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M12: Biotech [Spring 1999]

m12_cover

Including: Sheep T. Iconoclast on Microsoft toy Barney, Kate Rich on Disney architecture, FrÃ©dÃ©ric Madre on the net.art merry go round, Danny O'Brien on Linux, Korinna Patelis on Internet regulation, Jamie King on the avant-garde's biotech frontier + Hari Kunzru on Harry Partch and Tom McCarthy on necropia.

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Some Past and Future Cliches Regarding Linux

By Danny O'Brien

It is regarded by many as the most serious challenge yet to Microsoft's domination of global computer culture. But the Linux operating system has also furnished us with many a potent metaphor for the belief structures we use to make sense of this culture. Between them Linus Torvalds (Linux), Bill Gates (Microsoft) and Richard M. Stallman (the Free Software Foundation) provide us with enough gods, prophets, saints and devils to populate a whole new religion. So why are we still using the old ones? More importantly, why are we using religion at all?

"My name is Linus, and I am your God"

–Linus Torvalds, Linux Expo, Durham NC, 1998

It's like the Mahabarat of Code

A gently-rocking Bill Gates, the 20th Century's Greatest Living Autist, makes a Jesuitical distinction to an unimpressed circuit Judge. The US government goes for his fallow throat, and the whole system of proprietary software begins to collapse. Elsewhere, Richard M. Stallman, recipient of a \$240,000 MacArthur Foundation Genius grant, a man so consumed by his Great Work that he once let his own home burn to the ground rather than leave his workstation, pulls the trigger on a Colt .45 ACP Officer's Model semiautomatic pistol in an Atlanta gun shoot. Hitherto peaceful, he mulls over his options as Eric S. Raymond, respected commentator on Free Software to Corporate America – and also a self-proclaimed "neopagan anarchist wacko" – suggests, jokingly (but "ha, ha, only serious" say the hackers), that this revolution should arm itself.

This is not your everyday computing story. The technological press is not configured to describe these events – or even the possibility of these events. The vocabulary of the Office Integration Pack Group Test and Review cannot hold. So how can the technological ghetto explain to the rest of the world how these fierce emotions are burning?

Well, which religious metaphor would you like to use today?

The Martyrdom of Saint Ignucius

Here's the Authorised Version of the Free Software story. In the Sixties, software was created free, out in the high temples of Western technological academia: MIT, Stanford, enlightened corners of Bell Labs. The Internet was created here, they say, as were the purer artefacts of the programming art: LISP, and C, and UNIX. The future was dedicated to the dissemination of incorruptible knowledge, passed on and improved through the frictionless channels of the fledgling Net.

But then (thunderclap on soundtrack, please) the software hoarding began. Graduates sold out to companies, who retailed their code without sharing the knowledge behind it. Software that, when bought, could not be changed, or fixed, or improved. Frozen forever – imprisoned by the greed of its owner, who did not want his secrets revealed or his product redistributed to the needy.

Horrified but isolated, Richard M. Stallman, at MIT's AI Lab, made a stand. In 1984, he dedicated his life to preserving the ideals of Free Software: he formed the Free Software Foundation and began building the tools that would one day allow a computer to be used without having to purchase any hoarded, proprietary software at all. Free Software – not just free as in for nothing, but also free as in free to be distributed, modified, improved; fixed by anyone who has a different plan from the blinkered view of the binary-pushing corporations.

Stallman is viewed as a saint by many in the Free Software movement. And, if you ask him, he'll dress like one. He has a costume. He is called St. Ignucius.

This fact has not passed unnoticed by profile writers.

[gnu.internexus.net/people/saintignucius.jpg]

Demonology

1990 was the annus mirabilis for Microsoft. Before that year, the company was a shadow of its present self. Every IBM machine, true, had its MS-DOS software installed, but Microsoft Word and Excel – the future cash-cows – were merely players in a market counterbalanced by Lotus and WordPerfect.

Then, in 1990, Microsoft released Windows 3.0.

It was an unprecedented success. All competition was instantly deposed: master of programming for MS-DOS, Microsoft found that no one was buying DOS software any more. Everyone was buying into Windows and wanted Windows software to run on it. And guess who beat its competition to market, with a slew of pre-written applications?

And from then on, Bill Gates lead his followers into the promised land. He transformed himself overnight from successful businessman to cultural icon: he had ascended to the heaven of 20th century celebrity, and never looked back.

Meanwhile, back in the Wilderness

Stallman slaved away, coding, proselytising – slowly, very slowly. He was dedicated, and had help – he was allowed to work at the MIT campus, although he drew no salary. His flat did indeed burn down (a colleague e-mailed him to let him know): mostly, he lived in the AI lab next to his machine. For seven years, the Free Software Foundation supplied tools to grateful programmers, but no central operating system: the long awaited GNU (Gnu's Not Unix) system. Wherever Free Software had been used, it had perforce been run on an enslaved machine running a proprietary OS, bought from a software hoarder. In 1990 the FSF's Great Work, a UNIX-compatible operating system called the GNU HURD, was nowhere near completion.

But then, the herd came to him.

The Messiah

In 1991, Linus Torvalds, a Swedish-speaking Finn at Helsinki University, mentioned a project he'd been working on to the newsgroup comp.os.minix. At the bottom of the message, as an aside, was a request to test another program of his, a hack of the Unix 'finger' program that most half-decent Unix programmers could rustle up in their sleep. The first project was a plan to write his own, UNIX-like operating system. The disparity between this minor achievement and his aims couldn't be more stark. [www.arrabonet.gyor.hu/linux/linux-birth.html]

Years later, industry pundits hailed this as a seminal moment in the history of computing. Thomas Scoville, writing in Salon Magazine, described it in terms of Luther nailing his anti-papal theses to the doors of Wittenburg Church and smashing the dominion of the Church (Bill Gates). (Scoville also designed the Silicon Valley Tarot pack, which includes cards like The Hacker, the Salesman of Networks, and the Four of Cubicles). [www.salonmagazine.com/21st/feature/1998/11/12feature.html]

But if the religion had a leader, where were the followers to come from?

The Children's Crusade

Like Gates's competition, the enthusiastic part-time programmers who drove the home PC market had honed their skills in DOS. Like Gates's competition, they were discovering that Windows was almost impossible to code from scratch without expensive assistance from Mr Gates. Programming Windows was also a lot less fun. In the brief moments between Gates gassing his enemies and introducing cheap and cheerful development software – Visual Basic – for the devoted Windows fans in 1992, his followers had a precious chance to wander off.

And who was this flock composed of? Teenagers and uni students, mainly, acting out the same actions as Bill Gates when he was that age. Hungry programmers, joined by the orphans of platforms murdered by Bill – the Atari owners, the Amiga hackers, some Mac coders. All milling around, wanting to do something – anything – with the increasingly powerful equipment that was falling into their laps, but prevented from doing so by the corporate interests of Microsoft. A crusade of orphaned, illegitimate children. Hobbyists.

The initially simple Linux, as a way of handling this machine, was perfect to these hobbyists in just the way that Windows was not. Windows (unlike DOS before it) is almost incomprehensible to one person. One might say, deliberately so: if Microsoft were to make it any simpler, it might be successfully cloned and replaced by a competitor. Linux, by contrast, has to be simple enough to be understood by one person – at least in overall structure. If it gets more complex than that, Linus Torvalds's head would explode.

By choosing a UNIX-compatible system, Linus's OS could use all of the tools created by Stallman. Before his system could even boot, it had an editor, a development suite, and hundreds of vital utilities already prepared. Dabblers were also introduced to Stallman's credo that all software should be shared, just as the code they were using was shared with them.

Whenever some new feature was needed by the new OS, it was joyously written by the crowd. Because they understood the benefits, they fed the code back into the whole. Linux, and the numbers of Linux users, grew.

The New Hacker's Jihad

“Our hacker heritage is just what they need to make moral and mythic sense of the infant cyberspace struggling to be born out of the Net.”

–Eric S. Raymond, *The New Hacker's Dictionary*

[www.tuxedo.org/~esr/jargon/jarginfo.html]

The fit between the old Stallman worldview and the Linux hackers was not perfect. It was only by the somewhat forced collation of the two groups by mediators such as Eric S. Raymond (who pointedly documents the old hacker ways in his *New Hacker's Dictionary* with the explicit intention of explaining them to the new audience), that the two groups could meld at all.

One could say that the connection between that tradition and the new, GNU generation, was like the relationship between Muslim antiquity and the Nation of Islam: a heritage adopted to solidify an inexpressible alienation, rather than a tradition. But, just as importantly, that alienation dictated the vitality of the movement. Rudderless, still young, and distrustful of authority, Gates's bastard children injected the emotional charge into the technical culture that so many still insist it lacks.

One could say that.

Gates as Existentialist

“Just in terms of allocation of time resources, religion is not very efficient. There's a lot more I could be doing on a Sunday morning.”

–Bill Gates, *Time* magazine

Or perhaps it was Bill Gates who – while at Harvard, just a few miles away from the cradle of hackerdom – was the one struggling against the dominant geek culture? In some ways he was the abandoned child: furnished with the gifts that grew from the free software (Microsoft's first success, BASIC, was based on an academic software project at Dartmouth University), but set apart from the ethical mitochondria that surrounded it. Gates and Stallman were – very briefly – contemporaries at Harvard in 1973, before Gates dropped out. He would have been 18, Richard Stallman 20.

Instead, Bill met his future vice-president and marketing genius, Steve Ballmer, and forged his own ethical habitat from his background among the affluent bourgeoisie. Instead of sharing the software, he insisted – in his infamous 1976 “Open Letter To Hobbyists” – that copying software was stealing. Was this, rather than Linus's query about Linux, in fact the quintessentially Lutheran moment?
[www.mindspring.com/~asdunn1/Gates.html]

And do you see how easy this is, now?

Choose your own Metaphor

Or, perhaps the difference lies in nationalities. Is Linus drawing upon his own country's traditions? In one of the earliest outings for Linux in the mainstream press, Glyn Moody in *Wired* suggested that Linux's collaborative nature harked back to the Kalevala, a patchwork mythology that helped form Finland's national self-image.
[www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.08/linux_pr.html]

Or do we have the wrong religion? It's worth noting that two of the key figures in Linux development – Eric S. Raymond, and Alan Cox (the Welsh deputy to Linus in the loose organisation that maintains the kernel) – have connections with the Neopagan movement. Raymond is recognised as the founder of a Wiccan lineage that still worships today. Perhaps something can be made of that? It's only a matter of time. And, of course, there's all that gun-toting libertarianism in the background, which can only spell religious fanaticism and Waco to a European mind.

In the Cathedral of the Bizarre

“Ha ha only serious” – a phrase that aptly captures the essence of much hacker discourse... Indeed, the entirety of hacker culture is often perceived as ha-ha-only serious by hackers themselves; to take it either too lightly or too seriously marks a person as an outsider. For further enlightenment, consult any Zen master.

–The New Hacker’s Dictionary

[www.elsewhere.org/jargon_search/TAG823.html]

You can spool these spiritual comparisons forever – and if the wave of pro-Linux articles in the mainstream continues, you’ll be force fed many more of them.

Why? Because when we don’t understand the motivations of others, religion stands first in line to explain. The use and re-use of these metaphors to describe Linux indicates how any motivation beyond the purely financial gets attributed to the mad, religious drive. What font of faith drives these holy men to work without pay – because without money, surely all projects are nothing?

Richard Stallman’s stock reply when asked “If no-one paid them for software, why would programmers work?” is: “because programming is fun.” And programming has a culture, because creating a culture is fun. Stallman, for all his projected evangelism, objects to ‘software hoarding’, because he sees it as an impediment to sharing that enjoyment. People hate Bill Gates, because he spoils that fun too – at the very least, by making it too expensive. At worst, by simply refusing to join in. Because fun for Bill is not hacking, but accumulating.

Creating a work of art as complex, ornate and powerful as Linux is as enjoyable as creating the complex, ornate, metaphors drawn up to describe its phenomenon. Just because it’s practical doesn’t mean it has to be motivated by greed; just because it’s non-commercial, doesn’t mean it has to be driven by a spiritual yearning. And just because the metaphors are pretty, doesn’t make them true.

The idiocy of the modern computer is that it is a toy. It is a toy designed to amuse hackers which could only spread that enjoyment if all the world pretended that it served some commercial use. Like art, which whores itself with its own po-faced seriousness, to somehow justify why anyone should dance or paint or sing.

And if there is a religious lesson to Linux it’s that, given enough beauty, one man’s bright and entertaining idea will eventually be sucked dry by some straight-faced St. Paul loser trying to pad out his own barren life by turning it into a religion, or turning it into a buck.

Sadly, the principals of Free Software delimit the extent of the last part, so we’re stuck with issues of faith.

And for that, you should pray. For all our sakes.

Tales from the Godhead

On USENET, in comp.os.linux.advocacy, Stephen Edwards writes:

>Oh, how fugging pathetic. Next thing you know, people will be wearing
>”L”s on gold chains around their necks, and praising Linus Torvald’s sacrifices
>and teachings.

On USENET, in comp.os.linux.advocacy, Linus replies:

What the h*ll? They don’t already?

Grumble.

Linus

[www.dejanews.com/=dnt_lk/getdoc.xp?AN=410219167]

Danny O'Brien xdanny@spesh.comx is an editor on Need To Know [www.ntk.net], Britain's most sarcastic weekly technological update. He doesn't mean what he says.

