

Strange Culture

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Strange Culture-

- Steve's Incident
- Lynn's Film

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Steve's Incident-

- CAE background
- The incident itself
- More recent developments
- Implications

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CAE background

- Artist collective founded in 1987 by Steve Kurtz and Steven Barnes
- "dedicated to exploring the intersections between art, technology, radical politics, and critical theory." (CAE website)
- Art that examines questions surrounding information, communications, and bio technologies
- Installations, performance, writings, ...
- Very well known before this incident (Artforum, Kunstforum, The Drama Review, ...)

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CAE's book, Molecular Invasion (Autonomedia, 2002)

- "Over the past five years Critical Art Ensemble (CAE) has traveled extensively doing participatory performances that critique the representations, products, and policies related to emerging biotechnologies. When we do projects concerning transgenics, one of the most common questions participants ask is whether CAE is for or against genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The reply from group members is always the same: We have no general position. Each product or process has to be taken on a case-by-case basis. Some appear disastrous (primarily to the environment), while others seem soundly engineered and useful. The real question of GMOs is how to create models of risk assessment that are accessible to those not trained in biology so people can tell the difference between a product that amounts to little more than pollutants for profit and those which have a practical and desirable function, while at the same time have no environmental impact... For those without scientific training, the question of what constitutes scientific rigor seems to be a mystery, and reading a study on the safety of transgenic products appears to be a mountain that is too high to climb. The concerned public can be further bamboozled by specialized vocabularies. The result is that individuals are left with the implied obligation that they should just have faith in scientific, government, and corporate authorities that allegedly always act with only the public interest in mind."

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The incident itself

- Police called to house for unrelated tragedy
- Police see petri dishes & scientific instruments related to his art
- FBI notified, sends in biohazard team, and Steve is accused of bioterrorism

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More recent developments

- May 2008 (4 years later) Dept of Justice failed to appeal his dismissal w/ 30 day window
- FBI finally returned the art projects, research materials and personal belongings seized in its 2004 raid on Steve's home
- Oct 2007 Dr Robert Ferrell, Pitt Genetics Dept, pled guilty to lesser misdemeanor charge after recurring cancer and 3 strokes since his indictment

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Implications

- Paranoia of bioterrorism
- Erosion of constitutional rights & civil liberties if accused of terrorism
- Criminalizing civil violations like "mail fraud"
- Difficulty of critiquing controversial areas without being indicted
- Outspokenness against perceived government & agribusiness excesses can be perceived as evidence of disposition towards terrorism
- Taking 4 years of someone's life under threat of jailing
- An exhibition invitation w/ Arabic writing can be "evidence" of terrorism

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Lynn's Film-

- Lynn as media artist
- Strange Culture as film

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Lynn as media artist

- Works in wide variety of media (photography, film, video, photo collage, installation, new media, ...)
- In 1999, the ZKM Mediamuseum cited her as the "most influential woman working in new media"
- Her work is in MoMA, Canadian National Gallery, the Hess Collection, ZKM Mediamuseum, ...
- Has had over 200 exhibitions, completed 53 videotapes
- As academic: UC Davis Art Dept (chair), Program in Technoculture Studies, SFAI, Cornell

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Lynn's themes

- Relationship of spectatorship to identity
- Relationship btwn bodies and machines
- Relationship btwn real and virtual
- Themes of Identity (particularly female), Surveillance, Privacy
- Themes of Gender, Technology
- Using new/emerging technologies

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Lynn's selected Works

- Roberta Breitmere (1971-78 performance)--fictional character
- Dante Hotel (1973-74)--reconstructs fictional occupants through fragments of their identity
- Phantom Limb (1980-1990 photos)--female bodies with limbs from communications technologies
- Longshot (1989)--video editor secretly shooting woman, tries to control her destiny
- Camera Obscura (1998 installation)--real-time digital capture becomes reverse surveillance system
- Dollie Clones (1995-98 installation)--telerobotic dolls absorb humans into their internal networks
- TechnoLust (2002)--Cyberidentity, cloning, and the future of hybrid occupants and artificial life

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Roberta Breitmore (1971-78 performance)--fictional character (avatar?)



Roberta Breitmore (1971-78 performance)--fictional character



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Dante Hotel (1973-74)--reconstructs fictional occupants through fragments of their identity



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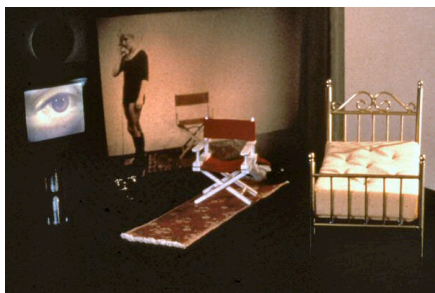
Phantom Limb (1980-1990 photos)--female bodies with limbs from communications technologies (cyborgs)



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Room of One's Own Peepshow (1990-93 interactive box)--women framed through viewers' gaze in media



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Dollie Clones (1995-98 installation)--telerobotic dolls absorb humans into their internal networks



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TechnoLust (2002)--Cyberidentity, cloning, and the future of hybrid replicants and artificial life



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Strange Culture as film

- different kind of documentary/docudrama
- interweaving reenactments with artworks, interviews, and even discussions between the actors and Kurtz himself (self-reflexively critiquing the idea of reenactment)
- some impetus for reenactments is the legal restrictions on what Kurtz could say
- continues Lynn's themes of surveillance, privacy, individual, identity, ...
- "We needed actors to reinterpret events, to open out the edges of the film, just like Steve's life was opening to interpretation."
- "I think there's a sense of immediacy, for one thing. You have the drama, but you have what's behind the drama. ... This gives you a different kind of interpretation of what truth is. Truth is not just one omniscient voice, one omniscient character that says everything."

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- <http://besser.tsoa.nyu.edu/impact/s94/speakers/hershman/hershman-leaflet.html>
- <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/e-art/e/lynn-hershman.html>

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