverse, but where we work it isn't. For example, at the places where we work, creativity is not a talent for recombination, divine inspiration, or a way of interacting with the undetermined. In the workplace "creativity" means that workers should invent or recognize the means by which a business product or process can be improved. "Creativity" is very specific and focused in this case, and is only valued when directly applied to a business process. When working "creatively" to improve the bottom line of the business, the worker is rewarded; however, if this energy is directed toward any other activity, it is marginalized or punished. Creativity has to be put in quotes here because its goal is already predetermined—make more profits. It's a completely closed system.

McKENZIE: You've written that the term "artist" is an anachronism and suggested it be replaced with "cultural worker." What's at stake in this displacement of artists by cultural workers—in terms of creative techniques, critical practices, and critico-creative experiments?

CAE: The designation "artists" tends to bring with it the social connotation that they are beyond the labor market, which in turn implies that they identify with their economic superiors. The overwhelming majority of artists are not a part of an elite class, and must sell their labor to the highest bidder like any other workers. At the same time, CAE does not want to suggest or imply any soviet or communist identification or affiliation, so the group is not even sure "cultural worker" is the best term to use. At present, CAE likes "tactical media practitioner." This term distances us from traditional ideological categories, and distinguishes us from the specialization of artists who are precious object makers for the luxury market.

McKENZIE: What's the role of the cultural worker, and more generally, "culture" vis-à-vis digital globalization?

CAE: Culture is a diplomatic word for the symbolic order or for semiotic regimes. The military period of globalization (colonization) is fundamentally over. Now domination is predominantly exercised through global market mechanisms interconnected with a global communications and information apparatus. Any type of resistant production of representation intervenes and reverse-engineers the displays, software, and hardware of this apparatus.

SCHNEIDER: In the *TDR* essay ["Recombinant Theatre and Digital Resistance"] you write about the ways in which the art world "defangs" the politics of resistance—turning "Happenings" into "performance" and "environments"



1. *At an onsite cryopreservation lab, cell samples are taken for flash freezing during the CAE project Flesh Machine. A cross-media profile of an individual's genetic representations is constructed (consisting of cell samples, DNA samples, a donor profile test, and a photograph of the donor). Participants can then assess the potential value of their bodies as commodities, and hence their place in the new genetic market economy. (Photo courtesy of CAE)*

into “installation.” The category of art defangs—so you have an investment in fangs?

CAE: Yes, there is a symbolic violence in the act of reverse-engineering. Resistance is not a friendly process.

SCHNEIDER: Are you looking for a constant tearing? A tearing for tearing's sake?

CAE: No, CAE doesn't think that tearing should be an end in itself, although the collective has associates who disagree on that point. Take Stelarc's performances, for example. He is not working for a particular goal; rather, he is interested in trying whatever comes to him regarding the development of the posthuman—this is tearing for tearing's sake. (At the same time, his reckless experimentation is intriguing. I think that is why audiences like his work so much.) CAE, on the other hand, thinks that there needs to be a more cautious negotiation. Experimentation does not have to be completely blind to its own intentions. In the case of Stelarc, CAE would begin with questioning the idea of the posthuman. CAE begins inquiry by developing an understanding of a given territory using critique to rip at the territory to expose hidden and transparent ideological strata. Then we try to exploit those areas with participatory cultural practice. Certainly, from the point of view of the defenders of the status quo, this is a violent action, rather than the positive anti-authoritarian and pedagogical practice CAE perceives it to be. From the perspective of the status quo a minor (in the Deleuzian sense of the term) movement cannot be anything other than an organization that tears. This position is one that is as much forced upon us as it is chosen. Unfortunately, the degree to which our position is forced upon us represents the degree to which resistant/minor practices are always/already recuperated by dominant culture.

McKENZIE: What's in store for the individual artist—the painter, the photographer, the solo performance artist?

CAE: CAE is sure that these artists will continue to be around for many many years to come. We don't know if anything is in store for them. Photographers and painters will continue to make objects for the luxury market, or they will find minor applications for their media. In a tactical sense, object-making has its context. One never knows what cultural tools might come in handy in any given context. I am sure that the individual performer will continue to be part of the entertainment industry in much the same way.

