



Photo: Belisario Franca

FIGGY GUYVER *Your work has always involved cutting-edge technology, from artworks made using Minitel terminals to developing new forms of bio art. You're also about to become the first artist to have an artwork installed on the Moon. How did you first encounter these new technologies?*

Eduardo Kac performing *Intervenção (Interversion)* on Ipanema Beach, Rio de Janeiro, 1982

EDUARDO KAC I've been an avid reader from a young age and, as a boy growing up in Brazil, I read encyclopaedias and dictionaries. When I was 10, I read one called, *Conoscere il Nostro Tempo* or 'Knowing Our Time', in which current things including cybernetics, computer art, and holography were discussed. I became fascinated by this other world opening up before my eyes.

FG *That would have been during the late 1960s, early 1970s, right? I think of that as a time saturated with ideas of the future.*

EK It's interesting... I remember clearly the Moon landing. All the adults were very excited about it, but I wasn't. I'd been reading in comics about people already living in outer space and moving between

planets, so landing on the Moon seemed kind of late. And it paled in comparison.

FG *It seems you've always been ahead of the times, or anticipatory. The Porn Art Movement you were involved with in the early 1980s was very avant-garde. Could you describe the art you were making then?*

EK There's a photograph of me in a pink miniskirt, performing on Ipanema Beach, which alone tells you what was going on there. We were retaking the public space of the beach, where freedom of expression had been suppressed by the military under the dictatorship. It was an opening of possibilities, and it anticipated the gender-based work that is being done today.

Every avant-garde movement is a symptom of what's missing from society. When you think of futurism and its embrace of technology, it wasn't a reflection of the social reality of Italy – at that time, Italy was powered by horses! An avant-garde movement reaches for what isn't there, and the Porn Art Movement did just that.

The vocabulary of the 1970s, not just in Brazil,

was a vocabulary of violence. We didn't want that. We wanted to transform desire, to develop a vocabulary of the revolutionary power of happiness. For instance, when people say 'fuck you', they mean something aggressive. But that's a perversion. It takes something that is supposed to be enjoyable and weaponises it to offend somebody.

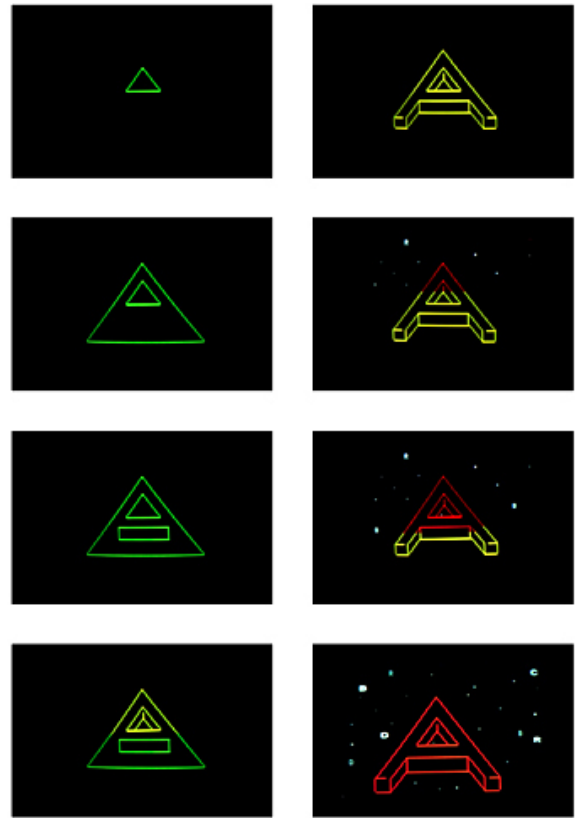
One of the techniques that we developed was to take an expression and build a poem around it, so that when you encountered it, its meaning would not be that of a conduit of violence, but the opposite. Part of the humour came from that cognitive dissonance of experiencing so called 'curse words' in poetic contexts that subverted their meaning. Graffiti was one of the practices of the Porn Art Movement, because it was another way of reclaiming public space.

FG You went on to make a series of works for Minitel terminals, which was a videotex service and a precursor to the internet. What was this system, and why did it appeal to you artistically?

EK Well, Minitel is the name the French gave to their implementation of this medium, and it referred to the terminal itself not the network it was connected to. The UK had its own version, and Japan and Canada had it too. In Brazil, they implemented Minitel as a public service, so you had terminals at malls, libraries, airports. You could use it to do things like buy train tickets.