Opposite: Richard M. Stallman

Above: Lucas Cranach, Martin Luther, 1592

Opposite: centre ring: Linus Torvalds

outer ring and other: Bill Gates and Noel Godin

Opposite: Richard M. Stallman

Illustrations by Catherine

Vegetable, animator or terminator?

ByMute Editor

Editorial

Including: Sheep T. Iconoclast on Microsoft toy Barney, Kate Rich on Disney architecture, Frédéric Madre on the net.art merry go round, Danny O'Brien on Linux, Korinna Patelis on Internet regulation, Jamie King on the avant-garde's biotech frontier + Hari Kunzru on Harry Partch and Tom McCarthy on necropia.

One Man Bands for One Man Lands

ByHari Kunzru

King of the road and king of the 43 tone scale, Harry Partch drove a freight train through the conventional music landscape whilst retuning the payment methods of the US public transport system. Hari Kunzru reports...

The recent American Pioneers concert season at the Barbican will be remembered as a defining moment in the British reception of American Minimalist music. Performances of works by major figures such as John Cage, La Monte Young, John Adams and John Zorn gave London audiences a chance to hear a range of compositions, some familiar (Philip Glass's 'Koyaanisqatsi', Terry Riley's 'In C'), some decidedly less so. One of the most eagerly-anticipated events was Newband's performances of works by the American hobo composer Harry Partch. Largely ignored during his lifetime, Partch's hour may have come, as his unconventional interests start to chime with the DIY approach of many contemporary musicians operating outside the academy.

one man bands

Partch (1901-74) was one of the great iconoclasts of twentieth century music. Growing up in Arizona, the son of ex-missionary parents, he had an unusual set of early musical influences - Chinese songs sung by his mother to the accompaniment of a reed organ, the chants and rituals of the remaining local Yaqui Indians and his own part-time piano playing in an Albuquerque cinema. In his late twenties

Partch burnt all his compositions, realising that "in pursuing the respectable, the widely-accepted, I had not been faithful". He then took the decision to abandon conventional modes of musical expression and devise his own system.

Partch's move was in some ways a typical avant-garde gesture, the artist signalling his rupture with deadening tradition. However it also involved a positive relationship with tradition which made it far more complex than much 'shock of the new' modernism. He based his bizarre 43-tone scale on Just intonation, the mediaeval European tuning system. In Just intonation the intervals of the scale are based on the pure intervals of the natural harmonic series. The diatonic scale which forms the basis of modern Western classical music is a so-called "tempered" scale. Temperament, the modification of tuning to lessen dissonance between tones, was first proposed by Milanese musicologist Franchinus Gafurius in his 1496 treatise *Practica Musica*. In physical terms, dissonance, harshness or 'out-of-tune-ness' is caused by interference between sound waves of closely-related frequencies. The effect of Gafurius's system was to spread the dissonance evident in certain intervals of a Just-tuned octave over many octaves, smoothing it out and making it more "harmonious". Partch rejected this, going back to the mathematically purer primitive scale, which he subdivided according to his own rules.

Partch's ambivalent relationship with Western musical tradition went further, as he first started modifying guitars and violins to play his new scale, then began building entirely new instruments. The Barbican concert brought over many of these strange and wonderful creations, including the cloud chamber bowls, (made from old nuclear physics lab equipment), harmonic canons (reconfigurable string instruments) and giant marimbas, one of which produces a tone with a wave length of over 50 feet.

one man band

Partch spent much of the Depression period travelling the US as a hobo and itinerant worker, riding freight trains. He gained little recognition from conventional musical authorities during his life, and replayed the compliment, taking his conception of performance ever further away from accepted concert-hall protocols. His holistic approach encompassed the visual and theatrical dimension of the musician's performance, players of his "marimba eroica", for example, being instructed to "cultivate the aspect of a hero of the Trojan War", and in especially frenetic passages to "convey the vision of Ben Hur in his chariot, charging around the last curve of the final lap." His writings also refigure the abstractions of Western virtuosity as a spiritual discipline, closer to that of Indian music.

Newband's performance brought Partch's microtonal flurries of sound to the Barbican concert hall, rendering this difficult music surprisingly accessible. Though Partch's theatrical and spiritual conception of music did not convey itself, the performers behaving no differently to any other group of classical musicians, the concert was very well received. An audience accustomed to the repetitions of house and techno and the minimal soundscapes of ambient find this music far closer to them than the more conventional classical repertoire.

Largely ignored during his lifetime, Partch's hour may have come

Newband at the Barbican, November 1998

Hari Kunzru: hariATmetamute.com

Crystal Clare

ByTall Boy

Model: Kate Davies@Select

Hair: Richard Scorer@Phillip Sharon

Make Up: John. C. Doyle using Ruby & Millie

Photography: Tallboy

Fashion Direction: Simon Nunn

[IMAGE]

Outfit 1

Flesh pinned bodice by Robert Carey-William from the Pineal Eye.

[IMAGE]

Outfit 2

Zip choker sheer dress by Robert Carey-Williams. As before.

All red lino pieces by Simon Nunn, enquiries 0181 923 9560.

[IMAGE]

Outfit 3

Boiler suit by Robert Carey-Williams. As before.

Leather kitten heels by Michiko Koshino, enquiries 0181 749 8353.

[IMAGE]

Outfit 4

Fishing net dress by Robert Carey-Williams. As before.

Grey, wide trousers by Fake London from Browns Focus.

The day the circus came to town (Isea98, Consensus politics and the Festival Syndrome)

ByPauline van Mourik Broekman

the day the circus came to town

It has become a commonplace to describe the array of electronic and media art festivals held throughout Europe today as a travelling circus. Suggesting dazzling but ultimately superficial entertainment with only a fleeting relevance for its viewers this moniker of the moment also conjures up a repetitive presentation of the same things over and again, irrespective of locale. Certainly, were you to follow it, your hectic festival itinerary would span much of Europe and much of the annual calendar. From Linz to Rotterdam, Gwent to Osnabrück - after a slow start in springtime the show peaks, finally, during the late autumn months when the 'major' festivals occur in quick succession. Then the proverbial tents are dismantled, horses and elephants are safely tucked away in their stables and the ringmasters start to gear themselves up for another year of performances.

Irrespective of location or host organisation, their ambitious thematic scope, growing global reach and loyal band of attendees ensure that events like ISEA, Ars Electronica, EMAF, DEAF, Consciousness Reframed, CyberConf and Viper, to name but a few (some annual, some bi-annual and others more irregular), continue to act as prime catalysts for debate. Importantly, these festivals also function to showcase recent international work to the respective local audiences while, vice-versa, providing different frames of reference for, and analysis of that work. Nothing new under the sun, you might say: in this, the festivals are no different, more or less context sensitive (or indeed compromised) than any other type of 'travelling circus', be that a trade fair, contemporary art biennial or academic

congregation. Perhaps their damning nickname is but a jocular swipe aimed at technology-heavy shows and a tiny group of professional travellers?

However, lately it has felt as if there is something rotten in this electronic state of Denmark.

Notwithstanding the gradual process of development each event may have undergone, a more general and profound process of evaluation is going on - both on the part of the host organisations themselves and their most devout publics (not to mention the 'general public' in whose name the larger events are, by definition, put on). As with the other cultural 'circuses' (Manifesta and the Berlin, Venice and Sydney biennials come to mind) questions are being asked as to the usefulness, continuing relevance and ultimate beneficiaries of a year-in year-out wagon trail of bonanzas: is there really anything more profound to all this than the sophisticated management of international, or rather Western, cultural industries? Are regional, local audiences not only attending these events but also getting something out of them? Taking part in the panel 'Biennials: Hope or Hype?' at the recent ICA symposium Beyond the Artist, Manifesta co-curator Robert Fleck for example commented that, of the already small (c. 13.000) audience that actually visited the Manifesta2 exhibitions, only a fraction (c. 3.000) resided in the host city of Luxembourg - attributing the relative size of the visiting audience largely to professional motives). When arguing for the necessity and good of the biennials, the festivals, the symposiums, what is being assumed about the desires of local and visiting audiences? What is being assumed about the ways in which cultural production and consumption works?

The last five years have seen the ascendance of informal resources like electronic mailing lists that are available year-round and cheap (although dependent, of course, on not so cheap technology and access infrastructures). Feeding off the dispersed and often inconspicuous offshoots of local public moneys and private investment, culture and technology related lists like Rhizome, nettime, Syndicate, Faces, re::code and Xchange in conjunction with a rambling series of small but closely associated events have provided compelling ancillary environments - and counterpoints - to the larger 'electronic art' festivals. More conspicuously, and by virtue of their deeper integration into everyday life, they have provided alternatives to the attempts by organisations like ISEA, the International Society of Electronic Arts, to act as community builders.

One of the missing links between these smaller networks and events and the larger ones is their relationship to audiences and audience numbers: whereas many thousands will visit the festivals, in the main related lists are subscribed to by hundreds. Likewise, whereas information about the former is accessible in a multiplicity of contexts, the lists and their associated events can seem inaccessible and dependent on intensely codified discourses. Yet, rather than act in a process of mutual fortification, nurture and dialogue as it has done elsewhere in this cultural landscape, here the emergence of one structural matrix seems to be endangering the life of another.

Depressingly, the one achievement on which broad consensus does exist is the festivals' capacity - out of hours that is - to act as productive, pressure-cooker style meeting places: compact, congenial and fun. Perhaps we should never have wished for more, but this scenario does make one wonder whether the events' still-sizeable budgets are being well spent and whether the high-flying dictums about audience participation, 'outreach', global discourses, interdisciplinarity and cultural collaboration (alive and well in all but the least self-confident) can go on being made unridiculed.

Isn't there also a false dichotomy in the making through which some notional local community and public - translated, largely numerically, as either the cringe-worthy 'bums-on-seats' or the more polite 'attendance figures' - comes to determine the success of an event and justify its form and continuing existence while more critical, and certainly more partial, assessments of quality, radicality, diversity, thematic coherence and public participation are consigned to the dustbin for being 'politically motivated' or elitist? To be sure, this is an only slightly dressed up version of the aged debate about elite and mass cultures, but it is doubtful that such a binary relationship should still be quite so easily

made.

This was well illustrated during the preamble and subsequent staging of ISEA98, this year held in Liverpool and Manchester and entitled Revolution/The Terror, in which both ISEA's own growing pangs and the tensions inherent in putting on large-scale (electronic) art fairs were put on full display. Arguments centred on prohibitive costs, a kowtowing to the academy, vague and - for some - depoliticised treatment of themes as well as a lack of overall coherence. They can be characterised by this, an extract from an open e-mail Diana McCarty - co-moderator of the Faces mailing list - sent to Lulu Jones, convenor of ISEA98 Liverpool panel 'Variant Architecture[s] within Cyber-celibacy' after Jones had dismissed complaints about high prices as false radicalism:

"I think you are partly missing the point to assume that the critique is limited to the price of attending ISEA98. Rather, I think it is the inherent paradox of an elite, academic conference adopting the theme of revolution. Do we agree that the realm of the revolutionary is that of those ideas/things/battles which will have an impact on the masses? If so, then the price issue becomes understandably problematic - it is a real barrier to the masses participating in whatever discourse evolves during the event. The cost or technology is neither a new issue, nor is it revolutionary in the circuit of new media conferences (I believe we are all familiar with the discourse of technology as an elite tool in the first place). Now we have an elite symposium for an academic elite, just how revolutionary can ISEA become?

...

It seems that it might be more beneficial for ISEA to question its own role, rather than paying lip service to the margins and then criticising the margins for not being satisfied. ISEA (or its staff & organisers) does not, by default, become revolutionary in addressing this theme any more than it became a contentmeister last year when the theme was content."

(Faces, Diana McCarty: "Lulu Jones - comments on ISEA prices and starving artists", 18/7/1998)

The number of ways in which each festival acts as a point of crystallisation or refraction of local and international cultural politics is impossible to enumerate here - each is subtly different at many levels. Suffice it to say though that each, apart from setting its own cultural agenda and programme with all the concomitant opportunities for presentational experimentation etc., is also subject to processes of instrumentalisation. However, it would not only be onerous, but also counterproductive to analyse the lot, rationale and history of 'festivals' tout court. It might instead pay to look at ISEA, for the UK this year's biggest circus, in isolation. The unique task it has set itself - of being event-organiser, society and umbrella organisation of sorts demands this doubly; much of the apparent disgruntlement regarding this year's proceedings stems from the expectations (and confusions) this self-declared remit have created.

the day the circus came to town

ISEA started out as an interdisciplinary venture, aiming to bring people involved in the electronic arts in touch with each other, showcase work and break down the barriers that its founders, Wim van der Plas and Theo Hesper, saw between existing computer related conferences (like Ars Electronica, Siggraph, etc.). Its other aim was to break down the 'Enlightenment inherited' bifurcation between the sciences, arts and humanities. The First International Symposium on Electronic Arts, organised by the Dutch Foundation for Creative Computer Applications was held in 1988, in Utrecht, the Netherlands. Two years later, a proposal put forward there - to develop an organisation that would structure "a systematic and scientific (my italics) approach to the problems and potentials of electronic art" became a reality. Ten years hence and ISEA is a relatively small society running on membership payments, a minimal amount of Canadian public funding and an unspecified donation from Softimage's founder Daniel Langlois, a benefactor who is broadly supportive of ISEA's potential role as a gateway organisation for the electronic arts on a global level. ISEA's 'HQ', based in Rotterdam between 1991 and 1996, now resides in Montrouche.