It should be added that resistant models and processes will never be dominant. Perhaps this is one romantic characteristic that CAE can't seem to shake. We only believe in temporary solutions, temporary improvement. There is only permanent cultural resistance; there is no endgame. Authoritarian culture won the day on the first day. CAE knows of no way that it can be removed—it's too deeply entrenched. Certainly at the end of this century we know that a revolution won't even do it. But there can be spaces and processes within certain moments that can successfully stop the flow of capital, lift the repression, and in so doing, actually allow for the emergence of pleasure and happiness.

SCHNEIDER: I wanted to ask you about the manifesto quality of CAE's writing as a strategy. Manifestos, of course, accompanied performative art actions in the modernist avantgarde and thus manifestos have a kind of "event-oriented" ring—a kind of echo of or call to action. They also retain a kind of revolutionary air about them, maybe only because they remind us of a time when revolution seemed promising. Yet you are not arguing for revolution.

CAE: No, only because revolution never works—it's a dead idea. Every time the Golden Dawn is supposed to come, Coke is gone and Pepsi is in power. Authoritarian military and semiotic regimes are incorporated too deeply in culture, so even the most violent revolution cannot eliminate them. When an attempt is made at revolution, the eventual results are incredibly horrific, whether the attempt has come from the left or the right. Take the most extreme example of the Khmer Rouge. Even after eliminating half its population it could not destroy traditional culture, nor the effects of Western imperialism. It could never start with a clean slate. That revolution was a gruesome failure. Some revolutions have temporary moments during which a euphoric autonomous space emerges—such as the Paris Commune or Makhno's Ukraine—but outside authoritarian forces crush them in relatively short order. Some would argue that the Russian revolution had a general utopian moment between 1918 and 1921, but that revolution was eventually recuperated from the inside by the indestructible Russian bureaucracy.

An important thing to note here is that although CAE dismisses revolution as a useful goal, we do see a difference in history. There are times that appear to be more desirable moments to live in than other times—times when issues of autonomy, of voluntary cooperation, and the liberation of desire have greater practical currency. The hope is to try to maintain the open fields that already exist, and perhaps expand this territory and elongate its temporality, rather than insist that we change the whole structure with some kind of utopian ideal. What we can hope for are expanded areas of autonomy—and history shows that that is a possibility—and that's what general resistance is all about. That's why resistance is not a futile gesture.

SCHNEIDER: So, the manifesto style: Does the manifesto function as a kind of outmoded backward glance, then? A kind of quotation? Or affect? What's the strategy behind wielding the echo of revolution?

CAE: Well, manifestos have never really gone away, even if the idea of revolution has. Manifestos are still the style of the disempowered. Of course, CAE has reconfigured and expanded the form. We're certainly beyond the 10 imperative steps to utopia.

SCHNEIDER: Now it's the 12-step?

CAE: Hah! CAE tries to reveal the logic that's behind the imperative. We also like it because it's a fast style, perhaps the fastest.

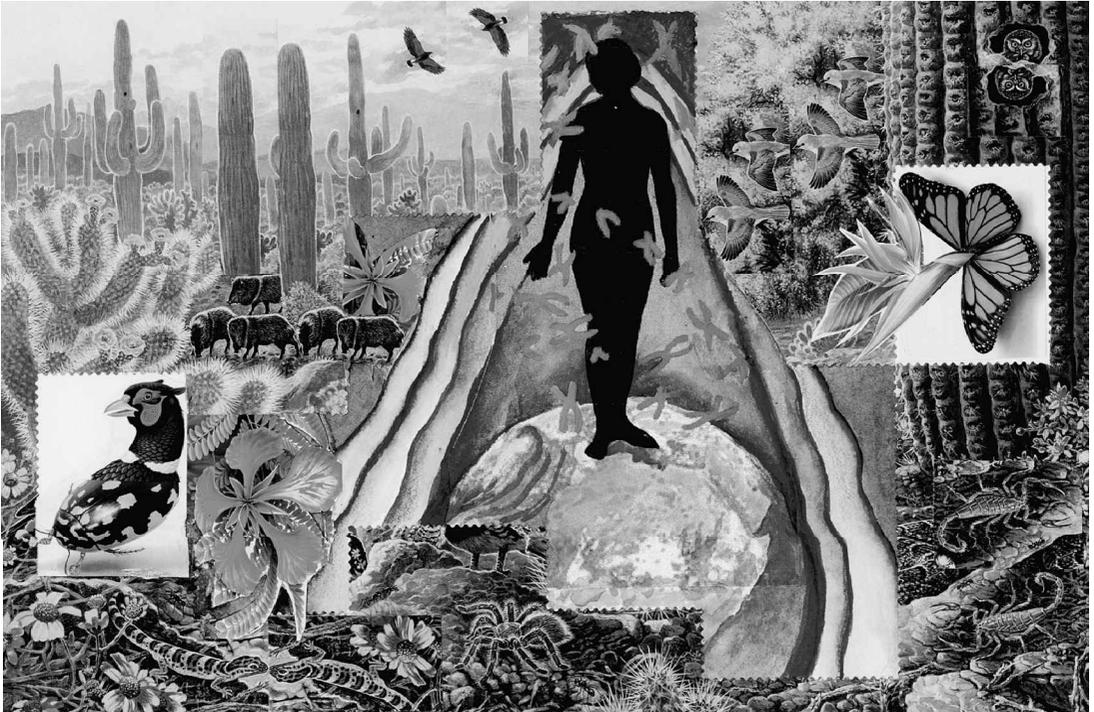
SCHNEIDER: Because you don't have to put in footnotes?

