

The new media designer is God's anti- apprentice, reproducing and refining the human through design technology.

The new media designer is an artist whose work does not fear technological change. Rush describes the experience of the new media designer as excited by the possibilities of technology and not afraid of them (Rush 2005: 9). The reach and potential of technology enables these experiences to make a canvas of artwork out of almost anything. What has become the most exciting canvas for the new media designer is the human body. Walter Benjamin states that man made artefacts have always been imitated by men and he goes on to mention the newness of the mechanical reproduction process (Benjamin 1936 : 3). What could not be reproduced was considered unique and for the longest time the human body seemed to exist in this bracket. The advancement of technology has enabled new techniques in reproduction. Reproduction was never about changing the artefact altogether but seemed to only go as far as the available technology could go. The Greeks practiced founding and stamping as those were the only procedures they knew (Benjamin 1936 : 4). When their technology advanced, so did their techniques. The capabilities of what can be done to an artefact always hinged on the advancement of technology which is why the body as an artefact is only being explored now. New media designers and their methods of embracing technology have made the human body a reproducible artefact.

An important aspect of reproduction which Benjamin notes is that a reproduced artefact will always be lacking in its presence in time and space. (Benjamin 1936 : 5). This quality determines the authorship of an artefact. The authorship of the human artefact has been attributed to God through what is known as the Garden of Eden narrative.

Acoording to this narrative of the Garden of Eden, the human artefact was created by God who designed it in his own image and gave the human power over everything else in the world. The artefact was given rules to live by in a place known

as the Garden of Eden. The human then went to break the rules to which God admitted that it caused the artefact to become a god. The result of this was the human being punished and cast out of the Garden of Eden (The Bible no date: Genesis 1.) This narrative serves to inform on the authorship of the original human artefact as well as to enforce the position of the human as a God in his own right.

Peterson claims that:

To be in the image of God is to be like God in some relevant way, but also unlike God at the same time, as an image is like and unlike that which it reflects or represents. But how are we like God? (Peterson 2002 : 340)

One way to answer Peterson's "how are we like God?" question is to simply say we are designers, creators and mechanical reproducers of the human artefact. Hayles (2003 : 319) describes the manipulation of the body through placing prostheses as a continuation of a process that began before birth – essentially a continuation of the Garden of Eden process. She calls this the Posthuman. A further explanation of the posthuman from Hayles is this:

The posthuman subject is an amalgam, a collection of heterogeneous components, a material-informational entity whose boundaries undergo continuous construction and reconstruction. (Hayles 2003 : 319)



Figure 1



Figure 2

Stephen Hawking in figure 1 is a human artefact on which the work of the new media designer has been explored. He can be considered as post human as he is an amalgamation of human and material components. Stephen Hawking was diagnosed

with early onset amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) at the age of twenty-one and was given a life expectancy of two years.

He lost the ability to write and speak which made communicating with him almost impossible. For a while he communicated through choosing letters on a spelling card by raising his eyebrows. He then received a computer known as an Equaliser which enabled him to press a switch to select words on a desktop computer which was attached to his wheelchair. He used this device until he lost use of his hands and could now only move his cheek muscle. What he currently uses is an adaptive word prediction system powered by Intel, the same microprocessors as what powers most computers and laptops. Stephen Hawking is configured to a Lenovo Yoga 260 computer which runs on an Intel core i7 central processing unit. Also attached is a speaker and amplifier as well as a speech synthesizer this is all attached to his wheelchair and controlled by an infra red switch which he operates with his cheek as shown in figure 2.

Without these extensions, Stephen Hawking would have no means of communicating at all. Through this interface, he has given lectures and written books, all knowledge that would have just been locked away. Sherry Turkle (1984: 27) tells the story of the wild child who came out of the woods without any ability to communicate. Attempts were made to teach the wild child how to read and write in an effort to understand the human condition more. This story speaks to the importance of communication. The wild child was indeed a phenomenon but a useless one as the information inside him was never known. It is from this story of the wild child that the spectacle that Stephen Hawking is can be understood. The technology and methods of the 1800s got nowhere in revealing the information that was within the wild child but in Hawking's case so much has been achieved because of new technology and methods.

Stephen Hawking has been communicating through computers for much longer than he ever did with his own body and voice. What works and enables him to communicate is all machine. After so much reconstruction and upgrading of his systems the question of his authorship as an artefact comes into question. Not only is his authorship as an artefact in question but what kind of an artefact he actually is. He can be called a cyborg – a hybrid of machine and organism described by Donna

Haraway (1991: 149) as creatures who are simultaneously animal and machine, natural and crafted. Whose creation then is the cyborg and what is it really?

