



TELEMATIC TUBS AGAINST TERROR: BATHING IN THE IMMERSIVE INTERACTIVE MEDIA OF THE POST-CYBORG AGE

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Telematic Tubs consisted of a network of bathtubs equipped with webcams, computers, web browsers and other "immersive" media, with the goal of creating interactive shared bathing spaces that explored the relationship between public and private space. Some of the tubs also included other sensors, such as electrocardiographs (ECG, heart monitors) and electroencephalographs (EEG, to monitor brainwaves) so that the communal bath environment encompassed both the body and the mind.

To begin the project, I proposed the concept of *Telematic Tubs* and put out a message calling for others to set up sister nodes linked to the tub at Deconism Gallery, to provide an immersive experience in which participants at

various locations could bathe in water at the same temperature, wave state, etc., and share in an audiovisual experience. The tub's water temperature, as well as its wave states (status of the jacuzzi jets, etc.) were on-line to enable others to adjust their water temperature and wave patterns so that all participating tubs would have identical bathing conditions. Participants supplied live video feeds from their tubs' webcams.

The first *Telematic Tubs* event was combined with the opening of the Simon Penny/Bill Vorn exhibit and the opening keynote address for the Subtle Technologies conference, all of which took place at Deconism Gallery at 330 Dundas Street in Toronto on 22 May 2003. The keynote panel discussion (between Derrick de Kerckhove, Ronald de Sousa, Simon Penny and myself) probed issues of simulation and simulacra at the cyborg/post-cyborg boundary, setting an appropriate context for *Telematic Tubs* to take place later that same evening.

Those who wished to participate had been informed to BYOBAT (Bring Your Own Bathing Suit And Towel), but this event was only open to persons who could prove that their social security or social insurance number was not an odd number. Those who could not prove that the last digit of their social security number was not 1, 3, 5 or 7 were stigmatized by not being allowed to participate. This symbolized the seemingly arbitrary nature of suspicion. Additionally, through biofeedback, attendees were invited to suppress the odd harmonics of their brainwaves, using brainwave therapy to cure Obedience Deficit Disorder (ODD). Those who were not ODD were rewarded in various ways.

Participation, of course, involved a stripping off of cyborg prostheses

(clothing, eyeglasses, wearable computers, etc.), and then re-connecting in a collective (de)consciousness (see Statement Frontispiece).

We did a series of further *Telematic Tub* exhibits and performances, such as DECONcert2 on 29 May 2003, which involved participants being connected to brainwave electrodes for the generation of regenerative jazz (jazz generated through the brainwave feedback of the audience) from a stream-of-(de)consciousness.

After the brainwave jazz performance, attendees were invited to participate in a much different kind of telematic bathing experience later that evening. This time each person was connected to brainwave electrodes going to a separate input channel of a system programmed to measure the visual arousal level of each participant. The visual arousal indices, measured by harmonic analysis of the brainwaves of each participant, were used to control the firing angle on a triac-based light dimmer. Participants involuntarily controlled the light shining on them by the extent to which they were visually aroused. Initially all the lights were off until someone was visually aroused, at which point he or she would be illuminated for everyone else to see. This created a visual arousal feedback loop among the participants.

Thus, with *Telematic Tubs*, the public bath, a concept that already challenges the notion of physical privacy of the body, now takes on the role of challenging the privacy of the mind. *Telematic Tubs* stripped attendees of their prosthetic shells and probed both the mind and the body. The tub events turned the clothed (concealed) individual into an exposed element of a collective (de)consciousness, assimilated into its immersive medium of water and brainwaves.

Frontispiece. Steve Mann, *Telematic Tubs*, light-vector painting, 1312 × 2000 × 192 bpp PLM (Portable Lightspace Map), 2003. (© Steve Mann) People in different places bathe in tubs having the same wave state, water temperature, wave patterns etc., together with projections of shadows on the translucent outer surfaces of the tub. The hot tub is traditionally a place to relax, but in the age of bioterror hysteria, it is a place to be free of contamination, contraband and the liberty to conceal. The word "hysterical" derives from the Greek word for "womb," which is further suggested in that the electrodes worn by each participant form a kind of umbilical cord.