La Melanconia della Tecnologia: intervista a Bryn Oh
di **Cristina Cilli**

Parte Prima

E' con grande piacere che in occasione dell'installazione al MiC "Family Unit" di Bryn Oh, mi accingo a rieditare una intervista che abbiamo fatto all'ultima edizione del Digital Café di Più Libri, curata da Marina Bellini, lo scorso dicembre.

In quell'occasione mostrammo un Machinima di uno dei primi lavori di Bryn: 26 Tines, storia tenera e malinconica, di una creatura e del suo scienziato.

La cifra che chiamerò "tecnologia meditativa", è sempre stata presente nei lavori realizzati da Bryn Oh, nei mondi virtuali. Così come l'interattività che permette sia una esperienza rilassante nell'esplorare l'installazione, così come la sensazione di pericolo imminente o appena passato. Una riflessione costate, insomma, in chiave altamente poetica, di come si svolgono le relazione umane nell'epoca del digitale, senza dimenticare la realtà quotidiana, vissuta nella prima vita e nel passato. Relazioni, quelle con le tecnologie, che hanno differenti valenze: spesso Bryn usa le sue installazioni come appunti di un sogno melanconico che nella vita diurna, in genere, non è dato mostrare. Per questo le sue installazioni sono immerse nel buio della notte, come a dire che esistono una luce e uno spazio propri dell'immersione dentro se stessi: così come sono immerse – le sue opere – in quella vaga nebbia che ci accoglie nella zona tra il sonno e la veglia, quando i ricordi del sogno sfuggono alla luce del giorno, ma lascia, apparentemente vaghe, tracce di sé nella memoria. Tracce che Bryn sollecita nella circolarità di percorso e di visione, anche tra arte antica e contemporanea, in cui l'artista pone le proprie installazioni.

L'intervista è divisa in tre parti per facilitarne la lettura on line ed è in inglese. Ritengo importante darla al lettore così come è avvenuta, per non tradirne il sapore originale. Poi, ai tempi di internet, ci si destreggia con i traduttori. Buona lettura.

1. *Let's begin to speak about your visual poetic style in SL. If I should choose some keywords for your art work, since the very first beginning, let's say "26 Tines" I would: loneliness, silence, black. Why so?*

In my first life I am a fairly happy person I think, but like most people I have little pockets of sadness. I would never want to burden my family or friends with some of the things I dwell on and in some cases it would really hurt them emotionally if I were to do so. They

might feel responsible in some way and I don't want anyone to feel that way. Being anonymous in a virtual world allows me to say things I otherwise would not. My family and friends will never know Bryn Oh is me so its essentially a nice big diary with a lock on it.

The darkness in much of my work though, is a bit different. Aesthetically I am considered to be Steampunk. Steampunk art is traditionally a mix of Victorian sensibilities mixed with modern alternate technology. When I make Steampunk, I like it to be a bit dim. In addition, I love the dark works of artists like Georges de la Tour. Technically though, darkness on a monitor allows the viewer to focus more on contrasting light areas. It is a compositional tool which allows me to pull the eye from one area to another. The artwork 26 tines is called a "cam build". The avatar arrives to the work and comes across a small door. Their avatar is too big to go into the door so they must disengage their view or camera and enter the hole without their "body". The machinima or movie you refer to follows a scripted camera so it become more like a movie. But in the virtual world the viewer experiences it as an unscripted open ended environment and must discover ways to enter and explore it. I am not sure if you will show that machinima on tv but the part after the radio where the camera goes down the narrow tunnel, the viewer must find that tunnel in Second Life and go down it. Many never do. My works are often about the excitement in finding hidden things, like turning over a rock to find a giant centipede to look at. I spoke to an American artist the other day and he stated that he didn't want to do "work" to see my art. He wanted it laid before him like some kind of King, expecting me to be pleased that he has even taken the time to look at it. I believe the opposite whereby doing the work and finding hidden parts that you know others have not found is what makes the artwork special. When people find something hidden and intimate they have separated themselves from the average person who only know the surface of the artwork. Finding the layers is the true interaction.

2. You are a oil painter in RL. Which differences in feelings, thoughts and action are involved in expressing your art in two different kind of art? There are similarities between them?

The same basic principles of colour, form, line and composition apply to the virtual world as a medium, but with a few differences one must consider.
In the Galleria Nazionale di Capodimonte in Naples there is a work by Mattia Preti called Banchetto di Assalonne.