Much like any society, ISEA aims to provide its constituency, a mix of professionals working in the arts and sciences (although the former predominate), with a variety of practical and theoretical resources. It regularly publishes a newsletter, promotes dialogue and collaboration between members and doubles up as the co-organiser of the annual International Symposiums of Electronic Art, festivals (including extensive exhibition programmes) which it co-ordinates in collaboration with local host organisations around the world (and which also function as platform and outlet for the concerns and activities of its members, whose participation is organised via a juried selection procedure). It does so in a spirit of open dialogue and enquiry, the values of which are repeated mantra-like in much of its literature.

So, is there a conflict between the 'systematic and scientific' approach ISEA is attempting to muster and the experimental ethos it sees as integral to its identity? And are its other aims - "the promotion of communication between organisations and individuals active in the field of the electronic arts"; "the promotion of interdisciplinary cooperation, between aesthetic experts and scientific/technological experts" - dependent on stable, administrative and financial structures which are mutually exclusive with the cultural nomadism - and radicality - it prides itself on?

I posed some questions along these lines to Eddie Berg, director of FACT (the Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) and, as such, of Revolution98, the exhibitions and events component of ISEA98. In the drive to get bums on seats, funding to cover all expenses, make sure events are well co-ordinated and marketed, planned far enough in advance, properly affiliated with partner organisations, etc. isn't something important being lost? Does the new culture of 'expertism', aimed for so zealously by cultural organisations of all hues, run counter to ISEA's - perhaps even electronic art's - past? A totally different mode of participation and/or viewing seems to exist at smaller, more informal, events and, while people begrudgingly admit that these can be chaotic and exclusive - in spite of their egalitarian aims (a good example being the manner in which the Revolting temporary media lab [www.yourserver.co.uk/revolting], held during Manchester's ISEA98, was perceived) their 'small' successes beg the question whether the awry ledger account that pits individual cultural experiences against Total Number of Cultural Experiences Had isn't extremely problematic.

Eddie Berg remained optimistic. "I still believe in the blockbuster event's ability to grab media attention, provide critical focus, attract audiences and investment," he said, but added that he was wary of certain aspects: "But size isn't everything. Good ideas and projects can get lost in the cornucopia of openings, events, parties, press calls and the sheer scale of the euro-standard art bonanza. You have to know what you want to see (or hear). I'm not sure anymore if the big-event serves every artist's best interests. I think we achieved a little bit of the best of both worlds at ISEA. Revolting was chaotic and irritatingly elitist, but probably held some of the most insightful and interesting moments for many people. For other people the big-event conferences often feels like a redundant, inert exercise, with the same people talking about the same things to one another. Meaningful exchange and dialogue occurs only in the spaces in between. My personal jury is out on this one."

Sean Cubitt, consultant to Liverpool John Moores University's Revolution symposium and co-ordinator of its 'Bio-architectures' panel, was more fatalistic: "Me, I like a big blast once in a while. On the other hand, given the annual round of annual events, and our experiences with VideoPositive [a bi-annual video and new media festival also held in Liverpool and co-hosted by FACT] I reckon biennials would be better. On the other hand, the dinosaur bash is clearly ripe for the remaking, at Documenta or Venice as much as in e-arts. Genuinely thematic shows/events tend (only tend, mind you) to restrict the creativity of the curator. Which may be fine in itself, but may well run after the contemporary development. Permanent exhibition spaces like ZKM [Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie, Karlsruhe, www.zkm.de], without perhaps the medium specificity and the canonical works but with a regular programme, in every city in the world, with touring budgets to

ensure genuinely global access would be nice. Impossible, but nice. Nicer still would be the existing global nets of art institutions and art publications noticing that the ground has moved from under their feet. This is why London is so moribund as an art city, a suburb of New York misplaced 2,000 miles west of SoHo." Clearly, there is no love lost between Cubitt and a deluded London: "A good question to ask is why London has no e-arts presence worth shaking a stick at - it's because its scene is dominated by galleries with no interest at all in anything they didn't learn at art school. Dead from the neck up."

When asked whether we can still talk meaningfully about the electronic arts as an experimental and cross-disciplinary practice, as all of ISEA's literature does, or whether the word has come to denote a rather more fixed and stable category, ready for mummification in the museum, Cubitt offered this riposte: "Sure there's a canon, and it is in the interests of ISEA to promote both that canon - to get into the major galleries and collections, and to criticise it, while promoting other artists who do not figure in this way. It is naïve to believe ISEA members can alter the art world, or indeed that they wish to. Personally, I am in favour of doing away with the concept of art, or rather the professionalised institutional and discursive structures that exclude from funding and discussion the vast majority of the world's cultural activity." Cubitt's died-in-the-wool disdain of cultural naïveté also stretches to those who complained about ISEA98's depoliticisation of the notion of Revolution: "The word revolution has been depoliticised by history, not by ISEA."

Meanwhile Peter Ride, director of Bristol based digital arts agency DA2 and recently a nominee for ISEA's board, maintains that the seed of most if not all ISEA's ills lies in the obfuscations and confusion surrounding the relationship between ISEA the symposiums and ISEA the society: "ISEA needs to make clear that it is separate from the local projects". In his eyes, this would also open the way to the society becoming more pro-active: "Officially, they're supportive and therefore too close to be critical." Go to the ISEA website [www.isea.qc.ca], look at any of Wim van der Plas's feedback to ISEA98 and this uneasy relationship becomes painfully clear: swerving constantly between a kind of paternal, constructive support and what seems like a nervous anticipation of the manner in which each event might harm the 'franchise' and overall reputation of the organisation, it makes for confusing reading.

the day the circus came to town

Look at this situation from the host's perspective however, and the picture changes again. After having paid \$3000 'for the privilege' of using the logo, as Eddie Berg expressed it (during last summer ISEA decided to reinvest this yearly fee, usually \$5000, in its newly formed diversity fund), an organisation must be left both constrained and frustrated by the reams of guidelines by which they have to abide. These 'symposium host candidate' guidelines [www.isea.qc.ca/symposium/guidelines.html], the various committees (including a new international advisory committee - IIAC - and the one for cultural diversity mentioned above) are no doubt precisely what ensures the society's currency and internationalism in its own eyes. They also bolster its accountability and 'social democratic' style of governance, if that is the appropriate word. But it remains difficult to tally the high level of bureaucracy they can only engender with Wim van der Plas's recent comment that the continuing success of ISEA rests on its capacity to remain fluid, nomadic and pluralistic in its approach; that it will otherwise "run the risk of petrifying into a traditional structure as has happened with so many other events of this nature." On top of that, it would be naïve to think that the guidelines and committees, whose flavour comes across as more indebted to academic than artistic contexts, don't have implicit values. It is for example a specifically academic structuring principle that Andreas Broeckmann, co-organiser of V2_'s Dutch Electronic Art Festival DEAF [www.v2.nl/DEAF] and a slightly exasperated observer of ISEA's activities, sees as the unacknowledged centre of gravity of the organisation: "They fail to recognise the encompassing role that they could be playing for the global electronic arts community, and instead they are an academic club."

For his part Alain Mongeau, chair of ISEA since 1996, is bemused by ISEA's current reputation: "The tendency to categorise ISEA and the ISEA symposium as the 'elite' has appeared only recently ... I think it is a perception that has evolved in relation to very polarised local politics in the UK ... If one analyses both the history and the current state of ISEA, in reality it is a very frail organisation that still needs to score a major breakthrough if it wants to survive. Its struggles are very similar to those of www.adaweb.com for instance, as the help first provided by the Canadian and Quebec governments and then by the Daniel Langlois Foundation has been temporary. In fact as an organisation ISEA still faces its greatest challenge yet: it needs both to reinforce its 'raison d'être' and to stabilise its financial means at the turn of its first ten years of existence."

The discussions surrounding ISEA's activities represent, in a microcosm, many crucial issues facing 'network society' - those of leadership, organisational accountability and the development of culture in social networks. There is something reminiscent in all this of the problematic status of NGOs, for example, or for that matter the score of intra-governmental organisations set up to do work in the name of some universal good. Many will find this comparison ludicrous (what does a couple of hundred-member, poorly funded, arts organisation have to do with an international special interest player like Greenpeace or indeed an organisation like UNESCO?). But it doesn't surprise me that, according to Peter Ride, the word UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation) was 'bandied around' a lot in the criss-cross dialogues leading up to ISEA's reformulations of its remit two years ago. Both Broeckmann's description of ISEA's possible 'encompassing role' and Daniel Langlois's desire to see ISEA act as a gateway organisation of international renown, a leader in short, point in this direction - if certainly with different personal interpretations attached. Append to this the debates surrounding the potential some instead see incarnated in cheap (again, relatively), rhizomatic, net mediated, discursive structures like mailing lists and you have an intriguing parallel to the way ad-hoc, grassroots and intensely localised activist groups relate to their grander, bureaucratic and/or heavily financed neighbours.

Is the open, erratic and unpredictable cultural dialogue so fervently desired by ISEA more likely to emerge from structures of this kind? Or is this yet another false opposition?, the lists and ad-hoc groups having their own cross to bear when it comes to representation and accountability - as anyone will know who has followed the acrimonious debates about moderation on nettime [\[www.factory.org/nettime\]](http://www.factory.org/nettime) or who believes in what Richard Barbrook calls, after Jo Freeman, 'the tyranny of structurelessness' (see Mute 11, "The Holy Fools" [\[www.metamute.com/issue11/fools.htm\]](http://www.metamute.com/issue11/fools.htm)). It seems we're destined to alight at a conversation that is thirty rather than three years old, namely one about direct and representational types of governance and democracy, albeit updated for a networked society. It seems also that we have to acknowledge a far greater degree of interdependence between the two types of organisation than many of us currently do.

The day the circus came to town used to be fun. Worlds of fantasy opened up and, when the elephants walked out of the ring, people were sad to see their pathetic little tails and big behinds. People didn't want them to be integrated into everyday life. They weren't, and that was the whole point. The hope of the early electronic arts, and their festivals, was that the separations built into this spectacle might be turned around: perhaps the audience could have even stepped into the ring. The sad, and contradictory, result of interrogations into ISEA's (and, to a certain extent other festivals') legitimacy is that it seems the baby has been thrown out, not the bath water. The excess, singular visions, excitement and risk we associate with our favourite, double-edged analogy - circuses - have gone out the window while the scaffolding, portaloos, civic representatives and money lenders have been left behind. Are these just the teething pains of a more socially inclusive circus or are we destined to rerun the antinomies of consensus politics till we're too old to care?

Thanks to all quoted interviewees plus Isabelle Painchaud at ISEA HQ, Maria Stukoff and Lisa Haskel.

Pauline van Mourik Broekman:
pauline AT metamute.org

Pandaemonium 1998

By Nelly Voorhuis

pandaemonium 1998 The second Pandaemonium Festival didn't lie beneath a lucky star this year. As so often in the art world, it's much easier to find money to build a venue than to secure and maintain the programme budget. But none of this seems to have diminished the LEA staff's enthusiasm for working on their festival. Pandaemonium came after a long festival summer which started with EMAF, Impakt, Viper and World Wide Video Festival and you could tell that all these festivals must have rummaged through the same basket for new films and videos. Although on a superficial level the art world seems to be more interested in artists' films and videos, for festivals such as these the struggle continues to be getting the attention of precisely that 'art' public. Yet, except for some student groups from several London art academies, Pandaemonium's visitors were mainly the old 'avant-garde' film crowd.

What was offered to this public? As with the other media festivals, the quality of the selection left something to be desired. Due to lack of funding and the concurrent movement of artists toward installations, mixed media and net projects, there were fewer short films and videos than in previous years. Even the contributions by all those visual artists now working in the film and video field were not very convincing, as witnessed by the Pandaemonium commission: Sundown by Tracey Emin. Her video projection on the front of the Lux building about her fascination for horse riding was filmed like a commercial and lost, perhaps intentionally, its more intimate and personal undertones.

pandaemonium 1998

With recent productions, the curators of the festival went the classical route: the majority of the works came from North America, Europe and Japan. Strangely enough there was almost nothing from regions like Eastern Europe, the Nordic countries and elsewhere. Not that the international selection was limited. The amount of works selected was so immense that it had to be shown in around 24 separate programmes and inevitably interesting films were screened alongside less impressive ones. Although the overall impression of the new productions in single screen film and video wasn't very exciting, as was the case in all the other European festivals, a few interesting and even excellent films were impossible to miss. Martin Arnold showed a new film in his series of found footage film. In Alone..Life Wastes Andy Hardy he recreates fifties B pictures as an investigation into the hidden messages of sex, violence and dependency in families. As Arnold's is a continuous project, we recognise the by now familiar strategy, but the result is nonetheless an amusing spectacle of rhythmic editing and the wicked play of layered meanings.

Reworking a past was also the subject of the film Shulie by Elisabeth Subrin. This is a historical reconstruction - quite literally - of a student's film made in Chicago in 1967 about the feminist writer Shulamith Firestone. Firestone later became famous for her essay "The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution". Through Shulamith's biography, Subrin investigates the historical time and myths of the late 1960s while at the same connecting these issues to her own contemporary preoccupations. The video is an ingenious mixture of today's interest in re-staging history and the autobiographic agenda of the filmmaker. Eija-Liisa Ahtila's film Today explores the relationship between a father and a daughter. The story Ahtila tells could fill a feature length film, but she eloquently manages to accomplish this in 10 minutes through her selection of scenes and dialogues.