CAE: Among other things. We do mention people we're indebted to, but footnotes are overwhelmingly used as a method of privatizing, associating certain words and ideas with certain personalities.

SCHNEIDER: Your fast and loose way with information has a kind of "bad boy" ring to it. It goes against the academic "property" code and yet other equally politically invested moves would be to precisely locate discourse—to build a web of precise tracks between a network of thinkers, artists, and activists, not in the name of property, but in the name of giving voice to a body of work or closely critiquing the assumptions of a body of work. I'm thinking of feminism and minoritarian writers. As most of the thinkers you refer to are dead white males, I wonder about the gesture; is it gender and race marked? In a way, not citing the big daddies like Deleuze and Guattari except by name allows them a kind of monumentality—they don't exist on the level of precise details.

CAE: CAE does mention various networks. It all depends on what we are examining. For example, in a paper CAE just wrote on simulation, public space, and electronic civil disobedience [ECD], we cite a lot of minoritarian radical movements and mention what their contributions were to the development of the strategies and tactics we're deploying. A lot of times, too, when we're

2–5. Images from "Prophecies of the New Eve," an agitprop booklet created for Cult of the New Eve, 1999. (Courtesy of CAE)



talking about pedagogical tactics, all the breakthroughs were made in minoritarian praxis, but when we're talking about certain centralized master narratives, and we want to challenge them, then we're caught up in the white guys. When we start talking about very practical tacticalities, we find ourselves dealing more with minoritarian writers and thinkers.

SCHNEIDER: I was thinking about how Brecht was both into theft and plagiarism and yet he argued for a theatre that is modeled on footnotes. The main thing there I think was actually formalistic—the way footnotes break up a text and defy a quick, linear read or view. But you're also going for quickness.

CAE: Wouldn't Brecht's theatre of footnotes be a predecessor of hypertext? As you know, CAE finds the strongest forms of plagiarism to be intimately linked to hypertextuality: digital methodology meets digital technology. CAE likes the model you suggest, but not in book form. The book is far too slow.

In books, the most important thing for CAE is to make up for its clunkiness with a speedy style. We want to give enough evidence to show that a given imperative is credible, and then move on to something else. Virilio calls it a staircase construction—a jump up followed by a short horizontal burst, repeat as needed. I think that's the way most people read now. No one wants to read grand tomes where every piece of evidence is exhaustively presented and dissected. Further, CAE wants its writing to reach as broad an audience as possible—everyone from the lumpen intellectual in the squats of the East Village to those holed up in the ivory tower. You can't have that nonspecialist presentation if the work follows academic convention. That form turns writing into specialized discourse.

SCHNEIDER: Does that recapitulate an idea of the “disempowered” as non-readers? Or as noncritical? I mean, you say “who really reads those tomes”—well you do.

