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Abstract

Through a close reading of the 1976 artist's book and exhibition catalogue "Celebration of the Body," the N.E. Thing Co. Ltd.'s pioneering representations of the body's "informationalization" are situated within the conceptual company's creative reworking of Marshall McLuhan's sensory media theories. In turn, McLuhan's thought is located within a genealogy of physiological aesthetics that troubles conventional narratives of Conceptual art as a movement defined by its engagement with theories of cognition, language, and systems. Friedrich Kittler's analysis of modernism as reflecting the decomposition of the body under a regime of psychophysical experimentation provides the framework for this article's re-evaluation of the Toronto School theorist and his influence on the foundational Vancouver-based "critical company."

En utilisant une lecture attentive du livre d'artiste et catalogue d'exposition « Celebration of the Body », 1979, les représentations du corps numérisé de N.E. Thing Co. sont encadrées dans le remaniement créatif des théories médiatique de Marshall McLuhan entrepris par la compagnie. À leurs tours, les pensées de McLuhan sont placées dans une généalogie d'esthétique physiologique qui dérange les récits conventionnels de l'art conceptuel comme étant un mouvement défini par son engagement avec les théories de la cognition et du langage. L'analyse de Friedrich Kittler de modernisme comme réflexion de la décomposition du corps effectuée par des expériences psychophysique fournit le cadre pour cette réévaluation du théoricien de l'École de Toronto et son impact sur la « compagnie critique » fondatrice de Vancouver.

Keywords

Marshall McLuhan; N.E. Thing Co. Ltd.; Conceptual art; Information art

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"Celebration of the Body": Marshall McLuhan and the Sensory Conceptualism of N.E. Thing Co. Ltd. Article. Full-text available. This chapter examines the influence of the Swiss art historian and architectural critic Sigfried Giedion on the collaborative work that developed during the Culture and Communications Seminar (1953–1955) and the publication of the Explorations journal (1953–1959) at the University of Toronto. Chaired by Marshall McLuhan, the graduate seminar was co-directed by cultural anthropologist Edmund Carpenter along with British urban planner Jaqueline Tyrwhitt, political scientist Thomas Easterbrook and psychologist D. Carleton Williams. When the sensory inputs are dim, the sensory response is correspondingly strong. This is why small children are always "poetic" in their responses to anything at all. A child’s sensory reception is very selective, somewhat in the manner of what is offered our senses by "abstract" art. This amounts to a new posture or situation of the old body which engenders a chain reaction both in the senses and in the environment. He then suggests the topic in which this book had its genesis: the idea of brief studies of the theories of communication of famous or important figures in major fields. It has nothing to do with reason as such. Reasoning does not occur on single planes or in a continuous, connected fashion. The mind leapfrogs.