The British video maker John Smith was represented by his video *Blight*, a simultaneously poetic and political film about a building near the M11 in London. The video performs a perfect balancing act between diaristic images and a formal play of elements from animation and the documentary film genre.

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The international selection was combined with a few guest programmes by international curators. Lori Zippay from Electronic Arts Intermix showed 70s performance films by visual artists.

Disappointingly, the 16mm and Super 8mm films were shown on video in the Lux Cinema, a venue easily capable of showing them in their original formats. The films from the 60s and 70s lose a good deal of their texture through this transference. Also, not all the selected films, like for example Hannah Wilke's, survived being screened outside their own historical period. In contrast *Song Delay* turned out to be a strong and playful work by Joan Jonas, whose recent videos are too often overloaded by symbolic meanings.

Gavin Smith and Mark McElhatten curated a programme of contemporary American avant-garde film. The strong films by Leighton Pierce and Peggy Ahwesh were undermined by Scott Stark's naive interpretation of pornography and a recent work by Greta Snider which, despite being technically well executed, failed to impart a strong enough sense of its intentions. *Glass: Memories of Water #25* by Pierce was an extremely well edited and balanced film about a simple thing: the beauty of water. A real pleasure to watch. Stuck in the programme between Stark and Ken Jacobs, was the film *Nocturne* by Peggy Ahwesh. A sombre film which references Mario Bava, Kathy Acker and Marquis de Sade, mingles facts with hallucination and alternates between an atmosphere of humour and horror, violence and tenderness. In conclusion, the selection of the films and videos lacked a strong curatorial stance as to the prevalent tendencies in contemporary artists' film and video. Although this would have made the festival stronger, it must be conceded that the organisers were open to the other places where works are being shown.

Pandaemonium was not just limited to screenings and presentations of video installations; a lot of attention was also given to the Sound Meets Vision programme which combined musicians, VJs and artists. Memorably, the alchemist filmmaker Jürgen Reble presented his collaboration with the musician Thomas Küner. But, the event that most radiated a festival energy was the programme *Riveting*. Here, films were projected onto the back of the Bankside Power Station, soon to be the location for the second Tate Gallery. Some films like Richard Serra's *Railroad Turnbridge* or those by Gordon Matta-Clark admittedly turned out to be too studious for screening such an event. But the short films by John Wood and Paul Harrison worked well in a crowd that was the right mix of Pandaemonium guests, modern art lovers, passers by and London's alternative scene.

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Nelly Voorhuis:

NellyVoorhuis AT compuserve.com

Digital Salvation

By Jorg Koch

digital salvation For a while now, old, long outdated video game consoles of the 80s such as the Atari 2600 or the Vectrex have been enjoying something of a renaissance. They've found their way into the canon of good taste; a multitude of records and T-shirts are testimony to that. PC emulators for old school games are being introduced everywhere with verve, as if every reviewer has to prove his or her proper socialisation with the holy trinity of Pong, Space Invaders and Donkey Kong.

But the nostalgic and sentimental enthusiasm for the cute little games of yore is being played out on

another level as well. Strategies are also being developed for saving the endangered artefacts of digital culture.

A particularly charming console, Milton Bradley's (MB) Vectrex, has become the darling of retro gamers. Vectrex was the system every kid wished for but never got because it was too expensive. It appeared on the market in 1982, a single console with a built-in monitor. The main attraction of this mini-arcade was that the screen featured not pixels (as a television does), but vectors. Razor sharp lines, unfettered by raster points, can be scaled at lightening speed, and this is what jettisoned Vectrex into the pantheon of arcades games, right up there with Tempest, Space Wars and Asteroids.

To keep costs down, MB decided on a black and white screen, but nevertheless wanted to bring a little colour into the game as well. So every game came with coloured filters one could stick in front of the screen, giving the game a unique aesthetic. In short, Vectrex was abstract modernist funk.
digital salvation

A quarter of a century later, Vectrex is still around and is, in fact, more alive than ever. Tom Sloper, who programmed the killer games Spike and Bedlam for the Vectrex and has since designed around eighty games on just about every imaginable platform for Activision, beams, "My old Vectrex-era cohorts and I are astounded that there is now a thriving community of Vectrex fans, that there are people creating new Vectrex software and cartridges."

No small feat. The computer and entertainment industries thrive on amnesia, full speed ahead to the future, with no looking back. Every sixteen months, the power of processors doubles, and the storage capacity for digital media is all but unlimited. One would think that these would be terrific times for the preservation of the output of our civilisation.

Hardly. The rancid cartridges and obscure consoles crammed together at flea markets could serve as a metaphor for a looming informational disaster. In the shift from atoms to bits, any digitally stored information for which we no longer have instruments with which to read it will become indecipherable.

But for how long can these rows of zeros and ones actually be stored? At the beginning of the year, an industry-sponsored study by the National Media Institute in St. Paul was released which examined the life expectancies of digital media. The study put an end to the myth of eternal storage. At room temperatures, magnetic tapes can be expected to last for just twenty years, while CD-Roms vary in their durability between ten and fifty years.

But even if magnetic tapes are still intact, the instruments necessary for them to be of any use have often already been tossed onto the silicon heap of history. "Imagine an encyclopaedia program that only runs on Windows 2.0," says Tom Sloper, describing a typical situation. "Somebody would have to have a machine with Windows 2.0, with an appropriate CPU and the appropriate audio and video cards and drivers, in order to run the software."

Strategies for salvaging obsolete hardware and software are beginning to evolve. The most refurbished of models will turn up after all in the video game community, whose members might merely be trying to revive their childhood memories, but who are also at the same time developing a blueprint for dealing with obsolescence in general. It's these people who lovingly scan in old manuals or upload onto the Net the source code of games or the smallest detail of the cartridge design of their favourite platform.

They're creating an infrastructure which makes it possible for, say, the 21-year-old Londoner, Andrew Coleman, to program a new Vectrex game called "Spike goes Skiing" (Spike was the Mario of the Vectrex universe). "I think it's great what people are doing to try and help preserve the whole 'culture'," says Coleman. "The archives that are out there on the Internet hold just about every game

written for every classic system, including arcade machines."

And what about hardware? If the Vectrex hasn't gone the way of the E.T. poster on the wall in the romper room, the machine is worth a very tidy sum indeed. "Let's face it, the average life expectancy of a microchip is about 50 years. After that enough of the silicon will have oxidised to render it unusable," says Coleman, and goes on to predict that, "In 40 years time there will probably be only a handful of working Vectrex machines and games in the whole world. I think that the emulation scene is the only hope really for keeping these games playable. At the moment, there are emulators for the PC which will let you play just about any old game on a standard computer. The emulators and game files can easily be backed up and transferred onto new media over the years so there's no reason that these games should be lost." Coleman concludes, "There are literally thousands of games out there that took a great deal of work to produce in the first place. I don't want to see all that work lost."

US computer scientist Jeff Rothenberg of the RAND think tank has been addressing the problem of loss of digital data to obsolescence. As early as 1992, he proposed the use of emulation "as a way of retaining the original meaning, behaviour, and feel of obsolete digital documents." And sees his efforts validated in the DIY video game emulators. "I see the use of emulation in the video game community as a 'natural experiment' that suggests - though it doesn't prove - the viability of this approach. Nevertheless, the success of the video game community provides significant evidence for the ultimate viability of the emulation approach to preservation."

Learning from old school video games, then, can also mean learning how to preserve a culture. "I think the Vectrex community shows us that with some dedication and cooperation among people with similar interests," Vectrex veteran Tom Sloper adds Yoda-like, "old software and hardware need not die."

Jorg Koch
Xkoch AT install.comX

Alien Autopsy

BySheep T. Iconoclast

"Hi there, it's so nice to see you" said the plump Purple dinosaur as I squeezed his left hand. "Squeeze my hand to play a game, squeeze my foot to sing a song, cover my eyes to play peek-a-boo" it continued, needlessly waving its hands and head from side to side. I saw how adults (the majority purchasers of toys) immediately connected with the underlying logic of the machine - computers are simple and untiringly repetitive, and so are kids; why not get the one to look after the other?

[IMAGE]

I have always had an interest in what is generally dubbed 'pervasive computing', in which computers leave their beige boxes and emerge in everyday objects - phones, hoovers, washing machines (and now children). Why should a computer be hard? Hard to use and hard to touch? I like the idea of a computer which has some awareness of its external environment. I like the idea of a computer being held tightly at night, ready to ask, "Did you have a bad dream?" I also like the idea of a computer I can drop, something I can do with my new Microsoft toy, 'Barney' (unlike with my laptop). When I pick Barney up and cover his eyes he says, "Ohh, it sure is dark in here". When I remove my hand and light streams in, his response changes immediately.

By inhabiting toys, the 'digital' has found a new way to interact with people. In toys, the soft machine comes ever closer, and with it a host of new design issues. Instead of the graphic user interface, we now have emotional interfaces, connecting directly with the user/player's psychological state.

Ultimately though, Barney manifests little of the soft machine's potential. Instead, imagine a purple cushion with the voice of a Sesame Street Stephen Hawking singing nursery rhymes in which the words have been changed, simplified or rewritten by Microsoft. With Barney "Round and round the mulberry bush" becomes "The wheels of the bus go round and round" - presumably the Microsofters have never even seen a mulberry bush, let alone enjoy a song about one. They've updated "This old man, he played two, he played 'nick-nack' on my shoe, with a nick-nack paddy-wack, give a dog a bone, this old man went rolling home," to "I love you, you love me, we're a happy family."

How strange it must be to want to remove the darker side of children's nursery rhymes in the service of such 'PC' Barney-values as 'Fruit is good for you' and 'Exercise keeps you fit'. Barney's potential has effectively been sanitised out of existence. One can't help thinking he now expresses the narrow opinions of a small group of Californian parents sitting in some focus group somewhere, whereas he could offer the exact opposite - an opportunity to reverse this whole cultural trend. By being controllable, even programmable by them, Barney could have empowered parents to pass on their own values, rather than being yet another vehicle through which to circumvent 'local' culture. Alternatively, his creators could have avoided this by leaving language out altogether.

While Barney can receive local radio transmissions, in the final analysis this merely makes him a victim, or puppet - either of the 'interactive CD-Rom' or of special signals carried on video cassettes (and perhaps one day those of a TV channel). In fact, the idea seems to be for Barney to assist your child in watching television.

So, is Barney interactive? I guess this depends on how far you can round down your definition of 'interactive'. Given children's capacity to make even the most inanimate household objects into spaceships and aeroplanes, perhaps Barney and Microsoft have missed the interactive point.

Sheep T. Iconoclast

Xsheep AT bartlett.ucl.ac.ukX

This Happy Place (The Architecture of Reassurance: Designing the Disney Theme Parks)

By Kate Rich

this happy place One of the most beloved experiences of Americans is visiting their other national capital, Disneyland. But, can it be a model for urban design? This exhibition slips this and other questions in between original promotional watercolours and various charming historical photographs from the Disney team archives, documenting the emergence of the Disney territories from California through to Tokyo.

As its subtitle - A THOUGHT-PROVOKING Look at the Planning and Construction Behind the MAGIC - illustrates, the exhibition is a little vague as to whether it wants to be critical. It's a small, small yet terribly sensitive Disney spot in the American heart, to wit: when Disneyland opened in 1955, critics accused Walt himself of, "callously commercialising characters that were already embedded in the imaginations of most Americans".

this happy place

In the 1950s ABC TV financed construction of the original Disneyland in California. In return Walt agreed to host a weekly 'Disneyland' show on the channel which, in its turn, created a public already

eager to visit the park. In Disneyland's layout of multiple world-choices, its viewer-visitors could repeat their familiar channel-flicking behaviour: Adventureland, Tomorrowland, Frontierland.

Disneyland's civic planners worked without reference to the actual site (an orange grove) concentrating instead on the park's internal spatial coherence. You can't see out - Walt terminated the views at the ends of all the major streets - which suggests certain parallels to prison architecture (and, there's only one entrance!!). Potentially an interesting focus for the exhibition. Not taken up though.

Further rooms reveal more intriguing historic documents. A castle contour sketch superimposes the relative heights of fairycastle castles: California/Florida/Paris/Tokyo. Tense issues in exporting the magic are exposed, eg the 'outquainting' problem: "it was hard to out-quaint Europe".

And amongst many inconclusive gems: a 1991 pitch for a Russian pavilion addition to Florida's EPCOT ("the Soviet Union presented a real problem for EPCOT designers") in which a marketing sketch proposes a Little Russia with red square, dacha, onion-church, apron-women dancing, and Tatlin's design for a Monument to the Communist Third International curiously inserted as a fountain.

The Architecture of Reassurance continues at the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum New York City until 10/1/99. Why? Because we like you.

Kate Rich:
Xkaterich AT infinex.comX

Garden Archaeology

ByKodwo Eshun

garden archaeology

While major dance festivals like Tribal Gathering collapsed in the summer of 1998, intimate 2000-capacity events like The Big Chill's 3-day Enchanted Garden thrived, suggesting a widespread boredom with the traditional 90s format of clubs in tents. Breaking with the anonymous rural location norm, organisers Pete and Katrina Lawrence moved their instant-village set-up into The Larmer Tree Gardens near Salisbury - an ornate topography of wilderness and order designed by the estate owner, archaeologist and anthropologist General Pitt Rivers back in 1880. Peacocks step along hedged pathways which lead you to the Nepalese house, the Roman Temple and the Pleasure House, antiques from the General's colonial jaunts sited through the Garden's bowers, crannies and cul-de-sacs.

