

EXISTENZ, DAVID CRONENBERG - LIQUID LIFE: A CASE STUDY

Soumis par admin le Mon, 07/16/2018 - 15:59

Auteur(s) (texte brut)

Hanja Maksim

Chapô

eXistenZ is a film that has the potential to greatly inspire research in that it frontally challenges the virtualization of our world by offering a comparison between the real world, in which we continue to live and evolve, and a world made possible by technology. In a kind of artistic support, it seems, can address this topic in such a comprehensive manner, and thus tackle social science from a new angle.

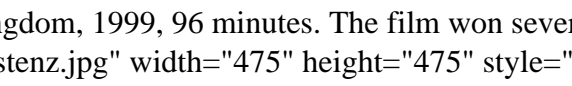
Présentation longue

You have to play the game to find out why you're playing the game

David Cronenberg is a Canadian filmmaker who includes *Videodrome* (1982), *The Dead Zone* (1983), *The Fly* (1986), *Crashtest* (1987), *eXistenZ* (1999). His films tend to be science fiction and fantasy – genres that are particularly suited to questioning and anticipating the problems that lie ahead. *eXistenZ* did this in 1999 by offering a critique of virtualization and the relationship with the body as an as-yet unshakeable link to the real world.

David Cronenberg on *eXistenZ* and the real and virtual (*Les Inrockuptibles*, April 1999).

eXistenZ Kingdom, 1999, 96 minutes. The film won several awards.



the story of Allegra Geller and her unprecedented video game that links the player to a virtual world via a “pod” inserted into the central nervous system. But the unveiling of *eXistenZ* by its designer is disrupted by objectors - guardians of the status quo - staving off the extreme virtualization and technologization the game proposes. The viewer is gradually drawn into the virtuality within the world of the film, in which the two have become confused. This is reflected in particular by the presence of characters that resemble fetuses and umbilical cords.

Analysis of the long term

Linking past, present and future

The director offers us numerous points of comparison with the scientific literature, particularly as regards the place in a particular type of near (virtual) future, although the research typically conceives the present and near future in terms of memory, changes, former policies and historical events (including personal ones), and the effects of their materialization as they are today. The virtualization of the future world we find in *eXistenZ* led to a plethora of special effects which are likewise representations of imaginaries of virtual mobility and clearly differ not only from the imaginaries of other artists, but also within the social sciences.

Analysis of the long term

* Analyzing the trajectories of public action among others, helps to identify changes in ways of thinking, and the obstacles to and levers for implementing measures. This perspective allows us to better identify changes in public action (Fontaine and Hassenteufel, 2007) and the dependency on time (Pflieger et al., 2009).

* The value of time is based on the assumption that each person has limited time. It therefore follows that we attempt to make the best use of them

Mobile Lives Forum – Lexicon

Emmanuel Ravalet).<p><p class="CORPS">* Time has gradually acquired a qualitative value that brings new perspectives to research by focusing particularly on how mobility is used (Lyons and Urry, 2005).</p></blockquote></div><p class="CORPS">Motility</p><p class="CORPS">The concept of motility is also found here in its fullest expression. Physical movement remains in a state of potential, and mobility exists virtually without it, via technology, giving the characters a kind of ubiquity and allowing them to go from one world to another. However, by staying connected, they never leave completely, and thus reside in both.</p></div><blockquote><p class="CORPS">Motility</p><p class="CORPS">* 'Motility is defined as the set of characteristics which enables individuals to move (namely their social conditions of access, skills and mobility projects). Motility therefore refers to social conditions of access (the conditions under which it is possible to use the offer in the broadest sense of the term), skills (those required to use the offer) and mobility projects (the actual use of the offer allowing the individual to realize them)' (Mobile Lives Forum – Lexicon – Motility, by Vincent Kaufmann).</p></blockquote></div><p class="CORPS">Virtual media as a means of transport</p><p class="CORPS">The medium Cronenberg uses to move his characters - a video game - is rarely addressed in research on mobility: scientific literature rarely, if ever, considers this medium. Moreover, generally speaking, the objects of information and communication technologies that most interest researchers (mobile telephones, computer technology, the Internet, etc.) do not always appear as such — that is, as direct tools of and supports for mobility. In many cases however, they are clear and identifiable, though their role remains marginal. By using a video game as a support for mobility, the film proposes a return to the concept of mobility itself, which in other fields is essentially based on the use of different modes of transportation, thus sometimes isolating this variable too much.</p></div><blockquote><p class="CORPS">Mobility and transportation</p><p class="CORPS">* Transportation studies have occasionally been criticized for being too marked by analysis of changes in transportation systems, and thus a certain technological determinism (Urry, 2007).</p><p class="CORPS">Mobility and technologies</p><p class="CORPS">* Technology plays a role in the social construction of mobility (Kesselring, 2005) in that it represents places that may be of particular importance in our daily lives and mobility.</p><p class="CORPS">* New forms of mobility allow individuals paradoxically to be both present and absent, present in absence, and even allow for a certain form of ubiquity, especially via information and communication technologies (Urry and Sheller, 2006).</p></blockquote></div><p class="timeless">Comparing two worlds: the real world vs. the virtual world</p><p class="timeless">While these two worlds oppose one another, they also intermingle, as demonstrated by the group of participants directly connected to the virtual game. The war that takes place between supporters of this virtuality and those who object to a virtual world defined by technological determinism allows us to glimpse a critique of the important shift our societies are making toward virtualization. This same critique can notably be found when one realizes that eXistenZ participants' bodies at all times remain connected to physical reality via pods that resemble umbilical cords and fetuses, preventing the former from becoming disconnected from reality.</p></div><blockquote><p class="timeless">Physical and virtual mobility</p><p class="timeless">* Researchers distinguish several forms of mobility in the contemporary world, including: the physical mobility of individuals (i.e. for work or leisure activities); the physical movement of objects (flows of economic goods, sending gifts, etc.); imaginary mobility (via images of places and people moving); virtual mobility; and finally communications-related (through messages or by phone). These different types of mobility are interrelated (Urry, 2000 and 2008).</p></blockquote></div><p class="timeless">The transition from heavy modernity to liquid modernity</p><p class="timeless">Other ingredients appear in an original way in this work. One of the most obvious is the reference to a modernity that is no longer heavy (like other forms of art as well as more classic sociology), but rather liquid. In liquid modernity - as conceived by Bauman - borders shift or evaporate altogether, and movement accelerates to the point of annihilating time. Nevertheless, the fact that we often find one conception or the other, depending on the context and the fact that the two conceptions tend to ignore or oppose one another, reflects a gap between so-called post modern scientific literature. This is based on, among other things 1) the advent of information and communication technologies and the