CAE: Yeah, but CAE is a Sadean group in this respect. As far as no one reading massive tomes, this statement applies across the social spectrum—disempowered or empowered. Do you think the president or a senator reads any of the multi-volume works that their respective offices produce, or that a high-level business person reads in detail all the reports filed to his office? No. They want the information digested, and preferably delivered in bullet-list form in a briefing. In a political economy that has intensified labor and consumption to unthinkable levels, as well as constructed a mass information apparatus that produces and dumps information at maximum velocity, there is no time for redundant details. Information must be fast or not at all. CAE's position in regard to issues of cultural inertia is a reaction to a general situation, not to a particular one of the disempowered. “Reader” and “nonreader” are only categories of significance in the academy, the institution of the book.

SCHNEIDER: —and you mention them by author's name, but do you in some ways mask your own location within the institution in the name of a mimicry of disempowerment which you don't in fact own?

CAE: That's harsh, but we'll say this: If you are theorizing from a radical position you are pretty much disempowered in terms of reaching people—for example, you will be denied access to quality distribution. The audience that you get is always an audience that you have to struggle for, and the practicality of struggling for an audience pushes the style in certain directions.

SCHNEIDER: That's interesting. Another thing about resisting the full-blown trappings of academic style is that you get to be both an academic text, or a theoretical text, and yet you free float, almost as an art object. Or a per-

formance. We could say that all texts are performative, but you kind of exaggerate your own location as a textual performance by resisting location within a precise genre—unless, as I suggested, it's the outmoded, or backward quoting genre of the avantgarde (I say backward quoting because so many pomo theorists [theorists of postmodernity] have claimed that the avantgarde is dead).

CAE: Yes, it's that broad base that we were talking about. We try and encircle as many camps as possible—we like to oscillate between them. We don't have to use a style that tends to totalize work in one camp or another, so it does allow us a certain nomadic mobility in addition to resisting the privatization of knowledge production.

SCHNEIDER: So if it's a repetitive resistance, is performativity a key practical and theoretical ingredient?

CAE: That depends. Here's where we make a distinction between the political and the pedagogical. Some activities, though they are performed, are not performative. These are activities that directly intervene in the distribution of power on a macro level. A strategic form is policy construction and reform; a tactical form is electronic civil disobedience. These types of activities CAE considers political. The other form of intervention is in changing perceptions through representational exchange. Tactical media practitioners initiate social processes that aid people in perceiving a social system and their roles within in it in a manner that is different from the normalized perception of these phenomena. This type of action is pedagogical, and performativity plays a key role in making these processes function.

SCHNEIDER: I should be clearer about what I'm asking. I mean that theories of performativity open up the ritual aspects of the "Symbolic Order," its maintenance through repetition. To resist on the level of exposing those rituals, or making those rituals explicit as repetitive—having people directly experience the generally unspoken codes—seems to be a current running through your work. When you passed out free beer and cigarettes in Sheffield, UK, the male collective that gathered, with a few women on the outskirts, was a kind of literalization and explicit experience of the unspoken codes of what you have called "false" public space. The space isn't really public, as it's haunted by ritual codes of behavior that are embedded in the deeper structure of capital and privatization. So, what I'm getting at has more to do with your emphasis on the direct event—and the notion of the experiential. You seem to return again and again to the strategic move toward trying to get people into explicitly experiential situations—even "hands on" experience, as in *Flesh Machine* where people experienced their own DNA sampling. You seem to have faith in something called real or embodied experience versus—what, a Baudrillardian simulacra?

CAE: Well, here is where Baudrillard is undersold. He's too often misunderstood as claiming that simulacral culture does not have material effects. It's not just a cynical ploy on his part to say that we're lost in the hyperreal.

SCHNEIDER: Yes but it's precisely the material effects that you emphasize—where I read Baudrillard as emphasizing more the loss of authenticity, something nostalgically before the simulacral. CAE places emphasis—perhaps through performance—on having your audience not look toward the lost real, but touch the very real effects of a tangible, real hyperreal.

CAE: Yes, well said. Experiencing the material effects of the real hyperreal as a means to understand its politics in a lived way is at the heart of our performances. It is in this realm that the transparent codes become opaque.

SCHNEIDER: What are the politics of resistance in making the oscillation between the so-called counterfeit and the so-called real experiential—when experienced within the pedagogical or experimental frame of a street action or a performance?