In late 90s clubland, there are more projections and VJs than ever before but it all leaves curator Alice Sharp unimpressed. She recoils from the prospect of another Bond and Star Wars loop-blitz 'unrelated' to the space, locking you into familiar responses. Sharp wants the Visual Art Exploration to integrate you and extend space while eliciting your curiosity through an experience you didn't know you wanted. Throughout January and February, she brought 8 artists (Gary Hume, Matt Mitchell, Thomas Gray, Rachel Inman, Michelle Griffiths, Tina McCallan, Maria Yiasoumi and Mark Bell) out to Larner Tree Gardens to choose a specific site, then worked with them to realise their events.

Daylight belonged to great DJs like Dego McFarlane, generating an acoustic space of solar feeling away from the deadline world. Later, lit by leaflights designed by Mark Bell, the Garden became a night-time exhibition, unknown and undreamt. That girl and that guy sprawling on the grass next to you turn out to be artists listening to your responses. Highlights included Michelle Griffiths' Re-entry: After Avalon, where the artist became a living Pre-Raphaelite astronaut painting. At the top of a carved staircase you looked down 20 feet to an artificial pond where Griffiths, the woman who fell to water, lay submerged, lit in green and slowly masticating next to the protruding corner of her sunken

spaceship. At the far edge of the pond, above a waterfall, Thomas Gray's Once Upon a Time projected montages of dancers and chapter headings like 'ELECTRICITY' onto the screen of shrubbery, perceptually flip-flopping between 2D image and 3D foliage.

Before you turned into the Golden Glade, you could hear the hum and drone of bees from Tina McCallan's video Natural High. Sitting in a deck chair, you watched the tinted blue screen vibrating as if shot from the bee's point of view. McCallan, oblivious to everything, inhales the pollen, gorging herself on the carnations in a Guernsey greenhouse.

Round the corner and you were enclosed in a tunnel of laurel trees. Maria Yiasoumi's lasers projected lines of light cut up as you moved through them, dissolving the biomass of branches into a dazzling lattice that zoomed to vanishing point. By transferring technology from the dancefloor to the outdoors, the Visual Arts Exploration updates the garden's Victorian tradition of summer theatre. It generates a new continuum of what multimedia club Raya call atmospheric engineering.

Kodwo Eshun:

Xkodwoeshun AT yahoo.comX

No.2: The Hole in the Pole (Tales of the interconnected)

By Jonathan Hoag

the hole at the pole When Sir Edmund Haley, discoverer of the eponymous Comet, proposed to the Royal Society of London in 1692 the notion of an Hollow Earth, he opened (I believe this to be the appropriate modern day vernacular) a Whole Big Can of Worms.

For his announcement founded a string of such Theories, culminating in those, widely popularised, of American trader John Cleves Symmes after the war of 1812. 'I declare the earth is hollow,' Symmes said, 'and habitable within; containing a number of concentric spheres, one within the other, and that it is open at the poles 12 or 16 degrees; I pledge my life in support of this truth, and am ready to explore the hollow, if the world will support and aid me in this undertaking.' A Later expedition in 1838, funded by Congress at a cost of \$300,000 to the American Taxpayer found no evidence to support the Symmesian theory. Still this Theory, exceeding Attractive to your average American (given his desire, as we established to our satisfaction in the preceeding Tale, for territories Novel & Unexploited) never required much Fanning to keep it alive. Certain Isolated & Wierd reports have kept it going until our present day.

[IMAGE]

Chief amongst these are the Alleged Diaries of Admiral Richard E. Byrd, who made the world's first flights over the North and South Poles in his Ford Trimotor aircraft in November 1926 and 1929 respectively. Two years after the death of the Admiral in 1959, one F. Amondeo Giannini wrote in his volume Worlds Beyond The Poles, that the good Admiral had flown into the Hollow Earth 1700 miles beyond the North Pole in 1947, and 2300 miles beyond the south pole in 1955: this Truth was covered up by the Government, and Byrd was sworn to secrecy on Pain of Death. In accompaniment and, as it were, counterpoint to this, there is an Certain Story about Byrd's widow having at the last moment, and Without Prior Warning, removed documents from the coffin where his Corpse was laid. These Diaries contain reports of 'radiant', 'disc shaped' craft following the latter expedition, craft marked with 'a type of Swastika'; of being taken into the Pole Hole and meeting an alien race, 'tall with blond hair'; the master of which race informed Byrd that, 'the dark ages that will come now for your race will cover the Earth like a pall', due to man's engagement with Power of the Atom.

Now, Lest We Forget, the poor Admiral, being Deceased, has not the werewithal to refute any of these Exceeding Fabulous stories which have been imputed to him, and let us note that after his second

crossing, his official report read thus: 'Surveyed nearly 10,000 miles of the country beyond the pole, and found nothing...There was no observable feature of any significance beyond the pole...only rolling white desert from horizon to horizon.' That, dear reader, is most probably the truth of it: and I proffer the following Assorted URLs only with a concerted Caveat Lector.

I am, Sirs, your Faithful Fiend,
Dr. Jonathan P. Hoag (Ersatz.)

These Belgian Times

ByHari Kunzru

Once upon a time, electropop was fresh and new. Having wrested synthesisers out of the 'progressive' hands of Rick Wakeman, Pink Floyd and Emerson Lake and Palmer, a generation of producers used their new toys to produce plastic, disposable music, which celebrated mass production, consumer culture and the synthetic pleasures of modern living. Everyone remembers Kraftwerk, but hard on their heels were a lesser-known Belgian act by the name of Telex. Between 1978 and 1986 they used vocoders, moogs and upfront beats to make songs about super-chic boys drinking Daiquiris while watching the Eurovision song contest. They never had the credibility of their German art-rock counterparts; being Belgian they could never muster up the seriousness that Kraftwerk always exuded, even when singing about pocket calculators or computer dating. But they have always had a strong, if unacknowledged influence on electronic music, especially in the USA. Now an album of remixes by eminently tasteful producers such as Shake, 16b, Pulsinger and Tunakan, and Buckfunk 3000 proposes to introduce a new generation to the joys of Belgian electropop. The originals are back out too. Tune in for a forgotten chapter in the history of modern music.

Telex I Don't Like Music Volume 1 (the remixes) [SSR lp1-202]

Telex I Don't Like Remixes [SSR]

Hari Kunzu

Xhari AT metamute.comX

Drang und Bass

ByMartin Conrads

Opposite the old Prussian Bode Museum and situated on the river Spree, Berlin's association [kunst und technik] lodges in an old GDR barracks, where it minds the gap between lab, showroom and meeting place. With its cross-examination of artists and their technics/techniques, Berlin-Mitte's [kunst und technik] is not just a place 'of art' but also a semi-public forum focused on communication and exchange. Equipped "with a swarm of external radical forces", the 9 members of [kunst und technik] (architects, artists and media people) create work between "technology, structure and communication".

Exploring the heterogeneous fields of art und technology and dwelling in a comfortable corporate backlab, it has been suggested that [kunst und technik] is continuing the development of the techno-esque logic of Berlin's legendary locations (like Friseur/Botschaft, Elektro or Panasonic) of the early/mid 90s. Whereas it was easy to select the places to go in those glory days, nowadays there is a broad variety of modular projects and locations in Mitte, so let's dispose with this linear myth making madness. Sometimes journalists suspect that soft drinks are served in the same building at logarithmic times, but this rumour must remain unconfirmed. In the meantime, definitely have a look at their website.

[kunst und technik]: [Xkunst technik@berlin.heimat.de](mailto:Xkunst.technik@berlin.heimat.de)
[www.berlin.heimat.de/kunst.technik]

Martin Conrads
[Xconrads AT zedat.fu-berlin.de](mailto:Xconrads@zedat.fu-berlin.de)
[www.art-bag.net]

Silence of the Suns

By Simon Worthington

It's midnight, the dead of night. The earth's dark side provides shelter from the solar winds: a barrage of electrically charged particles caused by plasma shockwaves surging out of sunspots. Shielded from the solar winds, the upper atmosphere's reflective underside - known as the 'radio mirror' - becomes more robust. As the solar radio noise lets up, 'Very Low Frequency' (VLF) radio signals can be picked up: a mix of magnetic storm emissions, atmospheric nuclear explosions, naval nuclear submarine communications, meteor showers and spacecraft launches and re-entries.

silence of the sun

It is this pulsing, crackling miasma of radio noise that the artist Joe Banks records and uses in performances like the recent *Disinformation*, a noise installation in a cold war nuclear bunker at Anstruther, Fife. The bunker Banks used on this occasion was already surrounded by a Faraday cage which neutralises dangerous impulses such as those radiated by atom bombs. Quite apart from their lethal radio-activity, as electromagnetic emissions go these are like the equivalent of enormous, man-made, lightning strikes. On a more modest scale, the Faraday cage functions as the earth does, creating Banks' very own protected dark side.

silence of the sun

In this artificial dead of night, or night of death, Banks created two noise works: *National Grid NO5608* and *Theophany*. In a service corridor 150 feet below the ground he fed the bunker's mains AC supply into one side of his sound equipment, outputting subsonics on the other side which, in turn, were audible on the surface (*National Grid NO5608*). Deeper down, in the bunker's chapel *Theophany's* recordings of VLF radio signals generated a different kind of noise: military intelligence communications and the universe's radio storm folded together.

Banks himself relates his work to the project of *intonarumori*, or noise machines, of Italian Futurism - drawing not on a stylised simulation of industrial processes, but directly upon electricity itself as both real and metaphorical source of creative energy. Banks' noise machines are plumbing the hemispheres for sonic truth, paving their immaterial way around what he describes as the "semi-skimmed" philosophical and deconstructive levities of the contemporary arts. Like lie detectors, Banks' sound machines make recourse to the objectivity of scientific measurement and relay. Unlike lie detectors, Banks is more than happy to undress the military technologies and history of warfare that make his experiments possible.

silence of the sun

Joe Banks was at *Interference*, the Lux Cinema 9/12/98. Tel: 44(0)171 684 0201.

The Net.Art Money-Go-Round

By Frederic Madre

Net art just wants to be free, or at least that's what we were led to believe. But recently the shine has been wearing off its image as the rebel art form which no 'dirty capitalist' would touch with a barge pole. Frederic Madre takes a look at net art in the post-edenic era.

net.art Ask an artist about money and you're likely to get a long face or some convoluted meta-cover ups of the well rehearsed sort. Email the same questions to net.artists like JODI and you will receive the object of desire delivered in your inbox: art for free. Every bit as effective as any of the aforementioned smokescreens, it is the best of both worlds. Immaterial, maybe, but still in my inbox. Outside my inbox there is now a price tag on net.art. Not that anyone's sure if it's really for sale, whether the just opened art.teleportacia.org gallery is a clever fiction or - simply - a gallery.

That nothing it conveys can be taken at face value is a feature, not a bug, of the Internet medium. The misunderstandings, innuendos, accidental failures and premeditated blind alleys that constantly pepper the browsing experience are part of it all. Olia Lialina, the gallerist best known for her cool hyperfiction, digests all critics and embraces their diatribes on her site as so many adornments. To my remark that it does net.art a disservice to sell it so cheap, at \$2000 a pop for all to see and count, she rebuts: "again, can i use this note in the 'under construction' section? you are the only person (besides me) who thinks it's too low, others think it should cost the same as a videotape. next time it will be \$20,000, and afterwards \$200,000. if it is \$20,000 now, it would look more like a joke". And yet, she is already bartering with big US institutions over figures which merely amount to a business class round-trip ticket to Europe, a trivial expense by their standards. The precedent is being set and prices fixed now will be difficult to dismiss later, too late to joke again. The asset of the teleportacia.org gallery is to be found in the turmoil it creates through making the model work tentatively but not right away, twisting the knife in the gaping wound of net.art's adversarial stance to the art market. And there's the merciless dedication of its mentor to both adore and upset any and all preconceptions, determined as she is to draw her own map with stolen pencils.

Have you got a model? Everybody in net.art is looking for one, some attempting to build a new one from the remnants of the old world. A model is needed in order to justify the unjustifiable: making money; buying clothes and food; going to the movies; travelling around. Plain unjustifiable, sustaining your life. The video model has a few advocates, such as Vuk Cosic whose "classics of net.art" book series seems to be a precursor of the gallery in its unlikely, and best left unrealised, potentiality. "ZKM is now seriously planning a series of acquisitions of net.art, and the way they'll do that is to buy 'non-exclusive' rights as in video art," explains Cosic. "This means that they'll make their copies of our files, and send us some cash. Simple." Meanwhile while stocks last, use remains free to all and every piece on the gallery can be browsed and downloaded at will. Hip surfers and idle collectors alike passively absorb and copy the same art files in their cache folder, sometimes unknowingly, from where it can effortlessly be resurrected and made to walk the Net again. Simple. It's the "send us some cash" part that most just won't get.

net.art

As any righteous sex browser can testify there is no point in joining a paying club when the same shady adulteration is waiting out there to be taken, used, crumpled and thrown away. The world is not in short supply of either art or cumshots. It would only make sense to pay to view if our best loved artist, whoever that is this week, suddenly decided to withdraw monk-style to a digital monastery. There our artist would admit visitors by appointment and at a fee, who would in turn gratefully kneel and kiss the holy green flashing ring of the artist. Too close for comfort to a conventional book club, the sex-site-convent model will probably remain untried until one can effectively distinguish white liquid soap spurts from the real thing.

