Personal Presence Online

The personal note and the human presence online in Net virtual art are key to the main theme of virtuality in art as I understand it—that is, the humanizing of technology through interactivity and neocommunicability as well as sensory immersion and multisensoriality. All of these works discussed here enter entirely into the category of the humanization of technology through the artistic imagination and illustrate perfectly my overall contention—showing the passage from technological to virtual art through the humanization of the machinic through artistic imagination.

As already mentioned in the introduction to this book, from an ontological point of view, contemporary virtual art represents a new departure from technological art since it can be realized as many different actualities. This can also be a useful way to understand the self insofar as the self is truly virtual: it has many potentialities.[10] Thus, the virtual self can be transformed into an actual, living personality. Moreover, virtuality and the virtual can be interpreted as a power opposed to the actual, but whose function, technologically speaking, is a way of being of digital simulation that can lead toward a certain expression of the subjectivity of the operator. This ontological tendency of virtual art can be clearly observed in the works of a good number of artists described in this section.

As I said before, virtual art can even play an ethical role in the present development of globalization by stressing human factors more than any other previous art form—both in regard to the artists and the multiple users of the art—and it could have an impact in a critical and prospective way on this globalization.

A personal note and an inalterable human presence dominates online multimedia works such as the art network *Is There Anybody out There?* (launched in 1998) by Igor Stromajer*. Here, Stromajer deals with loneliness/communication, especially the loneliness that one can experience in cyberspace, behind one's computer window, and in outer space—a loneliness expressed through the emblematic figures of cosmonauts Yury Alekseyevich Gagarin and Valentina Vladimirovna Tereshkova. In space, they were the only humans "there" at the time (the beginning of the 1960s), with no one to share the

extraordinary moments they were living. In Stromajer's view, the two cosmonauts represent the Adam and Eve of our new era. In this work, Gagarin and Tereshkova become kinds of icons, part of a saga and real history. Through them and their symbolic value, space has become part of history, of our life, something "usual" (figures 6.21 and 6.22).

Among other interactive Web art projects developed by Stromajer, *0.html* (1996) operates with a well-known repertoire from computer games and the Internet. On entering, the user is confronted with warning messages hinting at limited access ("Access denied") and is asked to enter a password. If the user chooses the right one, they are permitted access to the different levels of *0.html*: the body observation section, the communication area, the plain of provocative intelligence, and the archives of conditions. All of these levels are linked to sound files. Josip Broz Tito speaks to the nation, the U.S. president explains the geopolitical role of the United States, Kraftwerk counts in reverse
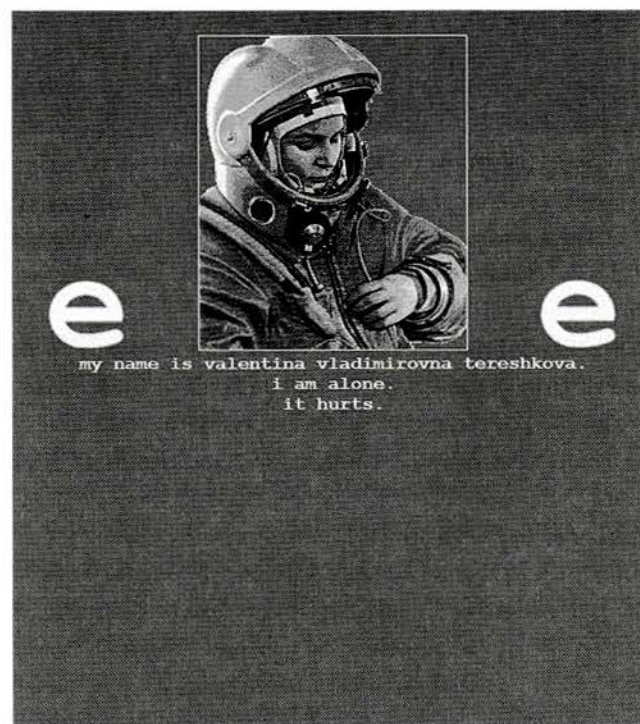