CAE: With the implosion of the original and the counterfeit, and the emergence of hyperreality, we now have the possibility of replicating a particular space and its politics outside of its normal domain. For example, CAE set up a biolab in a bar in Brussels. When this set of codes hybridized with the codes of bar performativity, the politics of the biolab read in a much different way. Without the academic or corporate architecture to act as a frame of capital/power, science as authority became less legitimate, and hence, could be questioned. Once the participants were skeptical about the underlying authority of the various processes, documents, gestures, and people, the once transparent, normalized authoritarian givenness of the eugenic substrata of reprotch was staring the audience in the face. Many people say that the aesthetics of shock is gone, and in terms of shock through sophomoric transgression (bad grrrl, bad boy aesthetics), that is probably true. However, if you help someone experience the face of capital by removing the mask of the welfare state, and show its predatory inhumanity in ways not conceived of by the viewer (representations of war, battered women, or starving children won't do it), you will find that the aesthetics of shock still exist.

SCHNEIDER: Would you say that the virtual and the bodily are already always implicated with each other, except that we're practiced at disavowing the material or bodily effects? We're practiced at disavowing the performative elements? And is this one reason you're interested in underscoring the performative elements?

CAE: The answer is yes. The way virtuality has been structured at this point is as a manifestation of Cartesian dualism. We're used to thinking that the virtual is a manifestation of mind only, as if mind and body, or even better, body and consciousness, can really be separated. CAE has a problem with this idea.

SCHNEIDER: In terms of multiple loops, tell me about CAE's political investment in intermediality—you produce across disciplinary boundaries, producing books and/as performances, producing CDs, and producing street actions, installations, and websites—often without discrete distinctions between the actions. You can't be delimited to any one genre, any one space of knowledge—does that make you a “movement” or does intermediality itself bear a political critique within its crossed boundaries?

CAE: Perhaps CAE is part of a movement—the recently named tactical media movement. Participants are neither fish nor fowl. They aren't artists in any traditional sense, and don't want to be caught in the web of metaphysical, historical, and romantic signage that accompanies that designation. Nor are they political activists in any traditional sense, because they refuse to *solely* take the reactive position of anti-logos, and are just as willing to flow through fields of *nomos* in defiance of efficiency and necessity. In either case, such role designations are too restrictive; these role boundaries exclude access to social and knowledge systems that are the materials for their work. But what truly distin-



3. From “Prophecies of the New Eve.” (Courtesy of CAE)

guishes this movement is that these participants value access over expertise. Amateur status is acceptable, if not desirable. And finally, this movement sees all media as useful, for each form has contexts within which it is the most effective; there is no specialized focus on a particular medium. CAE sees this as the beginning of a truly interdisciplinary movement. This is the subject matter for CAE's new book *Molecular Interventions* (forthcoming).

McKENZIE: One of your most provocative positions concerns the futility of political activism based solely on the image of sedentary power: that is, power as centered in bunker-institutions, and thus resistance as a matter of taking to the streets. Instead, you argue that the state has given people the streets because power has itself gone nomadic through electronic networks; thus for CAE, resistance must go digital too. Where do you see the most important tactics of electronic civil disobedience emerging? Any particular group or event on your radar right now?

CAE: The problem with electronic civil disobedience, or any type of political action that can have immediate policy shifting effect, is that it can only exist in absentia. We can only talk about it abstractly—we can't really talk about it concretely. If we did, it would be immediately stopped. Why? Because the authorities would arrest everybody involved. No one does talk about it. We can only have theoretical discussions. Supposedly there are underground organizations that have secret communiqués, but no member would break the code of silence of the network. Tactical ECD will never become a public conversation. Pedagogical action and political action are not the same thing. Pedagogy requires performance, spectacle, and presence. You want people to see it, and then go and talk about it. But ECD, like any radical application of power, is in the category of the unspeakable.

McKENZIE: Is there still a place for “old school” tactics even in the most wired of temporal zones, and if so, what is its role? I'm thinking of the highly mediated civil disobedience lead by Al Sharpton concerning the Diallo case here in New York City.

CAE: Remember that electronic civil disobedience was developed as a means to combat absent nomadic power. You answered your own question with the Al Sharpton example. The “old school” has plenty of currency in local affairs where problem institutions are present and concrete. What this means for the intersection of cultural production and activism is this: The street still acts as a key pedagogical base (at present, it's far more useful than the net because it has greater tactical viability). It's still a place where the discourse of resistance can be developed, and it is still a place where *localized* power vectors can be challenged. The streets may be “dead capital,” but they are by no means dead. CAE still does guerrilla actions; as a matter of fact we recently did one in Sheffield, UK. Guerrilla art action is not a dead form—the limits of these actions just have to be recognized.