It is a fine example of using composition to circulate the viewers eye within the painting. From above you see two men with knives ready to murder the man at the table, the angle of the blades lead the viewers eye to the focal point which is the man about to be murdered. The angles of the bodies around him create an oval frame which keeps the eye

circling around the subject. If your eye leaves this area it will meet secondary figures outside the oval who are all pointing or looking at the subject which again brings the viewer back to the focal point. Even the pillar to the top right is shaped like an upside down U to propel the eye back to the other subjects should, God forbid, your eye wander over there. You can control where the viewer looks because the human eye tends to follow along lines and contours rather than against them. It is a subconscious trait and also applies to the eye path of figures who
are depicted as looking at something. As humans we want to see what they are looking at so we follow their gaze.

Preti controls where he wants you to look. The image is static so he knows exactly how you will view his work. In a virtual world composition, you never know from which angle the viewer enters your composition. In Second Life you can disengage your view or perspective so that you need not look from the vantage point of "eyes". Because of this every angle must have a strong composition if possible. It is a very enjoyable challenge.

Parte Seconda

1. *Let's continue to speak about your language through the language and let's composite a kind of an endless mirror: from the first three keywords I Could continue with science/scientific experiment; cave; long tunnel: is this a way to reach "inside and hidden" memories? If yes, remembering what? If not?*
The characters from 26 tines are satellite ones from the main story of the Rabbicorn. Theirs is the melancholy story of two robots who are in a sterile place and just wish for warmth and love. Perhaps I should explain the story as it is in poetry and may be difficult to understand.
The tiny robot in a jar is an experiment the Scientists have created. During the daylight they do tests on him and he is treated not as a living being but as a tool. When night comes the cleaning robot arrives. She lowers her cable into the jar. It has 26 prongs or tines on it, and he has an outlet with 26 holes. In the darkness they connect her cable to his outlet and together they feel an intimate embrace. They stay like this until the morning and it keeps their loneliness at bay. It is like the warmth of a hug where you also get to hug minds.
It is about becoming just a number in a modern world. I am connected to hundreds through things like Facebook, email, blogs, flickr and Second Life but they all lack a certain depth or emotion. I guess my work revolves around the desire to have that magical connection that seems so elusive.

2. *Which is in your work the relationship between written words and moving images?*

In machinima they are two important part to creating Immersiva. They are not always successful as we do live in the age of ADD, but the slow camera movements help create mood in the viewer by slowing their heart and relaxing the body, the colour then influences ones mood and finally the poetry comes in when they have had time to get into the proper mindset. Everything you hear in the machinima was recorded live, the music the ambient sound, they were not added later.
The idea is similar in the 3D virtual build. When the viewer explores my environments they discover the narratives and are influenced by ambient sound and colour as well. But

unlike a machinima they explore in an unscripted manner.

3. In which way in the real world do you drive to seek for the solitude in virtual world

That is an interesting question. In my real world I am an oil painter as I said. My studio is in my home so my days are already spent in solitude. I have one big art show a year and much of my time is spent alone in the studio creating work for this show. One night a year is my opening where people come to drink wine and chat but barely look at my artwork as its too hard to when the gallery is full. Openings are actually the worst time to go see artwork, they are more for people to socialize. When I have been inside too long I wander around outside sometimes, and talk to friends on the phone but surprisingly for me Second Life has more of a social element to it. As far as feedback on art goes. It would be like dozens of strangers or friends popping into my studio each day to see what I was up to, but without the obligation of needing to stop what I am doing to chat. I am a bit messed up I think. I like solitude yet I sometimes crave finding a closeness to others. I am like the mouse who comes out of their hole to look around and sniff the air, then turn around and go back inside.

4. Do you have any relationship with P. k. Dick? In which way, if so, the so called "human science fiction" affected your art?

I really like the work of Phillip Dick and others such as China Mieville and Richard Adams. Books like Oryx and Crake by Margaret Atwood or short stories from the likes of Ray Bradbury or Brian Aldiss.
5. Again about your poetic visual signs: gear, wheels…
Gears and wheels are part of my Steampunk aesthetic. I find them hypnotising they way they slowly turn. Somehow relaxing.

Parte terza

1. You received a fellowship from the Canadian Government to continue your experimental artwork in Virtual Worlds. Could you explain to us why and how it happened that your Government is so sensitive towards your vanguard art?