For that, the flock needs a shepherd or a barking dog. Says Vuk, "The other question is the promotion and exposure that needs more than an art institution's back up. A net.artist will need a curatorial star if any career is desired." There is a model of the artist as top dog, pacing the lecture course as if it were Art Race 3000, dragging the mouse over his own oeuvre, the new breed of the net jet set. Dialectically opposed, but still on hyperbole to star-isation, =cw4t7abs claims to dispose of the body and become a machine speaking its own clickety language. Both self-proclaimed Saint Sebastian in the fight against net.fascism and "0 1 optional perzon", it can dismiss all these equivocations with a "m9ndfuc " and go on building self-mythology around expert audio software authoring and no holds barred spamming.

Without revealing their means of subsistence, JODI concur that "There are many genres of networks..... even in net.art= totally div backgrounds
&div\$moneys

a Moskow artist needs Money More> than a Berliner....

there is no one solution.....
but Fine art is a global system.....
with all div National.models;
Arts councils; Goethe institutes; Mondriaanstichting;
Festivals; Prizes; Concours...etcetc"
net.art

Amongst others the museum model conveys clusters of cruelly unapproachable or terminally down computers, resting like old yellow jars of formaldehyde containing freaks of natural history. Two-headed goat with no hind legs, click me, bird remains from the intestine of a snake, download realaudio player. The preservation of the Internet and its artefactual art is simply not achievable because it would imply the preservation of the computer industry which itself is resolute in sabotaging its productions every day with a relentless expanse of profitably incompatible innovations.

If what we know is wrong than what would be right? I ask JODI. "%20Make the net an independabt medium; like uh.. 'cartoons or 'digital minimal opera' ;]
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#FFFFFFfight/////"

Maybe they are more into the fight than the prize? I ask.
"<!-N J PAIK is DEAD-!>",
they answer,
"bella
BAU HOUSE
VON NAUMAN</BR>"

Ropy bridges have been slung between the pathologically self-referential and incestuous network and the hard-working world. As we gush at length on the immateriality of it all, a German stone craftsman is ready to sandblast a .gif of any homepage onto solid tombstone marble. Commissioned by Berliners sero.org (blank jeron), the expert carvers have yet to deliver more than the prototype. There is still no taker, even for the mobile version that comes with a handy shopping cart (all for under \$500, excluding p&p). Witnessing the pair show their finished product at the Neue Berliner Kunstverein, one could ponder the prospect of bringing the weighty self-referentiality back home.

Models galore! Submersion of thought! Smokescreen? As I'm typing this on a corporate laptop in a Club Lounge at Stockholm's airport, waiting for Air France pilots to end their strike and take us home, I think of this particular model, known as 'the day job', which does deliver but in very unglamorous ways. More than anything a model is needed to define room for compromise, to render tacitly acceptable what would, outside the system it arbitrarily delimits, be questioned or even objected to. Each builds his model according to the level of protection that he needs. The profusion of models is currently the overall protection that net art needs from the huffing and puffing of the big bad fine art wolf blowing its pestilent bucks. Already the roof is giving in. None of them appear to be strong enough on their own to provide brick-like homey comfort to those surviving artworkers on the Net.

Frederic Madre: **Xfmadre AT wanadoo.fr**
[pleine-peau.com]
[art.teleportacia.org]
[www.vuk.org]

Intercity Radiothon

By Josephine Berry

'Compulsive' is a word often used to describe our relationships with computers. Combine the compulsiveness of the computer drug with the hypnotic effects of voices on radio and you've got Torkradio. Frustrated by their experience of making 30 second 'audio blipverts' for a local radio station, Chris Dorley Brown and Bob Jarok of Cambridge's music and arts venue The Junction decided to make something more "marathon like" - an extended 72 hour audio experiment involving over 20 visual and performance artists. The Net offered the perfect environment for an audio project breaking with the conventions of radio's time compression, musical etiquette and high production values.

intercity radiothon

Tim Read, of UK web radio station Gaia Live and 'facilitator' of Torkradio, described the technical 'amateurism' of many of the artists as giving the whole event an open-ended, "sky's-the-limit feel". Although many artists had a background in performance (amongst others the writer Anne Whitehurst, the theatre group Desperate Optimists, the performance artists Alan Howley and Roney Fraser Munro, and Sony Radio Music Award winner and artist Chris Cheek), digital audio editing and webcasting tended to provide a new challenge. Czech artist Pavel Buchler described Torkradio as a 'laboratory atmosphere' in which there was no pressure for ideas to succeed. With limited knowledge of where technical boundaries lay, these boundaries could be happily (because unwittingly) overstepped. Dorley Brown explained how the strange paradox of being globally accessible and by the same token virtually invisible shifted the focus away from a concentration on listeners to the mad, sleep-deprived dynamics of the studio itself.

intercity radiothon

Venturing beyond its caffeinated confines, some of the participants incorporated local interviews and recordings into the mix. One of the most memorable was Chris Cheek's piece in which he approached locals with a microphone and innocently enquired: "Could you tell me where the heart of Cambridge is?" Mostly, the respondents saw nothing unusual in his phraseology and duly trotted out directions. Stewart Home also incorporated the live prankster element into his slot when he rang local prostitutes and asked whether they were prepared to perform variously depraved sexual acts in unusual locations. When they replied in the affirmative he would earnestly explain that he had a pass to the reactor of a nuclear power station or other such end-game scenarios. The handset was swiftly replaced. Whilst Alan Howley read out melancholic love stories involving his mother and father, knitting enough archetypes together to undo even the most hardened psychoanalyst, the heavy base from The Junction's downstairs club pulsed audibly.

intercity radiothon

Appropriation and sound collage were favoured tropes. Pavel Buchler's piece 'Pavel Buchler's Finest Hour' excised the audience applause and stage comments from three live recordings of Rolling Stones, Billie Holliday and Louis Armstrong hits to synthesise one 'greatest hit'. Thousands of voices were compressed into each minute of sound. Although very often the concept behind such pieces was lost in the execution, resulting in undifferentiated 'noise' which made the works hard to tell apart, as Read puts it, "the God is in the detail". Extending the audio blipverts into a sound continuum, and inverting the logic of the small intervention in mainstream media, Torkradio spreads itself across the vast indifference of the Net. In the locale of frenetic data exchange and cacaphonic chat, brief moments of coherent detail provide small rafts with which to negotiate the endless expanse. As the paternal days of the solo DJ voice give way to the 'noise' of synchronous chat we come closer to the proverbial life-sized map disintegrating and mixing with the ground it covers. Torkradio puts a whole new spin on the concept of the 'attention economy'.

Josephine Berry

Xjosie AT metamute.comX

[www.torkradio.com]

How Do You Like Your Blue-Eyed Screen Saver, Mr.Death?

ByTom McCarthy

Tom McCarthy on Necropia.com

Ever read the Egyptian Book of the Dead? Not many people have. This is a pity: it's full of funky, garish beasts strutting and pouting à la Jagger as they hiss lines such as: "The sky is wrapped around the stars, magic is wrapped around the sky, and my mouth is closed on the magic which is in it. My teeth are a knife, my horns are like a mountain of snakes." It has inspired such modern masterpieces as Norman Mailer's *Ancient Evenings* and William Burroughs's *The Western Lands*. Above all, it is, as far as I can make out, the world's first software system. Developed and updated by whole teams of programmers and coders (there was nothing Baudelairean about Egyptian scribes: they sat in rows in Microsoft-like corporations, learning and applying cipher sequences), it consists of more than a hundred spells, each one of which facilitates a function in the underworld, such as the procurement of food or the opening of a door. The hardware onto which these spells were loaded was, of course, the mummified body of the deceased: scrolls - or rather a selection of them, as few people could afford each spell - were tucked inside the coffin, and thereafter it was hoped that the protocols, passwords and anti-virus shields (the underworld's hazards included disintegration and the theft by wily crocodiles of the dead man's magic powers) these contained would auto-run when necessary and thus maintain the paradoxical state of being alive-in-death, of living out one's own annihilation.

In the early 1990s, cryogenics was the medium of choice for those hoping to melvin the Reaper. In the late 1990s, it's the Internet. Even before Timothy Leary's 'online death', Extropians were fervently saving their memories to disk in the hope that these could be downloaded onto fresher flesh fifty years down the line, thus ensuring the continuation of their own identity beyond its host's demise. It's no coincidence that some of the Net's more imaginative theorists have pictured it as a giant graveyard. Hakim Bey presents it as 'a psychic slum', 'haunted' by UFOs, Heaven's Gate ascended masters and prisoners in Texas doing data-entry as slave labour (those Egyptian scribes again), by 'predatory avatars' (those crocodiles), disinformationists and advertisers.

For us 'sane' Europeans, too, death and the Net are inextricable, were always going to be so, even when we didn't detect the slightest whiff of morbidity in our subject matter. The main points of reference in technothory and net criticism are Deleuze (the rhizomatic structure of the Web, its thrusts and clinamens and BWO-like proliferations) and Marx (the way the medium impacts, reproduces or subverts non-virtual power relations). Behind Deleuze is Nietzsche; behind Marx, Hegel - and death is absolutely central to the thought of both philosophers.

Firstly, Nietzsche: the death he announced was the first death, the über-death: the death of God. As Simon Critchley points out in his excellent *Very Little... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy and Literature*, philosophical modernity has been little more than a thinking through of this death, "not only the death of the God of the Judaeo-Christian tradition, but also the death of all those ideals, norms, principles, rules, ends and values that are set above humanity in order to provide human beings with a meaning to life." As Heidegger (who cited death as the precondition of temporality) noted, Nietzsche's work marks the collapse of the supersensory world into the sensory world, into its mechanics. True, Platonic presences become POPs.

Secondly, Hegel. Hegel's strange and beautiful schema by which knowledge and comprehension come to institute themselves, to 'occur', turns on a process of negation and surpassing which Hegel likens to death. Things must disappear as things in order to appear symbolically. To name and understand a flower, I must take the living, photosynthesising reality away from it, cause it to be absent - cast it in a state of ideal absence. As Mallarmé puts it: "Je dis un fleur, et le fleur est parti" - I say 'a flower', and the flower is cut/split/gone. Hegel writes that "Adam's first act, which made him master of the animals, was to give them names, that is, he annihilated them as existing creatures." Kojève, Hegel's most celebrated exegete after Marx, unequivocally proclaims this process murder. Maurice Blanchot, Hegel's most poetic exegete, calls death "the advent of truth in the world": "In speech," he writes in "Literature and the Right to Death", "what dies is what gives life to speech; speech is the life of that death, it is 'the life that endures death and maintains itself in it". If death is so fulcral in the realm of common, spoken language, how much more so is it in the virtual world, whose VRML zones enact quite literally the replacement of objects and people by avatars, whose IRC lounges and coffee rooms make users present to each other through a mediation of their very absence, their remoteness at a keyboard at the far end of a networked line?

Ah! To each other! Death isn't just a solipsistic thang. Death makes us present to each other. It is the condition of our mutual experience online, our rapprochement, our communion. For Levinas, common experience of death brings about hypostasis, an event that, as Critchley puts it in his study, "will culminate in the establishment of the ethical relation as the basis of sociality." In Shakespeare's tragedies communities are founded on a shared, and often guilty, knowledge of the murder of another: the eponymous emperor in Julius Caesar, Duncan in MacBeth - but what I'm proposing is more radical: that communities, and online communities par excellence, exist because all participants have entered into death, death is the condition of our participation. To paraphrase Emily Dickinson: we may not have stopped for it, but it's sure as hell stopped for us, flung its doors open, taken us along for the ride. We are all necronauts.

Tom McCarthy:
Xtom AT metamute.comX

Hacks (an interview with Christine Bader)

By David Hudson

Over a period of four years, Hamburg-based artist Christine Bader captured a network of friends on camera thinking out loud about 'hacks'. Fortunately, she has interesting friends, starting with many in Hamburg's legendary Chaos Computer Club (CCC), its Bielefeld off-shoot, Foebud, and the founders of Amsterdam's pioneering Internet provider XS4ALL. The network expands to include Kommhelp, an organisation devoted to helping the physically challenged communicate via computers, the crew of Stubnitz, a media art ship experiment which failed interestingly, and Paul Watson, captain of the Sea Shepherd that voyages where even Greenpeace doesn't dare to go in the fight for environmental justice.

Bader's travels take her not only across the European continent but also through a particularly euphoric period in the development of net culture. The result is part home movie and part meditation on what it means to live freely despite social constraints. Some of those she interviewed years ago cringe at the naivete of their comments now, Bader notes, but she feels that editing the travel log for a late nineties sensibility would be dishonest.

hacks

In a sidewalk cafe on a sunny afternoon in Berlin, Bader spoke about her portrait of the European hacking scene.

David Hudson: This is probably a question you get a lot. The movie is called hacks, and of course, some of the scenes are very much what you'd expect - for example, the bits from Hacking in Progress. Then there's a sort of broadening of the definition of hacks. Especially when it comes to the two ships, the Sea Shepherd and the Stubnitz. Did you consciously want to stretch the definition of hacks beyond what you already understood it to be?