McKENZIE: In *Electronic Civil Disobedience*, CAE suggests that political cells might contain an activist, theorist, artist, hacker, lawyer, and even a fetishist of bureaucratic efficiency. The MO seems to be political integrity, technical diversity. But even with the internet, strong divisions remain both in terms of infrastructures and convictions. How do you see such cells emerging?

CAE: CAE is in complete agreement with this criticism, and we have said it over and over: the complex division of labor separated into microspecializations is the most effective police force there is, because it creates such profound separation that social unities other than those based on perfect similarity are very improbable. This is one reason CAE likes the idea of cells. Being

small, they are the most probable of all intentional social configurations. Individuals with diverse technical abilities can be drawn together by common political beliefs and causes. The emergent properties of the cell are the same as those that create affinity groups (which form all the time).

McKENZIE: This tension between integration and disintegration can be found on the left, or within its remains, as some argue that labor solidarity has become lost in cultural diversity. Does electronic resistance channel this tension between class action and autonomous zones?

CAE: CAE has very little hope for long-term class action. Nothing is worse than when a committee, movement, or campaign becomes an institution. At that moment, it is fully recuperated by the system. For long-term action, CAE supports the cell. For short-term action, goal-based coalitions still have an important role to play. CAE covers this issue in-depth in the essay "Observations on Collective Cultural Action" [*Artjournal* 57, 2 (Summer 1998)].

In the article, one thing CAE argues is that while cellular collective structure is very useful in solving problems of production, long-term personal cooperation, and security (for those involved in underground activities), like all social constellations, it has its limits. It does not solve many of the problems associated with distribution, nor can it fulfill the functions of localized cultural and political organizations. Consequently, there has always been a drive toward finding a social principle that would allow like-minded people or cells to organize into larger groups. Currently, the dominant principle is "community." CAE sees this development as very unfortunate. The idea of community is without doubt the liberal equivalent of the conservative notion of "family values"—neither exists in contemporary culture, and both are grounded in political fantasy. For example, the "gay community" is a term of-

4. From "Prophecies of the New Eve." (Courtesy of CAE)



ten used in the media and in various organizations. This term refers to all people who are gay within a given territory. Even in a localized context, gay men and women populate all social strata, from the underclass to the elite, so it is very hard to believe that this aggregate functions as a community within such a complex division of labor. To complicate matters further, social variables such as race, ethnicity, gender, education, profession, and other points of difference are not likely to be lesser points of identification than the characteristic of being gay. A single shared social characteristic can in no way constitute a community in any sociological sense. Talking about a gay community is as silly as talking about a “straight community.” The word community is only meaningful in this case as a euphemism for “minority.” The closest social constellation to a community that does exist is friendship networks, but those too fall short of community in any sociological sense.

CAE is unsure who really wants community in the first place, as it contradicts the politics of difference. Solidarity based on similarity through shared ethnicity, and interconnected familial networks supported by a shared sense of place and history, work against the possibility of power through diversity by maintaining closed social systems. This is not to say that there are no longer relatively closed social subsystems within society. Indeed there are, but they differ from community in that they are products of rationalized social construction and completely lack social solidarity. In order to bring people from different subsystems who share a similar concern together, hybrid groups have to be intentionally formed. These groups are made up of people who are focusing their attentions on one or two characteristics that they share in common, and that put potentially conflicting differences aside. This kind of alliance, created for purposes of large-scale cultural production and/or for the visible consolidation of economic and political power, is known as a coalition. The bottom line here is, dump the idea of community and come back to the real world of political organization by working for coalition formation.

McKENZIE: Because the present has shattered into different temporal zones of power, you call for resistors to “time travel” by any means necessary. Where/when have you time traveled?

CAE: There are lots of ways to time travel. Here are two examples. One of CAE’s early shows was at a blues bar called Pappy’s Lounge in downtown Jackson, Mississippi. There were a number of content issues we brought to that situation, but one was the issue of nonlocality through cyberspace. While there was a lot of interest in the computer work, there was little in regard to the issue of nonlocality. In other words, many audience members’ lives were bounded by locality. Family, friends, work, leisure, identity, history, etc., were all conceived of within the local framework of an actual community. Was the compression of space through the virtual relevant to some of these audience members? It wasn’t; it was a different time zone. After that show, CAE thought about actions and performance in a different way. We became more concerned with time than with space.