That is an interesting question and I can only speculate on the reasons. I believe the Ontario Arts Council is a very forward thinking division of the Canadian Government, but I also think part of the openness they have towards accepting new frontiers and mediums in art comes from Canada's history in the arts. What history? well exactly. Our great artists range from merely 100 years ago or so, and in the case of many, they are still alive such as Alex Colville and Christopher Pratt. I spent a year of study in Florence, Italy, while I was at the Ontario College of Art and Design. I recall meeting some very talented Italian artists who felt pressures from Italian society that the Canadians didn't. Each Italian artist had the ghost of Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, Leonardo da Vinci, Sandro Botticelli, Raphael, Titian, Caravaggio , Amedeo Modigliani, Giorgio de Chirico, Donatello and so on hanging above their shoulders. They had to live up to a very rich history in the arts, always being compared to those before them, while Canadians perhaps have a bit more freedom in that we have very little to live up to. No pressures. It is possible that the awarding of arts grants in Canada follows this same freedom.

2. In first life you are an oil painter and during last year's interview you told me that Bryn expresses her artistic virtual work in a different manner from the one you express in first life with the canvas. But you began to paint some of the characters you create for the Metaverse on canvas!!! Why? What has happened? What drive you to such?

Before I found the outlet of creating in a virtual space I knew only work on a static 2D surface canvas. I would think up ideas for characters, but when translated to a canvas they didn't have the depth I wanted in them. When I discovered the metaverse I found a medium that was, for me, a painting I could enter and explore. It allowed for ambient sound, duration, movement and a level of immersion I could not achieve in my paintings. If done well you can allow the viewer to forget their realities as they become immersed in your virtual environment. When I would go back to my paintings I would feel frustrated. They didn't seem relevant to me anymore. Over the last year I began to feel the itch to paint again. Without the itch of desire in the back of your mind it is pointless to paint. The work would come out sterile. So I felt a strong urge to paint but needed to find out where my passion resided. What subject compelled me to create? I realized that my characters now contained all my dreams, worries and the passion of my soul. They allow me to express parts of myself into the canvas due to my deep connection to them, where other mundane subjects no longer have that ability.

3. Let's come back to your virtual artwork. In this last installations is very clear that you are going around the storytelling of your family. Which is for you the relationship between past and present? Why do you still use war songs?

The war song you speak of is done by Vera Lynn. That comes from a radio in the room of my father. My father's parents were killed during WW2 when he was just four. He was sent to an orphanage not unlike those from a Charles Dickens book. His life was defined by growing up without parents to teach him how to love. The adults around him were headmasters who disciplined with violence and he literally was referred to by a number. There has always been a gulf between us to the extent that he has never once said he loves me. He doesn't know how to, because he never learned. The war songs in my work are a melancholy way to refer to this distance. It is the desire to hold someone's hand or wanting to say something, but instead watching them turn away and leave before you are able to do so. It is the moment lost in indecision combined with longing.

4. There is the possibility that your dreams about virtual art may come true. What are your hopes and desires?

I have very simple dreams. I would love to have a stable life where I could just work on virtual art without worrying about money. I think that is called winning the lottery, and I suppose everyone has that same dream. Salaries sound nice too. I would enjoy it if Bryn Oh exhibited in a major gallery or museum. If I had the opportunity to watch people's reactions as they discover that the art created was by an anonymous digital character who could be a man, woman old or young. I would like to see the perplexed reaction of those not accustomed to this new type of identity. Perhaps the identity of the future where we create a barrier to block all the Facebooks, product registrations, spammers and scammers who assail our personal lives for marketing gain or corruption. Because after all, the medium is the message.

Bryn Oh
Bryn Oh is a metaverse artist who is meant to exist only online. She is a concept, a pixel character who inhabits the virtual world of Second Life. The idea is to see if a virtual identity can succeed within the real world of flesh and blood artists.

