

# Neil Young swallowed whole by a computer

Neil Young — Trans  
Geffen XGHS 2018

by Nate LaRoi

Last year may have been the year of the computer but if *Trans* is any indication, 1982 was only a warm-up for things to come. Don't look now but Canada's finest singer/songwriter is now in the process of being replaced by a computer.

Before you take offence to the idea, think of it this way: when Neil Young dies they can simply replace him with a robot. As Young once sang, "Hey hey my my / Rock and roll will never die." I guess not. Long as they keep him oiled (remember, rust never sleeps).

Of course there's no need to put Neil out to pasture just yet. So the record company does trot out the authentic flesh and blood Mr Young for the opening cut (and the single), 'Little Thing Called Love.' After going hardcore raunch on *Reactor*, 'Little Thing called Love' is about as strong a return to pop as you could hope for: the acoustic-meets-electric guitar harmonizing is pure delight while the lyrics are playfully human:

See somebody walkin' down the street  
Hangin' head and shufflin' feet  
Don't take much to see  
What they been thinkin' of . . .  
Oh... a little thing called love.

The sequencing of TRON'S next eight songs is based on the movie of the same name. On cut two he is suddenly swallowed up into a giant computer. "We R in control / We R in control / We will prevail and perform our function," a computer happily burps half-way through side one, a goofy siren giving the words a kind of bogus authority.

Through the rest of the album, Young struggles to express himself through piles of microchips. Finally, on TRON'S eight-minute finale, 'Like an Inca,' Mr Young smashes Central Control and re-emerges.

Despite its incredibly repetitive acoustic guitar and its abrupt shifts from minor to major key, 'Like an Inca' is easily the LP's most emotionally affecting track. Considered alongside the earlier lines "Computer age— in harm's way," 'Like an Inca' suggests that turning power over to computers may be the only way to stop the human race from destroying itself:

Said the condor  
To the praying mantis:  
"We're gonna lose this place  
Just like we lost Atlantis"  
Brother we got to go  
Sooner than you know  
The gypsy told my fortune  
She said that nothin' showed

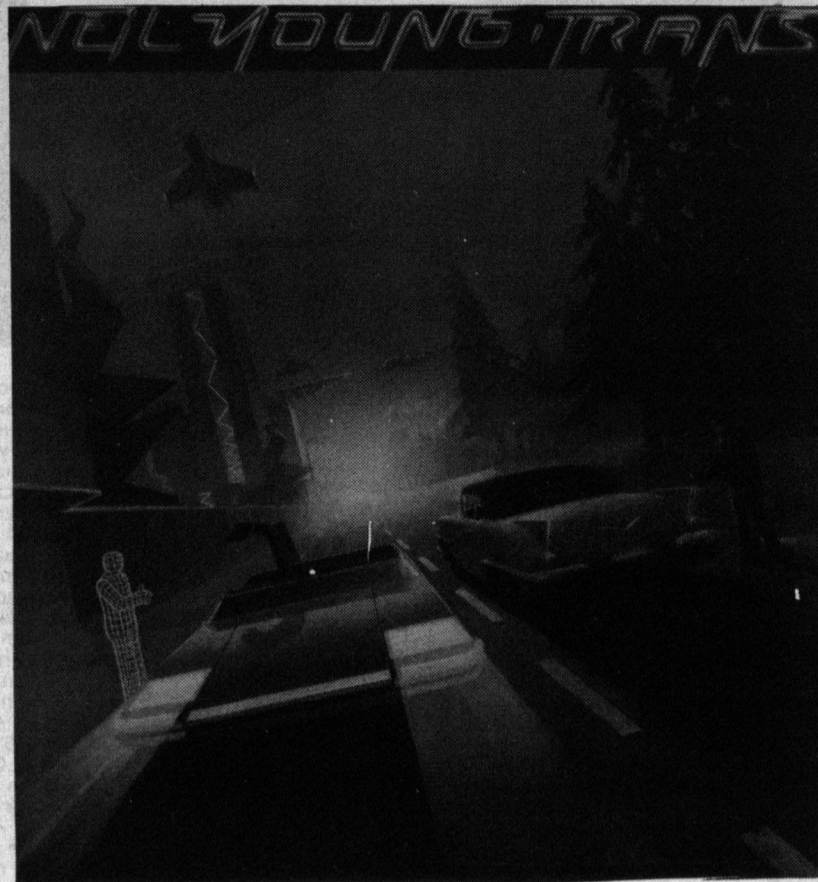
After a while, though, you do get used to the electronically altered vocals, believe it or not. 'Computer Age' and 'Transformer Man' are actually quite intriguing, the quirks of Young's voice managing to make it through the silicon.

The juxtaposition of human music and computer music on the same album can be disconcerting, but, like the album cover, it is meant to emphasize that we are in transit between a human age and a computer age.

This has serious implications, of course, but Neil isn't above having a little fun with the idea either. "I need a unit to sample and hold," he squeaks at one point.

Sample and hold— synthesizer pattern where the unit selects notes at random. Oh, he wants a new synthesizer I figured. Turns out he has other things in mind. Like blonde hair, blue eyes, 110 pounds. Naturally, Robotics has just what he's looking for. "We'll send it out right away," they tell him. "Satisfaction guaranteed." And you though you knew what computer dating was!

Yes, Neil Young does have a rather odd sense of humor and I'm afraid *Trans* is more a manifestation of it than a serious work of art. 'Little Thing called Love' and 'Like an Inca' could go down as Neil Young classics. As for the rest, I suspect that the appeal is going to be strictly, er, transient.



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| Facility                      | Close      | Open                                                                |
|-------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|
| SUB - Buffeteria<br>Snack Bar | Feb. 18/83 | Feb. 28/83<br>Open (With Limited Service)                           |
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| LISTER                        |            | Will Remain Open with Limited<br>Service at Breakfast (Continental) |
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| THE SHIP                      | Feb. 18/83 | Feb. 28/83                                                          |

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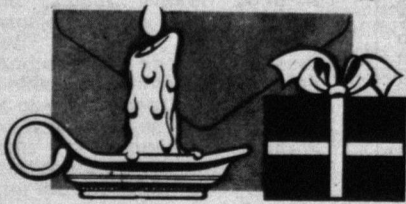
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February 1983

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