Donna Haraway (1991: 151) speaks of how the cyborg would not recognise the Garden of Eden. While the original artefact of Stephen Hawking's body can be attributed to the Garden of Eden, he is much less of that artefact but now more of a creation of the new media designer. Given the failures of his body, it can be said that this narrative where he was created in the image of God failed him and new media design stepped in to rectify those failures.

The new media designer has gone beyond the forbidden experiment of figuring out if there was more to the human and how the human relates to nature and the world (Turkle 1984 : 29). The work no longer questions but mocks God's ubiquity and spirituality by providing answers for itself. Just in the same way that reproduction depended on the available technology , Hayles (2003: 322) suggested that the ideas of body depended on the changes of culture.

Donna Haraway (1992: 300) describes a second birthing that will transcend the human condition allowing the human consciousness to be uploaded to machine. While she is describing a whole new embodiment, what is most interesting is the idea of a second birth. A second birth can change the authorship of an artefact. Stephen Hawking lived to a point where it was deemed that he could no longer communicate for himself and technology had to intervene , this can be his second birth; a process that freed him from the limits of the first birth of the body. The second birth allows escape from the frailties of the human body especially mortality. Without the ability to communicate, Stephen Hawking would have given in to the body and his knowledge would have died in him. With this second birth, he becomes immortal. An effect of technology is that the world has become an information rich environment where what matters most is information and communicating it. Because of this, Stephen Hawking has become immortal because he has been able to communicate his information. For his adaptive software to work, all his written work had to be uploaded in order to understand his speech and thought patterns. His consciousness existed in his work and it was uploaded to the system so that the system can become alive. This is being post human in the best sense because the

artefact of his body is not just an experience for himself but changes and questions the experiences of living in a body altogether.

Peterson (2003 : 320) argues that being in the image of God is dynamic and is not a completed process yet and the human is not just an image of God but god-like as well. The god-like component is a result of the human being a co-creator. He speaks of how technology has enabled the role of 'playing god'. The ethics around the human body as a canvas of new media art rests in the notion that there are some areas that are strictly for God and human beings are not allowed to interfere.

It seems quite regressive that an artist would create a frail artefact and copyright it then not upgrade any of its needs. Such is the human body artefact and the problems which the new media designer faces in trying to work on it. Perhaps that is why it is necessary to put the distinction between the human as God's artwork and the post human as the new media designer's artwork.

To be human is to be a creator and in being creators we are precisely fulfilling what it means to be in the image of God. But what does it mean to "play human?" What kind of creators should we be? (Peterson 2003: 324)

The limitations of the new media designer's freedom on the human body are not only bound by the limits of technology but with ethics for which there is an unwritten authority; the human body came with no instructions or user manual. The new media designer has enabled Stephen Hawking to communicate and there can be debate on whether they have crossed a line and played God. Of the ethics, Peterson (2003: 327) presents the idea that creating a cyborg by mixing human and machine causes a loss of dignity for the human. He goes on to highlight that for a human to not have control over their body like in the case of paralysis, that infact poses more indignity. The new media designer would then have performed a healing. Perhaps what is daunting about the new media designer's way of healing is that it bypasses the body. Natural human body communication has occurred through the mouth but for Stephen Hawking it is through an interface which even creates a voice for him. He does not speak, so the new media designer enabled him to communicate.

Walter Benjamin's analogy of the magician and the surgeon may explain the roles of God and the new media designer as artists. The magician heals the sick person by laying his hands, maintaining a distance between himself and the disease thereby

greatly exaggerating his authority. The surgeon on the other hand cuts into the sick person, interacts with the disease and leaves no distance at all. The surgeon faces the sick person where the magician does not. God is like the magician whose work is in the background and the new media designer is like the surgeon cutting and tinkering right in the face of the patient. What the magician does is offer a reality free from mechanical interference and it is what Benjamin said one is entitled to ask for from a work of art. So indeed the human body has always been a work of art. Now that the human body has become the posthuman, is the Garden of Eden design process invalidated altogether?

The new media designer was just an apprentice practising his craft on the human artefact but technology allowed him to push his craft beyond the expectation of the master. The new media designer became an anti-apprentice when his work pushed so far that the original artefact became almost obliterated. A Stephen Hawking without any of his technological attachments is just an immobile body that cannot communicate. That is as far as a body without technology could take him. Embracing technology has been the greatest achievement of the new media designer contrary to Peterson's claims that technology is a source of alienation not transformation but actually a problem and not the solution. A man who would not have been able to communicate would have been more alienated, there is no denying that technology transformed Stephen Hawking. While God is the author of the human, the new media designer is the author of the posthuman.

Reference:

Figure 1: Stephen Hawking. 2015. Web. 13 Oct. 2016.

Figure 2: Stephen Hawking. 2015. Web. 13 Oct. 2016.

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