

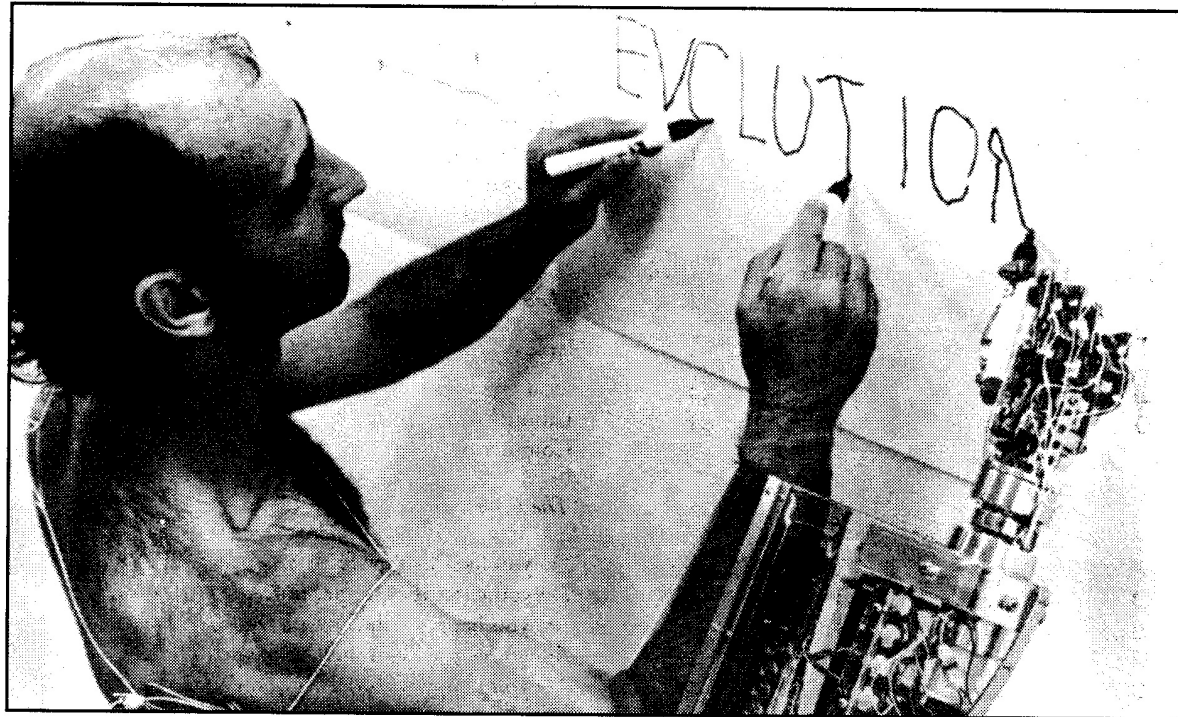
# Wire up, jack in, and mutate

Ben Greenaway asks: how willing are you to prepare for a future where only those who fully embrace technology will survive.

"THE MELTDOWN of metropolitan education systems in the near future is accompanied by a quasi-punctual bottom-up takeover of academic institutions, precipitating their mutation into amnesiac cataspase-exploration zones and bases for manufacturing cyberian soft-weaponry." This quote, from a presentation at Virtual Futures 1994, sums it all up rather nicely. Eric Cassidy, Otto Imken and Dan O'Hara, three post-graduates at Warwick University in the Philosophy and Literature departments, are currently in the final stages of organising VF95. When it happens, you'll be aware of it. From the 26th to the 28th of May, Warwick will be invaded by the future.

Some would say that it already has been. Major research into nanotechnology, chaos & complexity theory and virtual reality is being carried out here already. Big business; lots of money. Where it all comes from is another story... The Santa Fe Institute, America's home for complexity theory, is running a conference in London to prepare company directors and financial controllers for the future of capitalism; the mighty organism currently deciding how much grant you get. Entrance is a mere £2500 per person (that's all three of your student loans) but students of Warwick University will be able to arm themselves with vital cyberian survival information for a tenner!

The conference will mainly be discussing the Human/Machine interface. A research area diverse enough to include both the 'mouse and keyboard' interface that most of us who use computers these days are used to working with, and such extot-



Stelarc: A 'cybernetically enhanced performance artist' with three arms.

Photo: Tony Figallo

ic Sci-Fi as the 'chip in the brain' or the VR 'cybersuit'.

The question is how to mutate, and what to mutate into, in order to adapt to the future. A future where global communication is instantaneous, where currency markets can wipe out a nation before you can move, where a computer virus could decimate your identity, stored on a smart-card in the interest of security.

This fragile, wafer thin silicon future - the apocalypse of all the cyberpunk fiction - is here already. How are you going to deal with it? Adapt to survive. Mutate.

The technophobic reaction to the information revolution can be seen as

a symptom of the old, mechanistic world view, and this is simply out of date. The chaotic view sees unpredictability everywhere. What we once thought of as a safe, well charted environment, say for example civilisation, is in fact fractal, non-linear

control is outdated, deterritorialization and deregulation allow for small pockets of creativity to flourish and the loss of state order forces a survivalist attitude upon the population.

Otto Imken tells me: "The problem with the university is who teaches who, when a seven year old kid is faster on the net than a fifty year old computer science lecturer."

Increased access to the Internet fundamentally changes the learning process. The net gives its users a near infinite supply of resource material for an essay. 'Cut and Paste' essays, the writer as mix-DJ editing text. The assemblage of ideas; the way they flow from A to B (and back to A

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and unpredictable by nature. We should not greet this realisation with fear however, but with anticipation and excitement. If there is no map, then everything is exploration, everything is up for grabs at all times. The boundary of the map expands as you move, and we are all frontiersmen in this brave new world. Centralised

again) will be the marking criteria, like 'how smooth is your mix?' Liberal arts colleges in America are aiming to put a PC in every student room. In Wakeforest they've done it already. Warwick's own MBA course is fully available from a remote access computer terminal. Soon they will realise that students don't need to be on site anymore. Teaching will take place down a 'phone line with students meeting up for short conferences like VF rather than for long terms.

The degree will be forced to compete against the free learning process of net-surfing. In order to tempt students to a University course rather than just learning for themselves, academic institutions will have to surrender control of what is taught to the student, giving him or her far more choice over course elements than is possible with current 'Unusual Options'. With the net as a tool for learning, it is simply a question of how fast you can access. Micro chip implanted in the brain stem? Three arms starts to look a bit lame!

Equipping yourself for the future may not need to be as drastic as Stelarc's complete body rebuild; but changes do have to be made; changes in the way you process and analyse information, digital media and, essentially, time. 'Schizoanalysis', a philosophical doctrine advanced by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari makes the necessary changes to your information handling, and training in survivalist sampling, looping, fading and phasing is supplied by Rave culture.

If philosophy sounds like too much to take when you're cramming for exams, why not try the trance? Take a trip to the Virtual Future.