http://www.blurb.com/books/957542
Major Exhibitions (links are to machinima showing some of the builds)
2011 "BOX", MetaLES
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCVM7aRwHXw
2011 Web3D Conference presenter. Paris, France.
2011 Peter Greenaway Prize (UWA machinima) for "Rusted Gears"
http://www.youtube.com/user/BrynOh?feature=mhum#p/u/4/RnQ5HoUvIT8
2011 "Anna's Many Murders", full sim Immersive narrative.
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S9L7ck6fQB4
book-http://www.blurb.com/bookstore/detail/2360325?
utm_source=badge&utm_medium=banner&utm_content=140x240
2011 "Long Now Orrey", work in Dutch film "My avatar and Me"
http://www.myavatarandme.com/
2011 untitled work with Stelarc
2010 Program on RAI TV. "Digital innovators"
2010 "Standby", Second Life, IBM.
2010 Burn 2.0 invited artist.
2010 "Big Bang" Peter Greenaway project
http://www.youtube.com/user/BrynOh#p/u/0/_nVhkVVEDpk
2010 "Machinima", Queensland University of Technology
2010 "Imagine festival", Second Life, Yoko Ono/ University of Texas San Antonio
2010 Worlds fair Shanghai 2010. Madrid Pavillion (first life)
http://www.youtube.com/user/BrynOh#p/a/u/1/C8Y5VwQKMEs
http://blip.tv/file/3501718
http://www.youtube.com/user/BrynOh#p/u/2/0TOqyTEnrBg
2010 "Through the virtual looking glass", University of Boston
(second life/ first life mix)
2010 "26 tines", installation for the University of Texas San Antonio.
http://blip.tv/file/3200914
2010 MaMachinima International Festival 2010, Denmark
(second life/ first life mix)
2010 "Crosshatch" full sim installation for Rezzable, Open Sim
http://blip.tv/file/3024446
2009 University of Western Australia
2009 "Vessel's Dream", Second Life, Burning Life, Linden Labs.
http://blip.tv/file/2701783
2009 "Imagine festival", Second Life, Yoko Ono/ University of Texas San Antonio
2009 University of Delaware
2009 "BIW top 5", Brooklyn is watching, Jack the pelican presents, Brooklyn, U.S.A.
(second life/first life mix)
http://blip.tv/file/2435685
2009 "Rabbicorn story", Second Life, IBM.
http://blip.tv/file/3106327
2009 "How we play", Neutral Ground, Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada.
(first life)

2009 "Immersiva" a permanent changing exhibition on a sim donated by Dusan Writer
http://brynoh.blip.tv/
2009 "Condo's in Heaven", installation at the University of Kentucky
http://blip.tv/file/2792708
2008 "Carousel of dreams and sorrows", University of Massechussets Caerleon Island
2008 Burning Man (life)
2008 "The Gashlycrumb Tinies" Edward Gorey, A recreation at Arcspace.
2008 "Steampunk artworks", installation at Princeton University Crescent Moon

Bryn Oh's blog
www.brynoh.blogspot.com

Bryn Oh's sims
http://maps.secondlife.com/secondlife/Immersiva/28/126/21

Machinima
http://brynoh.blip.tv/
http://www.youtube.com/user/BrynOh#p/u

Selected articles related to Bryn Oh

"Open Sandbox: New Modalities of Animation Delivery"
Design Principles and Practices; An International Journal Volume 5 Number 4
http://leecadieux.cgpublisher.com/
http://avenuemagazine.blogspot.com/2011/07/stunning-creations-avenues-july-issue_25.html
http://avatarstyle.net/2010/05/24/chat-with-cleo-bryn-among-the-machines/
http://blog.art21.org/2009/11/30/virtual-artists-immersive-discoveries-in-a-virtual-3d-frontier/
http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2010/05/machinima-for-moby.html
Link to PDF file
http://andrewsempere.org/chart2009/CHArt09_asempere_paper.pdf
http://what-so-what.posterous.com/bryn-ohs-rabbicorn-story-a-second-life-art-pi
http://nwn.blogs.com/nwn/2009/11/rabbicorn-in-rl-book.html
http://www.metaversejournal.com/2009/11/09/uwa-3d-art-and-design-challenge-october-round-winners/
http://www.examiner.com/x-4734-Second-Life-Examiner~y2009m10d14-Burning-Life-2009-preview--part-five
http://www.jackthepelicanpresents.com/thefinalfive.html
http://ukisland.wordpress.com/2009/01/31/condos-in-heaven/
http://andrewsempere.blogspot.com/2009/01/bryn-oh-and-destruction-of-heaven.html
http://npirl.blogspot.com/2009/05/attainig-presence-4jetpacks4-and-bryn.html
http://npirl.blogspot.com/2008/09/bryn-oh-chronicles-fall-of-angels-story.html
http://npirl.blogspot.com/2008/07/edward-goreys-alphabet-gets-steampunkd.html
http://secondthoughts.typepad.com/second_thoughts/2009/04/immersiva.html
http://www.afkmag.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=64:bryn-oh-art-on-the-virtual-side-of-life&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=50
http://npirl.blogspot.com/2009/07/machine-poems-and-virtual-sculpted.html

Selected Awards
2011 Ontario Arts Council grant $10, 000 (new media)
2011 Best of Second Life - Original artist winner
2010 UWA art challenge (multiple winner)
2009 BIW/Jack the Pellican Presents -winner

Musei 2.0
Musei di Roma Capitale