Christine Bader: There are several ways to approach this question. One is that many of the people in the film already know each other or about each other. The people at the Chaos Computer Club, for example, support the Sea Shepherd. There's simply a great willingness to recognise and commend each other's work.

The other thing is that I understood hacking more as a way of thinking and a way of living. A way to materialise your visions without constraint or...

DH: Social constructs. Yes, that comes through.

CB: And to do it as a team. You are an individual, but you find people who think like you do if you are communicating. Paul Watson is the only person who really has a certain rhetoric which is his way to communicate - because he's very used to journalists. But he does a project which is really encapsulated. He has a very small crew of people doing really hard work, but when he goes outside to the media, he can speak very well.

Some people told me that this isn't hacking in its true form because he's so straightforward. But I don't see it from that angle. It's much deeper than that; the connection is on the level of human communication. The environment is much more than just trees and nature. The virtual environment, too, is our environment. So to live in harmony with our environment means to live in harmony with your social environment as well as your natural environment. This is what I think hacking is about.

DH: How long have you been involved with the CCC?

CB: Since 1993.

DH: So you've been filming them the whole time.

CB: Yes. The first time I was there was for the CCC Congress in 1993, and I had my Hi-8 camera with me, so I just started.

DH: So the scenes with the CCC are also some of earliest material in the film. And then you started approaching people for financial support for this four-year long project, but the money ran out. When was that?

CB: About four months before I finished. So the Hacking in Progress sequences I shot on my own.

DH: How long were you with the Stubnitz project?

CB: I think the Stubnitz project was a kind of mega-project. From the beginning, you knew it wouldn't work. It was a suicide mission in a way. Everyone wondered if these people were really so naive, but they just wanted to do what they wanted to do, knowing all along that it would fail. Nobody really knew what they were thinking.

But I think they really were naive. They really believed in this project. At the beginning, there was no recession, so they really believed that they'd get financing from the governments of Austria and Germany, cultural funds and so on. Very soon after they bought the ship, these financial problems began.

Everybody knew there was going to be no more money for culture, but they already had this big ship and they had to do something with it. They could have sold it immediately, but they didn't do that. They had the hope that it would work, and they tried very hard to find private financing. They offered it up to companies for company presentations, but nothing worked. It was a disaster.

It was at this point that we made our interviews, and there was a serious depression on the boat. They knew that it wouldn't work. They'd worked for four years on this project in return for just two months of travelling before they went bankrupt.

DH: How long did you spend with them on the ship?

CB: I was there at different times. It was a fish trawler from eastern Germany, not a media ship at all, so they had to do a lot of construction work on the ship. I was there in the winter and it was very cold; the living was very, very hard there. And then I was there in the summer a few months before they set out, and then I was with them in St. Petersburg.

Hacks

DH: When someone asks you "What do you do?", what do you usually reply?

CB: I'm an artist. I've been working as an artist for sixteen years. I started with exhibitions and fine art, but moved away from that because it was not so interesting for me. I love teamwork. I also love works-in-progress. It's always the process I'm interested in and not in the actual product. So I moved away from the fine arts and got into multimedia, performances, lectures and did a lot of work with the computer and interactive television - and then I started work on the film. I'd done a lot of small films before this one, though. This is my first feature. I made one documentary before; it was about half an hour. And some experimental short films.

But I see myself as an artist and I understand this film as a kind of performance. It was working together with all these people. This film was made from the inside; I didn't do it as a journalist. I didn't do a load of research and then go out with the camera and the team and so on.

Paul Watson is the only person I was not so close to. But that was also a funny thing. I saw a report on him on 'Spiegel TV' about half a year before I met him. I sat there in my chair, wondering: "Who is this guy?", "What's he doing?" It's so straight and so good.

When I was a child, I always said to the other children - you know, at the time there was a terrorist group, Baader-Meinhof, and my name is Bader, so the children were always making fun of that - and I asked them: "Why is there not an environmental terrorist group?" They do it for such stupid things - of course, at that age, I didn't understand their reasoning. The only thing that made sense to me was environmental terrorism. To blow up a factory, for example.

I always had this in mind, and then years later, I saw this report about this person, and I thought, this is a really good thing. I had to get to know him.

So I called my friends from the CCC because I knew a journalist there who speaks very good English, and we went together. We'd made an appointment, but it was very difficult because of all the television teams, but we got the appointment. And he agreed to give us ten minutes, but in the end we had more than one hour because he couldn't stop. Our questions were also very fundamental, and he liked the fact that this project was not a TV project.

DH: Any plans for the future?

CB: Yes, my next film will be about meditation. Because I'm very fascinated with the way people in Asia live. I'm interested in the discipline of this inner life and the ability to concentrate and create an inner freedom - despite overpopulation and social systems such as those in India and China. It isn't possible to realise yourself as an individual the way we can in the West, whether it be because of the caste system or religious fundamentalism, but many still manage to find this inner freedom, and I find that fascinating.

David Hudson Xdwh AT berlin.snafu.deX [www.rewired.com]

'hacks' (1994-98)

A film by Christine Bader

73 min.

Camera: Ulla Barthold, Bella Halben, Gabi Schwark, Christine Bader

Editing: Michael Thaler

Music and Animation: Andreas Kunzmann, Jin Choi

Production: Choifilm

[hacksfilm.home.ml.org]

The Rite Stuff

ByDavid McKee

Jerrel is about to celebrate her twenty-first birthday. It's the special she's been waiting for all her young life - the day on which she joins the Hive, in body as much as in spirit. This is more than your average holy communion for young Jerrel - a surgically facilitated rite of passage from which there's no turning back. A short story by David McKee

the rite stuff Jerrel could not shake the paranoia. Walking from her building to the metro she felt eyes on her, peeling back layer after layer of skin and flesh and probing her, investigating her intent. The air seemed unusually warm for March. Sweat trickled down her back and soaked her armpits. She imagined she was caught in a warm ocean current, drifting along an immaterial stream through cold waters. Strange, predatory fish floated casually alongside her, eyeing her with hungry fascination and trying to guess how far she planned to drift. Trying to guess her destination.

It was probably just the medication making her loopy. The doctor had warned it had odd and unpredictable effects. At least she had not hallucinated like some of her friends had. She shook her head to clear her thoughts. Day dreams aren't hallucinations. I'm fine.

But they might be watching her. She turned twenty-one today. The all-important day. The infamous, if clichéd, fork in the road. Anyone with an array could ping her. And that meant anyone with an array could know her public record. And age.

There were very few luddite enough to refuse an array. It was virtually impossible to function in society without the tiny implant that let one connect to the Net with a thought. The most casual of thoughts could send out an ethereal feeler to her array, and without so much as a 'by your leave' she – her array – would respond with an identification. She had never really worried about it before. But today was different. Today it mattered.

There were no few people who would be very interested to learn she had turned twenty-one. And they would all be curious to know what she had chosen for her birthday present.

Approaching the metro entrance she laughed to herself. Who needs to hallucinate? A crowd was milling around, jostling for position in the queue. People of every variety. All perfect according to whatever aesthetic they lived by. Most had pigment alteration: primary colours were popular this year. Most were also completely bald, and had visible prostheses of various descriptions – some of no discernible practical use.

In a rush of warm, stale air the train arrived. Jerrel climbed in and took a seat. Watching the rest of the crowd board the train, she saw only one person without obvious body alteration. A man wearing what looked like a silver skull cap. Everyone else gave him a wide berth, and as he sat down a furry man with yellow eyes hastily vacated the bench. He seemed utterly unaffected. Draping himself across the now empty bench he closed his eyes and leaned his head back. Jerrel knew that if she sat next to him she would likely hear him humming. They did that when they connected. Something about the implants caused an involuntary vibration of the vocal chords when they went fully into the deeper Web. Because of this humming, they were called 'bees' by the changers. And the deeper Web was referred to as the Hive. The place where they joined the hive-mind.

They referred to themselves as the People, but used the term 'the Hive' to refer to the Web beyond the Web. The Hive was a world apart. A place with its own realities in which things like sociality, individuality, and personality took on whole new meanings. Better meanings, Jerrel believed, although she had, of course, never been in the Hive. Many changers argued that once a person wore the skull cap – actually a new skull that housed and protected the complex collection of implants necessary to connect properly to the deeper Web – they gave up autonomy and individual identity. Jerrel refused to believe that. Her parents had seemed independent enough to her, even if they did spend most of their waking hours and all sleeping hours connected. They also seemed, to her, much more in tune with the feelings and thoughts of others than did those who refused or were denied access to the Hive.

That was precisely what she had chosen for her birthday. She was now old enough to make the decision that would shape the rest of her life. Not that there had ever been any doubt about the choice she would make. The only question had been her ability to pass the tests. Everyone who chose to be one of the People had to take a battery of psychological and physical tests. If any of these had shown her to be a poor fit for the implants she would have had no choice at all. She would have been forced to settle for body alteration or nothing at all. Few, having taken the tests, ever took the latter choice. Most, set on joining the Hive, committed suicide if they failed the tests. Of course, they were unbalanced, most of them anyway weren't they? Otherwise they would have passed the test. Then again, to Jerrel's way of thinking, anyone who didn't want to take the tests was at least a little suspect.

Jerrel pushed the thought from her mind. She had passed the tests. She had received the drug and hormone treatments throughout the past six months to prepare her body for the implants. She had done all the tutorials to prepare her for the Hive.

She was ready.

Soon enough the train arrived at her stop. Casting a final glance over her shoulder at the man reclining peacefully in the train car, she stepped down onto the walkway. Suddenly nervous, she hurried to her destination, eyes on the ground. Her paranoia grew with each step. The nearer she came to the offices where she would receive her implants the greater her certainty that she was being watched.

As she neared the address the walk became clogged with people, all changers. They were chanting and marching. Some carried signs with pictures of bees or other insects and slogans like "Smoke the Hive!" or "Human! Not insect!"

She had known she would have to pass protesters to get her implants. They were here every day, all day and all night. Idiots, she thought. How could people who grew fur and prosthetically added new and alien body parts accuse the People of being non-human?

Jostling her way through the protesters she felt a hand grip her arm. A blue-skinned changer spun her around and yelled, "It's her day! She's come to cast aside her humanity!"

The crowd roared and surged up around Jerrel, crushing her. She screamed and flailed about, trying to escape. Hundreds of voices cried out in unison, "Save her! Save her!" Arms grabbed at her from every direction. She lost her balance, but the press of bodies was too tight for her to fall. She felt herself drifting in a tide of more or less human bodies. Gasping with exertion and fear, the smell of sweat and the breath of others choked her.

Then she fell to the ground. The chanting gave way to panicked screaming. Someone was hurt. Was there fighting? She huddled on the ground in foetal position, crying, terrified.

"You killed him!" someone yelled.

The rest was drowned out in the crowd's roar. Strong arms slipped under her body, and she felt herself being lifted. Afraid to move, she kept her eyes closed, wondering what would happen to her. Would they force her to undergo body alteration? Would she be allowed to enter the Hive if that happened?

A harsh voice barked orders. The air became suddenly cooler, and the sounds of the crowd vanished. She was set gently on a couch.

“Are you all right, dear? Did they hurt you?” asked the voice.

Jerrel looked up and felt relief flood through her. Standing above her was a huge, massively built woman in a private police uniform. Her head gleamed brilliant silver under the fluorescent lights in the ceiling. “Are you hurt?”

Jerrel sat up, shaking her head. “I’m fine. A little scared. I had no idea...”

“They’re out in force today. It’ll be worse tomorrow. The other guards are dispersing the crowd. One of those changer idiots got himself hurt trying to snatch you away.”

Jerrel did not think the guard sounded very sympathetic at all. She looked back toward the door, but there were no windows to see through. The room, a reception area, was simply decorated. A few couches and tables were scattered throughout and expensive looking rugs covered the floor. A second door broke the wall.

“Who do I need to talk to?” Jerrel asked, scanning for a secretary.

“So you are here for your upgrade, eh?” the guard asked, smiling. “Just walk over to that door. It will ping you and let you through”

Jerrel nodded. She stood, wiping tears from her cheeks and patting down her clothes. Satisfied that Jerrel was all right, the guard winked, spun around and marched out the front door. Jerrel caught a glimpse of a suddenly empty street when the door opened.

Spinning about herself, she took a deep breath and approached the other door. It whispered open as she approached.

the rite stuff

Less than half an hour later Jerrel was lying down on an operating table. Anaesthesia washed over her, loosening her muscles, bathing her mind, stilling her fears. The room receded, and she embraced oblivion.

Jerrel’s mind exploded.

Every taste she knew – every physical sensation – coursed along like bright grains of sand under her skin. Her muscles twitched and jerked with the sensation. She wept and laughed and knew that Everyone wept and laughed with her. Everyone. The People.

They were all inside her. Or she was inside them. She felt them touching her, probing her, examining her. But not like before. She resonated with fright and contentment; this felt nothing like her earlier paranoia. Earlier? Was there a previous time?

Every touch on her, however tentative or bold, allowed her to touch back. Every gaze on her gave her sight. Every caress of her mind (her soul?) every caress of the something under her skin brushed the outside, caressed the others.

Then it was all taken away from her. In the moment before the dark, she felt herself die.

Jerrel lay on a firm surface, soaked in sweat and tingling over every inch of her body. Something was wrong. Different. Her head throbbbed dully.

“Jerrel, the implant worked fine. You have been upgraded. You will find that your first few trips to the Hive are disconcerting, but you seemed to handle the first very well.”