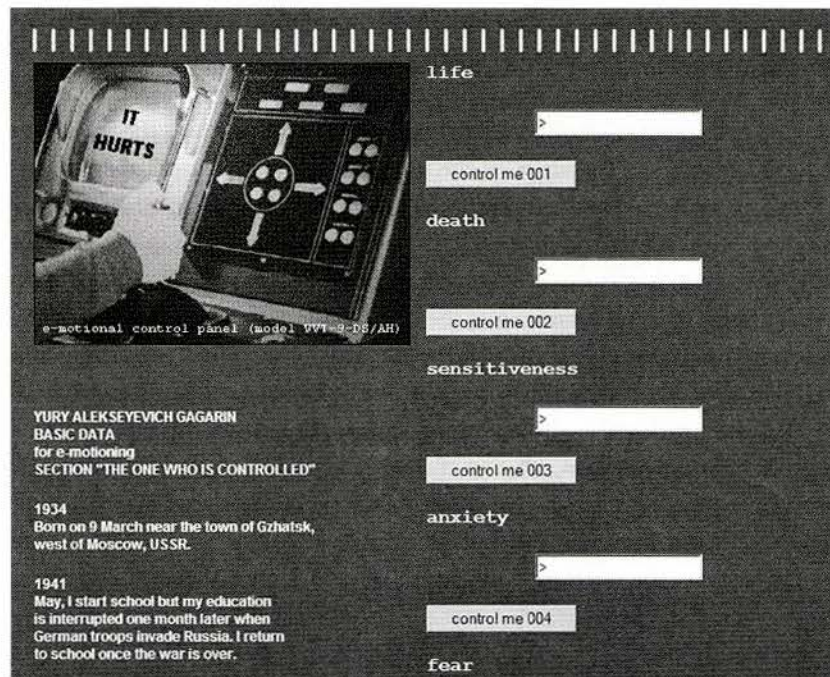**Figure 6.21** Igor Stromajer, *Valentina Vladimirovna Tereshkova*, 1997.

Figure 6.22 Igor Stromajer, *Gagarin*, 1997.

and suddenly there is Neil Armstrong's voice from 1969, telling us about the great leap for humanity. The *0.html* project is an archive of historical techno imagination and world politics with a grain of melancholy. At the end of the tour through this complex project, Stromajer confronts the visitor with the following words: "Internet is the most primitive medium ever."

Like other Stromajer projects, *GSMart* (1999) is a good example of "classical" Net art conceptualism, using the tools and possibilities of the Web in matters of design, interactivity, connectivity, delay, and so forth, for artistic realizations that are only possible in this medium.

In another Net art project, *i want to share you—what are you doing to me? (quero partilhar-te—que me fazes?)* (2001), created by Stromajer in collaboration with Bojana Kunst for Thought, Science, and Interdisciplinary Projects, an international conference on cyberculture held at the Serralves Museum in Porto, Portugal, in October–November 2001, the artist seized the occasion to declare that he was fully equipped for a highly emotional

experience. He managed to disappear deeper and deeper into the whiteness of the landscape, with the sites opening in the subtle and repetitive rhythm of images, voices, and music. Everything here was short, clean, and basic. One traveled through the emotional labyrinths that emerged from the intestines of linked networks. The artist or the user shared the rhythm of these parallel, flickering landscapes revealed in front of them, intriguing them, seducing them with their spaceless speech and imagery. No emotion, just a glimpse of it; no feeling, just the pain of it; no happiness, just the sound of it; no talk, just the word of it; no passion, just the climax of it could be experienced. The intimate landscapes play here with the illusions of mobility, possession, and boundlessness, surprising the participant with their inner history and touching the user with their surprising analogies. We are in the presence of a network of liquid emotion, a fusion of the visible and the invisible. The bonds between the incongruities and spanned incommensurables may seem playful, but they are not innocent. Playfulness is just a mask for a serious adventure taking place on the intimate landscapes. There is a clear threat of emotional attachment. Who provokes the user and who gets provoked? Who fills the user with lust and who is lustful? Who is mobile and who is frozen? Danger resides in the intimate link. What happens if the other loves you too much?

Stromajer is an artist specializing in mobile Internet art and intimate communication art projects, and he has participated in many international contemporary art exhibitions and festivals in Europe as well as North and South America. But he is also the creator of the Intima Virtual Base Web site (1996). The basic substance of his works are the intimate, the ascetic, and interactive aesthetics, and the key words for all his activities are seclusion and ascetics. These imply intimacy, which after all is emphasized in the name of his artistic mark, Intima. A true seeker of the emotional, intimate, and personal aspects of the Internet, and a militant striving to infuse this space with human warmth, Stromajer's virtual base, intima.org, is welcoming and alluring, and yet nonlavish and nonseductive, in its appearance. Stromajer is one of the most versatile artists on the Net, and the first cantor of HTML. His challenging works reinvent Internet navigation and the narrow relationship between the network and fiction. A recent navigational digital Web movie titled Sprinkling Menstrual Navigator (Site Internet, Collection du MNAM-CCI, Centre Pompidou) combines movies with written instructions that are alternately philosophical ("enjoy your sadness"), pragmatic ("enter by clicking enter signs"), or a synthesis of the two ("free your mind and the rest will follow"). The viewer then manipulates the work by clicking on individual film sequences. The resulting "short stories" rely on popular culture and individual (subjective) associations to create their full content.