Experiments in Energy: 3 Technological Ritual Acts

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ABSTRACT
Experiments in Energy is a three act ritualistic performance of a tribe of future cyborgs who require life-giving electrical energy and revere technology as divine. The experience looks into the notion that as technology becomes more and relevant in life, so do the rituals involved in its use. By presenting 3 example techno-tribal ceremonies inspired by real-life rituals, the performance intends to bring to mind ones own technological rituals.

Categories and Subject Descriptors
J.5 [**Computer Applications**]: Arts and Humanities

General Terms
Human Factors, Performance

1. INTRODUCTION
Throughout history, most human cultures have surrounded technology with myth and ritual. [9]

As the use and dependence upon modern technology grows, so does the modern cyborgs development of technological ritual. In Roy Rappaport's *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, "ritual" is defined as "the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers" [8]. As performers, modern cyborgs engage in numerous formals acts such as the seeking of social connectivity via wifi hostpot, the transformation of self through online avatars and personas, and the consumption of nourishment from electrical energy through batteries and power bricks. Since modern technology was developed with a "disenchantment towards religion", these acts are not seen as having any religious value. By presenting new technological rituals based on traditional tribal acts, the authors hope bring about discussion on how daily life is becoming full of technological ritual.

2. BACKGROUND
The development of *Experiments in Energy* is influenced by a group of notable previous works. As a study of technological ritual, it is inspired by the *Power Pilgrims* project where red cloaked religious members sought electrical sockets as an act of submission to "The Great Technological Systems" which literally kept them clothed: "without power the electro-magnets cease to function and the robe falls to the ground in pieces, leaving the pilgrim naked, ashamed and repentant" [1].

As a performance piece, *Experiments in Energy* is influenced by previous works which have engaged in highlighting a relationship between energy, action, and sound: SensorBand, *Afasia*, and Maywa Denki. The SensorBand trio of van der Heide, Zbigniew, and Tanaka performed using sensor-based gestural computer music controllers such as the Soundnet — a giant musical web for "human spiders" [2]. *Afasia*, a self-proclaimed "ultimate homeric one-man-multimedia-band", centered around a sensor-suit clad performer who controlled various multimedia video streams and robotic musicians [6]. Japanese performance/device art group Maywa Denki utilizes elaborate mechanical devices controlled by simple movement methods, such as the pull of a cord, in order stir peoples attention to the fact that the "live musical sound is created from a substance (musical instrument)" [4].

3. EXPERIMENTS IN ENERGY
Experiments in Energy presents 3 energy rituals as practiced by a "primitive" man-machine tribe from a future where technology has regained its status as "magic". The performance is broken into 3 acts using the theatrical allegory of life, death, and rebirth through electrical energy and each act is influenced by a tribal ritual from history. Energy is focused upon since it is a basic need felt by anyone who uses ubiquitous power-hungry electronic devices. The tools used within these rituals are not the stereotypical "bamboo, rain sounds, and incense", but sensors, graphics, and computer generated sound using the robotcowboy wearable computer music system [10]. By stretching the theme of technological ritual to the extreme, the authors hope to highlight ways in which our everyday lives have become full of tiny rituals demanded by our use of technology.

3.1 Experiment 1: Life
The ritual of life in Experiment 1 is a dance for life-sustaining electrical energy inspired by rain dances of Native American tribes from the southwestern United States. These tribes, such as the Pueblo, Hopi, and Zuñi,"depend on the good graces of the rain gods" and entreat the gods for moisture through rituals involving song and dance in order to help their crops grow in their arid environment [7]. Similarly, the tribe of the future lives in a harsh environment barren of electrical energy and calls for the help of technological gods. This dance is performed in a manner influenced by Meyerhold's "bio-mechanics" in order to convey the inherent efficiency these future cyborgs must utilize to conserve their precious electrical lifeblood.

Figure 1: The custom light suit which symbolically feeds on sound energy.

3.2 Experiment 2: Death

Experiment 2 is a cannibalistic mortuary ritual where the future cyborg tribe reclaims energy from its dying brethren devices. In certain cannibalistic societies, such as the Wari' tribe of the Brazilian rainforest, honor and respect for the dead are shown by the consumption of their flesh whereby "eating can be an act of compassion that pleases the thing consumed so that it bestows abundance on the eaten". The act of mortuary cannibalism is also seen as "honoring the dead by preventing their body substances from being lost to the earth" since the ground is considered dirty and polluting. [3] The future tribe honors its dead in a similar manner, sharing the deceased's energy among the remaining members. This act is presented using circuit-bent consumer electronics as the dead whose sound and electrical energy will power a custom light-suit (Fig. 1) that glows dependent upon sound level, rendering the transmission of energy tangible as the devices are consumed.

3.3 Experiment 3: Rebirth

Reminiscent of the African mask tradition, a masked shaman of the future cleanses the cannibalised energy of the tribe in Experiment 3. In the African mask tradition, "the performance of masked figures is generally thought to represent the visit of spirits from beyond among men in the here and now" who act as arbitors, guides, and mediums of the spirit world [5]. Similarly, the masked figure of the future tribe represents the personified spirit of magical technology who has the ability to cleanse ones consumed energy and data. This ritual will be performed using the robotcowboy helmet (Fig. 2), a working computer monitor mask, and touch sensors which will sonify the "cleansing" act of the electrical shaman.

4. CONCLUSIONS

As a performance, *Experiments in Energy* is meant to be an engaging look into a technological tribe of the future; as commentary, it notes the increasing trend of technological ritual. By focusing on 3 acts of energy, the authors hope to draw a link to the practical energy rituals with which modern cyborgs are accustomed. The "energy dance" of Experiment 1 can be seen as an extension of the isolation felt when the power is knocked out by a storm; Experiment 2's "en-

Figure 2: An electrical shaman using the robotcowboy helmet.

ergy reclamation" is the work within a spiritual electronics junk yard; and the masked electrical shaman of Experiment 3 can be seen as a medium to the Internet which has become the true technical construct on which we depend as cyborgs.

5. REFERENCES

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