She opened her eyes, then gasped, blinking at the harsh light of the operating room. A kindly, androgynous face hovered over her. “Jerrel?”

“I’m...I’m all right. I think. It worked?”

“It worked just fine.”

“My head hurts.”

The face nodded sympathetically. “You will have a headache for a few hours yet. It’s more from contacting the Hive than from the surgery.”

The Hive.

Memory, incomprehensible and sublime, flooded Jerrel’s mind.

“When your headache recedes you can contact again. Does that sound good to you, Jerrel?”

Jerrel closed her eyes and tried to feel the intensity the memories suggested. It was all a jumble. Hardly coherent. Her memories seemed pale and lifeless. She felt suddenly lonely. Her body seemed empty and oddly heavy.

“I want to go Home!” she cried, sitting up suddenly and grabbing the doctor’s wrist. “Let me go Home!”

The surgeon smiled, and Jerrel thought the glare from the ceiling lights looked like a nimbus around his silver head. He gently pressed her back against the table. “Just as soon as your headache recedes, birthday girl. We’ll go home together.”

David McKee:
Xdmckee AT uci.eduX

Staying In To Play

By John Paul Bichard

Morality and Immortality - the games industry under siege

staying in to play This review was going to be themed around the morality of computer games and the responsibility that games developers may or may not have regarding the exponential increase in influence that CV games are having upon broad sectors of Western society, as well as those sectors’ responses to these new ’uncontrollable’ media which present different world orders, scenarios for the destruction and reconstruction of society and the reassessment of personal and societal power structures. Furthermore, the intention was to assess the ethics of an entertainment industry that has a direct bearing on the physical state of its consumers: the ways in which the physical self is altered through intense concentration, continual rushes of adrenaline and heightened and focused aggression and how this impacts literally on the way that the individual functions in the ’real’ world post-gameplay. The problem was and is that one of the very games that I was using took over my life. I found myself psychologically transported to a world not dissimilar but harsher to the one I am used to: my legs started to shrink, whilst the joints in my arms and wrists became increasingly supple, the

vertebrae in my back fused into a perfect exponential curve, my kidneys and liver started metabolising at an extraordinarily low rate, my heart rate dropped to 20 bpm, my eyes started to self lubricate and my arse became completely flat. So I write this article from a zero gravity tank in a decompression chamber in extremely painful traction and awaiting a full heart, lung, liver and kidney transplant - but hey, lets not wallow in gratuitous self indulgence, on with the games.

A big thank you to two hardware companies without whose support, this section would not be possible: Creative Labs for the superb kit that has powered this column's journey through the outer reaches of games heaven for most of 1998 and beyond - a 3D Blaster Voodoo2 3D graphics card and Soundblaster awe64 gold sound card, (lovely bit of kit), and to Evergreen for their support in providing upgrade CPUs for our ageing PC's: accelerating a P133 up to a P200 (the minimum spec for most top games) and a Pentium upgrade for an ancient steam driven 486 that allows you to play network Quake and heaps of £10 white label classics - thanks guys and gals.

That's life.

Half-Life

It would be an insult to describe Half-Life as a game. Half-Life is a story, a beautifully crafted story of scientific excess, of government treachery, of terrifying encounters with alien races. If Half-Life was merely a novel or film it would be thrilling but, with you as one of the main characters taking the lead role in the action, it becomes something quite different to anything I have yet experienced. As Dr Freeman, you start at work on a usual morning, wandering around the research complex, chatting with the guards and your colleagues. It's your turn to work in the accelerator core when a mountain of shit hits an immense fan as the space-time continuum ruptures. From this point onward, you better move fast, rally the remaining survivors, gather as many resources as you can and be prepared for a terrifying, gruelling, holiday in hell. What puts this (game) head and shoulders above any other is the combination of a superb plot, an extraordinary array of weapons (including biological ones), and an awesome onslaught of foes. You will jump out of your seat, dread the next corner you turn, dive for cover as half a dozen machine guns rip into you, taste the bitter pill of betrayal as you fight, hour after hour, to reach the surface and freedom? I just got there and it ain't looking too good from where I'm crouching. Forget interactive movies, forget virtual reality and non-linear fiction, Hollywood action films and second-rate cyber-fi novels, get real, get Half-Life.

999/1000

Real life - Sierra /Valve - PC
ay anything

staying in to play staying in to play **Tomb Raider 3**

Picture this - the Natural History museum in all its Victorian gothic splendour, illuminated in red and orange, the huge diplodocus in the entrance hall lit up blood-red amidst the swirling mist, chamber music echoing around the galleries and corridors filled with silent, staring creatures, maidens wafting through the mist bearing vast cushions laden with all sorts of sweetmeats, wine flowing by the gallon, lapped up by the bleary-eyed doyens of the gaming fraternity. The lights are killed, noise pumps out to shatter the calm, a spotlight burns bright on a figure leaping down the vast stairway, plait waving, breasts heaving, leather shorts rubbing between the hot... shit I'm dribbling again. The launch party for Tomb Raider 3 with the latest real fake Lara Croft (lovely Geordie lass with charming personality - really - see the piccy), Jonathan Woss (overweight pervert, half decent chat show host and celebrity) more alcohol than you can wave a stick at and a glorious limited edition Lara Croft figurine that I wouldn't dream of picking up, running out with past the bouncers (real bouncers) and sticking in a safety deposit box in Switzerland (see other piccy). So much for the launch, but what about the game - well, it's great. Granted it is more of the same, but 3 is everything 2 tried and should have been with an extra couple of cup sizes thrown in. The thrills are bigger, the foes more convincing, the atmosphere is

spot on and Lara is looking a whole lot better with her new improved polygon count. With action that takes you all across the globe, from India to Shoreditch (cor blimey) to Area 51, to the Arctic and beyond - this game certainly deserves your hours of unnatural devotion.

910/1000

Big girl adventure - Core/Eidos

PC/PSX - #30

Instructions: how to change the world

(Be your own censor)

Carmagedon2

1. Buy the full-on squat-em-up car demolition / slaughterfest Carmagedon2 in which you get to motor around some pretty fucked-up 3D environments, denying other road users the use of automotive transport with extreme prejudice and relieving pedestrians and their pets of life and limb in a very messy manner (remember - pets mean prizes).
2. Ensure you are residing in the UK or Germany where censorial policy regarding Computer and Video Games (and just about anything else that is fun) is completely fucked.
3. On finding that the US-full gore version with human blood, guts and limbs has been altered to fit into the bizarre censorship laws in the aforementioned territories (UK version - green zombie blood, guts and limbs; German version - alien blood, guts and limbs) simply whizz along to the SCI website and pick up the full-gore game patch.
4. Cut out a 1.5 cm diameter, white, sticky label and with a red felt pen, draw a circle around the perimeter of the label and the number 18 inside.
5. Stick the label on the front of the box and tell your family and friends that the game is only to be used by responsible, mentally balanced adults over the age of 18.
6. You are now a censor and a valuable asset to the law enforcement authorities - you can practice your new-found skills on the liberation of video nasties, the emancipation of consensual adult pornography, the legalisation of non-prescription chemical substances and the lowering of duty on imported alcohol.

Fighting was never this BAD

Tekken 3

How the hell do you keep 5 or more adults amused for 2 hours every day for 3 months on a budget of £40? Easy, get along to your local store-that-sells-computer-games and get a copy of Tekken 3. Yes it has been out for a few months but, as one of the best games of 1998 and a touch of genius in terms of multiplayer megalomaniac-mayhem, it is sheer beat-your-brains-out heaven. A superbly crafted 1/2 player beat-em-up with even more characters than the respectable 2 previous incarnations (including a panda and the very suave and nimble South American Capoeira contortionist Eddy) and literally hundreds of moves per character, Tekken 3 just keeps on getting better and better the more you play it. Truly a masterpiece and one that should grace any decent games collection, every studio, office, factory floor, club, living room, bedroom and caravan throughout the inhabited universe (well maybe scratch the caravans).

950/1000

[IMAGE] **One for the kids**

Wargasm

It's odd how disappointing war is these days on the TV. I mean, gone are the days of bouncing bombs or week-long bombardments, of napalm attacks or millions of tonnes of carpet bombing. Now it's either a bunch of Yugoslavian horse rustlers, playing ludicrous and deadly games with innocent civilians or footage of tracer bullets and the occasional flash over Arabian night skies. Let's face it, war just isn't glamorous enough any more, there's no suspense, no terrifying excitement - or is there?

There is if you have a crack at Wargasm: the most excellent battlefield strategy and first person war scenario simulation in which you not only get to direct your tanks, troops and helicopters in a series of offensive or defensive missions, but you can also take the place of any of your troops or weapons on the battlefield in full glorious first person 3D, or track an unwitting trooper from the telescopic scope of your M1A Abrams main battle-tank before letting loose an HE salvo, then watch him crumple as the blast sends little bits of him around the surrounding countryside. Mmm, the smell of plastic trim and air conditioning in the morning! But don't just take my word for it, this game is so realistic that the MOD are using it at tournaments and fairs to get youngsters interested in warfare - train 'em young and fling 'em out onto some remote cyber-battlefield of the not so distant future-it seems that society may have a use for games after all. War is dead, long live warfare.

950/1000

Five Years

By James Cooper

In 1992, 1,700 of the leading scientists in the world put their names to a document that was released to the press and which included the following phrases: "Human beings and the natural world are on a collision course... The environment is suffering critical stress... Heedless exploitation of depletable ground water supplies endangers food production and other essential human systems... Since 1945, 11% of the earth's vegetated surface has been degraded - an area larger than India and China combined - and per capita food production in many parts of the world is decreasing... The irreversible loss of species, which by 2100 may reach one-third of all species now living, is especially serious... Current economic practices which damage the environment, in both developed and underdeveloped nations, cannot be continued without the risk that vital global systems will be damaged beyond repair..." They concluded by mentioning that: "No more than one or a few decades remain before the chance to avert the threats we now confront will be lost and the prospects for humanity."

As a call for help, as a call for a community-based effort to change human behaviour, it was practically unprecedented. However, although you may consider yourself a tolerably well-informed human being, although you may consider yourself aware of some of the issues involved - global warming, for example, or the human population explosion - you probably were not aware that a significant chunk of the most intelligent people on the planet were so alarmed that they had got together to issue this warning.

And why weren't you aware of it? Not, you may be surprised to hear, because of any error or oversight on your part. It's even simpler than that. You didn't get to hear of it because not one major newspaper in Britain or the United States considered this statement newsworthy. Not one of them covered it. And yet, the signatories were no bunch of crackpots. 58 of the world academies of science were represented in this document. When a similar statement was released five years later - in time for the 1997 Kyoto Earth Summit - scientists from 63 countries signed it, among them 60 US National Medal of Science winners and 110 Nobel Laureates, including 104 of the 178 living Nobel Prize winners in the sciences. These were not the New-Agers nailing themselves to trees that the media so loves to poke fun at. These were the most conservative, hard-working, wife-and-two-kids science nerds on the planet. And they were ignored. (The Independent was the only major English language newspaper to cover the 1997 statement.)

In his address to the Gaia Society (given at the Linnean Society, Burlington House, on the 5th October), scientist and author Dr. David Suzuki posed the question: How could this be? How could the death of Princess Diana or the trial of O.J. Simpson be considered more important than the news that life as we know it will end if we do not do something about our management of the environment

within the next ten years? The fact that the media could have ignored such a call is irrefutable evidence that the traditional tools of liberal democracy - freedom of the press, binary debate - have failed. Politicians and business interests have become so adept at manipulating them that it is no longer possible to communicate the truth - any kind of truth (and I deliberately write it without a capital 'T') - to the general public.

One example of this is the way in which the media, in a traditionally laudable attempt to always present both sides of the argument, continue to insist upon giving airtime to those who deny the existence of global warming despite the fact that it is an almost universally accepted hypothesis among climatologists. And when, earlier this year, the last shred of contradictory evidence supporting the nay-sayers turned out to be false data caused by a weather satellite's unreported decline in orbit, there was no coverage beyond that of the scientific press.

The aim here is not to deny the minority view or to silence the outsider. But something needs to change if vested interests are not to be allowed to continue to exploit any institutionalised good-will that exists towards the underdog. The problem may lie in the essentially formulaic nature of contemporary media presentation. News programmes tend to give the impression of debate, without allowing debate to actually happen. The first problem is that arguments always have to be left unresolved 'in the interests of fairness.' The second is that the participants are often forced into a binary opposition with one another. Confrontation may make good TV but the fact is that in our heterogeneous and minutely variegated society the binary form is all but moribund as a useful form of thought and interaction. New forms are needed.

If I were to bow to tradition I would end this article by demanding that you judge for yourself. What worries me is that with the evidence you have at your disposal it is no longer possible for you to do so. Perhaps it was never possible, and all that has happened is that this is finally becoming apparent. Hopelessly apparent, because even were we all equipped with the appropriate knowledge about the state of the Earth's ecological web, it appears that it is already too late to apply it.

David Suzuki is the author of *Genethics: The Clash Between the New Genetics and Human Values*, and *The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature*. Details of the Gaia Society's on-going series of talks can be obtained from [gaia AT uel.ac.uk](mailto:gaia@uel.ac.uk)

Cooper James:
XCooper AT plateau.win-uk.netX

Bringing It All Back Home

By J.J.King

The Net has lost its cachet as the site of best resistance. Should the Flesh stand to take its place? By J.J.King