But I wasn't interested in the way it was conceived. I wanted to develop my own form. The first

Right and below:
Eduardo Kac
Reabracadabra 1985
Video on Minitel terminal
35 secs
24.5 × 25 × 24.5 cm



work *Reabracadabra*, 1985, was my opening salvo, and it was a surprise in every way. The work begins with a green triangle, which loads fast, and is then quickly framed by a second, larger triangle. Lines are added to these shapes until you see a three-dimensional form appear, which is counter to what the Minitel is supposed to do.

Around the 'A' on the screen, dots that resemble stars begin to configure orbital positions. These stars then become consonants, and you realise that the vowel that structures the word 'abracadabra' is the nucleus. The consonants are now moons that orbit this nucleus. There is a relationship between the micro and the macro, the planetary scale and the microscopic.

One of the things that I have worked towards my entire career is undoing dichotomic systems, which serve power in specific ways. For instance, by articulating the difference between men and women, you're able to oppress the other. By articulating the difference between X and Y, or human and non-human you're able to create hierarchies. Once you remove those dichotomies, it becomes very difficult to use them as weapons of domination. This is also why I'm wearing my pink miniskirt on Ipanema Beach.

FG *It's interesting you connect this work back to the Porn Art Movement. *Tesão*, 1985-6, which is perhaps the most ambitious of the four Minitel works, seems more obviously related. The title translates as 'horny' and, over the course of three 'movements', that word is eventu-ally spelled out.*

EK 'Horny' is an approximation: there isn't really an equivalent word in English. In Portuguese, it's a word you can use to talk about yourself, what you feel, but it can also be an adjective that you apply to another person as an expression of desire. It's not offensive – it's an expression that indicates that you find that person attractive.

In the *Tesão* work you're engaged with colour and movement, and not necessarily thinking in terms of language. It wouldn't surprise me if even Lusophones [Portuguese-speakers] didn't see language there. You're mobilised by the action, by the form, the colour, the intensity, the sequence. But I've always been interested in how a person does that. Like with the graffiti work, how do you read it when you yourself are speeding by?

FG *I read that *Tesão* was conceived for a particular person...*

EK Yes. I was in a relationship that was, kind of, evolving. When the person in question came to the opening, I said, 'I've got something for you. It's online.'

FG *What was their reaction?*

EK It was an unusual thing for the time. But we've been together since then, so...

FG *When you realised, in the early 2000s, that these works would cease to exist when the Minitel network was dismantled, how did you go about preserving them?*

EK You never think that the things that form your surroundings will cease to exist entirely. But it's a fact. Like the Minitel, there will be a moment of transition for the internet too.

When I realised that this change was taking place, I knew I would have to do something about it. Fortunately, years earlier, I had my friend take a professional photograph of every keyframe of every Minitel work which proved to be a useful reference. But these are not like traditional animation where you can interpolate between the keyframes. The transition from one frame to another is made by the system, not by you. So you have to create the liminal spaces.

Then there was the question of the technology. You see, the terminal didn't do anything if it wasn't on a network, and the network had ceased to exist.



Eduardo Kac
Tesão (Horny), 1985-6
Video on Minitel terminal
1 min 11 secs
24.5 × 25 × 24.5 cm

I finally managed to get access to... let's call him an 'artisanal engineer' – somebody who was willing to reconstruct the pipeline.

In the end it took me 15 years to complete the process. But I'm not afraid of time – in fact I think it's fascinating.

FG *This relates back to the idea of your work always being ahead of the point that people might be receptive to it. I wonder what you make of that?*

EK Very often what I'm doing, what I'm interested in pursuing, is not yet part of the Zeitgeist or the common circulation of ideas, not yet close to the everyday experience of the audience. For that to happen, the passing of time is necessary. In the case of the Minitel, that was several decades, when even the phenomenon of the network itself no longer existed.

The kind of work that I do seems to have an embedded reception delay. The work Tate is showing is from 1985 to 1986. I was 23 then; I'm 62 now. The work I'm making now will probably find its audience in 30 years.

EDUARDO KAC IS AN ARTIST AND POET. HIS LATEST WORK, *ADSUM*, IS SCHEDULED TO FLY TO THE MOON IN 2025