Recently, CAE was working on an article on cyberfeminism. In thinking about the situation, we realized that an old narrative was being replayed. We were going back in time to the early ’70s when, in gender relations, the personal was political and women had essential qualities. There were so few women in computer science and electrical engineering that any action within this sphere by a woman was profoundly politicized. Simply to study computer science was a dramatically politicized action. As cyberfeminist Phoebe Sengers told CAE, when she went to study computer science at Carnegie Mellon, there were more guys named “Dave” in the department than there were women. In a practical situation of such inequality (that begins with day one of

socialization) it's quite clear who are women and who aren't. The discussions of whether transsexuals or transvestites are women aren't happening. Who is a woman is taken for granted. The general organization of women at this level is at such a basic stage of development that a very justifiable separatism has emerged. In this area of gendered contestation, all the feminist steps toward liberation taken for granted in other economic and cultural sectors are going to have to be retaken. Perhaps, advances will occur at a faster rate since we already have a general understanding of the process. However, since ICT [information communication technology] is a major power base, CAE doesn't expect this struggle to be easy.

McKENZIE: CAE has long argued that cultural activists are overdeployed in certain areas. That is, given the need to develop tactics of electronic resistance, too many resources are deployed in bunker politics, identity politics, body politics. In *The Electronic Disturbance*, you go so far as to argue that the personal is not political in recombinant culture, and in *Flesh Machine* you suggest that biotechnology has become a more crucial site of resistance than information technology. What's your reading of resistor deployment today?

CAE: A lot has changed since '93/94 when the web was in its fledgling years. The value of new information and communication technology has been recognized. A substantial critique of information communication technology that emerged out of radical practice (as opposed to academic media theory) has established a beachhead, and experiments in methods of electronic resistance are underway. Unfortunately, the opportunity for these experiments wasn't seized immediately by resistant forces, and now poorly defended locations are fortifying, and open fields for action are shrinking. The net is becoming increasingly privatized and managed—not that it didn't serve a repressive function

5. From "Prophecies of the New Eve." (Courtesy of CAE)



from the start. The cyber-practice/critique that CAE and many others were trying to build at that time in the early and mid-'90s was in sharp contrast to the libertarian rhetoric that tried to present new ICT as a radicalized techno-revolution. There was a revolution, but it wasn't radicalized. On the contrary, it was only a dramatic expansion of the territory of pancapitalist technocracy. Once this view was wedged into the discourse, it became clear that radicalized artists, activists, theorists, etc., were going to have to treat the net like any other communication apparatus and search for the cracks and empty spaces that could be used for subversive purposes. Now the resistance is facing the work of revising foundational ideas so they best address this electronic becoming, and of placing continuous pressure on various regulatory (in the broadest sense of the term) agencies in regard to issues such as access, bandwidth, minimized expression management, and so on. What has occurred is that the initial engagement is over, and now a slower and more methodical trench warfare begins. The number of participants is sufficiently large worldwide to have some causal effect on the key issues in the politics of communication.

Now we are replaying this same narrative with biotechnology, and this second round is very difficult. While more people are becoming interested in ICT because they use it every day, the biotech revolution is very distant. It does not encroach upon everyday life with the vigor and spectacle of ICT, and where it does, it primarily enters through the realm of the private—family planning, health issues, aging, etc. It's going to be a big problem to get resistant cultural resources into this area.

CAE believes that the biotech revolution will make the communications revolution look modest. The ICT expansion was only completing a project that was well underway in various electronic media. Biotech is not an expansion; it is the opening of a new frontier, and hence a new colonial endeavor has begun. While most of the exterior world is structured by relations of domination and repression, the interior world—that portion separate from language—is generally autonomous. This is about to change—the last stronghold of autonomy and undirected development is falling to the instrumentalizing systems of capital and is being reconstructed and reinscribed with its predatory values. The dream of a fully rationalized reproductive order first imagined by late-19th- and early-20th-century eugenicists is about to be realized. The economic foundation has been laid and the technology and knowledge are in advanced stages of development. In this territory, the deployment problem is very intense. There is some green resistance to eco-piracy and the privatization of various genomes, and some feminists are critically engaging the reprotech questions, but overall, the situation is pretty sad—particularly here in the U.S.