weakening of spatial dimensions and 2) territories as they are really experienced, lived and traveled, where we still observe the presence and anchoring of physical and social boundaries. In fact, many artists have begun to reconcile these theoretical approaches by showing that, in many instances, both are relevant simultaneously without being mutually exclusive.

Heavy modernity

* Sigmund Bauman (2000) talks about heavy modernity - as opposed to so-called liquid modernity - which he associates with the era of territorial conquest. It was also the era of the domination of space by time, which can be overcome by transportation, communication and information technologies, so as to shorten distances.

Liquid modernity

* According to Bauman, liquid modernity is characterized most notably by technological development that aims to accelerate movement, resulting in the annihilation of space by time.

How the work informs research: a growing inability to live in the “real” world?

eXistenZ addresses issues that are dear to mobility research, especially those related to information and communication technology and virtual mobility. By doing so in this unprecedented way, allowing us to immerse ourselves in an environment that compares virtual reality and the physical world, the film proposes an analysis not only of concepts from the social sciences from an original perspective, but even succeeds in introducing ideas that the latter has not yet (or is just now) exploring. For instance, the film suggests the possible inability to live in what we might call the “real” world, thus leading us to question our own relationship to the body when it comes to mobility. This observation could inspire research on motricity, to name only one.

Motricity

* Motricity refers to our perception of our environment from a practical and sensitive standpoint, and to the body’s capacity for expression, allowing us to develop and in turn, improve our motor skills, which we can use to anticipate trajectories (including those of others), adapt our itineraries or activities, etc. (Thomas, 2004).

References

Bauman Z. (2000), *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Fontaine J., Hassenteufel P. (2007), *Quelle sociologie du changement dans l’action publique? Retour au terrain et refroidissement théorique*, In : Fontaine J., Hassenteufel P., *To change or not to change? Les changements de l’action publique à l’épreuve du terrain*, Rennes : Presses universitaires de Rennes.

Kesselring S. (2005), *New mobilities management. Mobility pioneers between first and second modernity*. *Zeitschrift für Familienforschung*, Heft 2/2005, 129-143.

Lyons G., Urry J. (2005), *Travel time use in the information of age*, In: *Transportation Research Part A*, Vol. 39, pp. 257-276.

Pflieger G., Kaufmann V., Pattaroni L., Jemelin Ch. (2009), *How Does Urban Public Transport Change Cities? Correlations between Past and Present Transport and Urban Planning Policies*, *Urban Studies*, 46(7) 1421–1437.

Sheller M., Urry J. (2006), *The new mobilities paradigm*, *Environment and Planning*, Vol. 38, 207-226.

Thomas R. (2004), *Quand le pas fait corps et sens avec l’espace. Aspects sensibles et expressifs de la marche en ville*, *Revue européenne de géographie*, N° 261.

Urry J. (2000), *Sociology beyond Societies. Mobilities for the Twenty First Century*. London: Routledge.

Urry J. (2007), *Mobilities*. Oxford : Polity Press.

Urry J. (2008), *Moving on the Mobility Turn*. In Canzler et al., ‘Tracing Mobilities. Towards a Cosmopolitan Perspective’.

Date de publication

September 2013

Auteur(s)

Hanja Maksim (Sociologue)

Index / Ordre d’affichage