McKENZIE: You performed *Flesh Machine* in Europe and, in general, CAE has gotten more support for such productions there than in the U.S. What are the challenges of performing in the States?

CAE: That depends on what you are doing. If you are doing experimental interdisciplinary work, get on the next plane for Europe. If you are doing stage performance (even with radical content), the States is as good a place as any. We don't want to sound as if we are saying that Europe is a cultural utopia; it isn't. The European establishment understands the value of developing its radical fringe. A common understanding is that alternative media culture is a cost-effective research and development resource, so funds are available for broad-spectrum experimentation. The Europeans even have large festivals funded by the EU and various ICT corporations that allow these institutions to interface with radical media culture, see what it has produced, and take what looks good. Ars Electronica [Linz, Austria] is probably the largest festival

erving this function. Another helpful aspect is that in these relatively smaller countries, institutions are much closer to one another. It is very easy to link resources for interdisciplinary initiatives. When CAE was doing *Flesh Machine*, it wasn't that difficult for sponsors to get us lab equipment, doctors and technicians, computers, whatever we asked for. This type of institutional access joined to in-kind fundraising is impossible in the U.S. As always, everything is about money, and the U.S. strategy is to try and starve radical cultural activity out of existence; the European strategy is to exploit it, or at the very least, to keep it within civil parameters by throwing money at it.

McKENZIE: Since the Second World War, engineers, managers, stock analysts, and artists have developed different discourses and practices of performance.

Technical effectiveness, organizational efficiency, financial profitability, and social efficacy have come to form a grid of performative forces. What's the relation of this grid to what you call the "performative matrix"?

CAE: The performative matrix is the aggregate of interactions within social space—the dramaturgical activities of everyday life. However, for this matrix to be meaningful it must blend with the discursive matrix of performativity—recuperation through language—that you just mentioned. The hope of recombinant theatre is to continuously shuffle and reorder both matrices so they cannot solidify and stabilize. It's an attempt to stop recuperation from becoming domination—a hegemony of a particular kind of space and/or discourse.

McKENZIE: The performative matrix sounds a lot like the field of performance studies: the performance of everyday life, theatre, dance, performance art, ritual, political protest, etc. But I'm wary of your distinction between the performative matrix and discursive performativity. Cultural performances have discursive as well as practical registers, just as the performances of technologies, organizations, and markets entail both words and actions. It seems to me that performatives and performances are building blocks of a power formation Lyotard called "performativity," a formation that, precisely, binds together words and bodies. In short, doesn't recuperation occur through practices as well as discourses? And conversely, aren't there nonrecuperative, resistant discourses? Your books, for example!

CAE: You made the distinction between the two when you said "engineers, managers, stock analysts, and artists have developed different discourses *and* practices of performance." CAE agrees. Of course the performative matrix contains both speech and actions. CAE wasn't intending to make that distinction. Discursive performativity is the secondary representation of performance; it's outside the realm of immediacy, and functions at a metalevel. For example, one can perform the role of parent. At the same time, one is enveloped by numerous discourses on what it means to perform as a parent and on the proper methods to perform the role. These discourses are independent of any individual action in the matrix. Recognition of oneself as performing the role of parent presupposes an identification with one or more of these discourses. The application of the discourse has many individuated variations, and through the solidification of various imperfections, accidents, and recombinations in these variations at a collective level over time, discourse becomes open to recombination and mutation. Practice is the key to resistance. Practice is what really initiates change. Resistant discourse, on the other hand, helps provide opportunities by suggesting how to hurry this process. When speaking of recuperation in this case, CAE is not talking about systemic recuperation, but about the recuperation of action in language. From any perspective, this process can be resistant or complicit.

McKENZIE: What are your plans for the future?

CAE: The collective will probably continue with our investigations in biotechnology. Obviously, we think that is where the most desperate call is at the moment.

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6. "Eunigen Pure" and Hosts used in *Cult of the New Eve*, 1999. Beer and wafer made by CoNE with recombinant yeast containing the complete human genome. (Photo courtesy of CAE)

