

Table of Contents

Thinking Blogging Out-of-Sync 1

Thinking Blogging Out-of-Sync

By Timothy Murray

Collaborating for fifteen years as Out-of-Sync, the Australian artists, Maria Miranda and Norie Neumark, engage in performative explorations of affect via intersecting new media interfaces, sound, CD-Rom, installation, video, internet, and graphics. Wishing to bring the touch of the human – its skin, organs, and emotions – directly into the mix of computing culture, they have systematically developed artistic projects that inject the messiness of feeling, sound, trauma, and delay into the digital frontier's paradigms of efficiency, speed, and transparent cognition. They initially set out by combining Miranda's digital imagery with Neumark's experimental sounds to investigate the unpredictability and confusion of human communication, as enhanced by digital sound and image. More recently, interdisciplinary experimentations with video installation, internet art, and mobile computing have extended the international reach of their studios in Coogee Beach and Sydney.

[IMAGE]

> Machine Organs by Out-Of-Sync

Out-of-Sync's work first received international acclaim upon the 1997 release of their CD-Rom, *Shock of the Ear*, authored by Neumark with visuals by Miranda. Receiving first prize for multimedia at VideoFormes 2000 (Clermont Ferrand), COMTECart Dresden 98, and ATOM awards Melbourne 1999, with its subtle mixture of sound, experimental rollovers, intersecting narrative tracks, and creative visuals, *Shock of the Ear* represents one pinnacle of artwork designed for the CD-Rom. As with many of their projects, the piece derived from a multimedia performance. Here visitors were confronted with archival traces of various scenarios of 'shock': shock treatment, electrocution, torture, car accident trauma, and the linguistic shock experienced by a young Italian immigrant suddenly thrust into the linguistic cacaphony of an international hostel. The work's lyrical and melodic sound tracks of beckoning whispers, synthesised chords, and natural sounds work wonderfully to situate retroactive narratives of shock in a curiously kinesthetic environment. The many narratives emphasize the slow expansion of time experienced by those in shock ('like a silent movie') as well as the eerie tranquility experienced by an accident victim while viewing the blood flowing from her punctured leg. Instead of foregrounding the speed of an accident or the rapidity of electric shock, by choreographing such moments of delay and suspension the artwork's narratives fuse with the user's experience of navigating the CD-Rom.

Out-of-Sync's creative experimentation with various visual and aural manifestations of suspended time set the stage for subsequent pieces whose blends of installation, internet art, sound, and video mine the convolutions of sensation in the digital network. Working at the centre of the burgeoning Australian digital art scene in the nineties, these prescient new media artists recognised early on how they might blend various modes of interactivity to explore the energetic fields of trauma, affect and corporeality they believe to be inherent in computing archives. They have been particularly successful at seizing upon configurations central to computing, such as archival data, networked systems, and coded bodies, as a means of raising playful questions about the human computing interface and its association with more traditional archival structures. The Museum of Rumour is an internet archive of contemporary rumour – its mnemonic remnants of media bits and historical exposition ludically extend the rumours of mass culture, from the appearance of The Virgin Mary outside the artists' flat at Coogee Beach to the Australian imaginary of gigantic feral cats roaming the landscape, something like those feline specters so upsetting to Freud. Another fictional internet archive, *The Perpetual Emotion Project*, also blends installation and internet art to present the ongoing research activities of Doktor Rumor and Professore Rumore, who direct the Institute for the Study of Perpetual Emotion. This deeply layered and parodic project on emotion in digital culture includes 'Séance: A Networked

Glossalalia', which stages a 'pataphysical' experiment on the relays of perpetual emotion on the internet, and 'The Dog Files', which charts the emotional relays between dogs and their humans. The artists further enhance the link between the body and its phantasms in *Machine Organs*, a lyrical net commentary on the shared conventions of genetics and computing. This piece, included in the *CTHEORY Multimedia** issue on the Human Genome Project, again follows its originary installation, 'Dead Centre: The Body with Organs' and, through a series of puns, renders 'the digestion process' of scanning and coding as equally messy and noisy as it is stable and machinic. *Machine Organs* extends this performative exploration of computers as organs of digestion and excretion, transmission and emission by confronting users with phantasms and cultural fables of organs, which complicate the clarity evoked by the information age's many attempts to map the body. In this piece, the body is not only the biological material of DNA but also the cultural stuff of fable (the French liver) and, as an emotional vehicle, the carrier of breath, sound, and the traces of culture. Key to the inventive, conceptual projects of Out-of-Sync is the staging of the centrality of emotion, memory, and affect in the hardwired network of speedy machines, computing systems, and genomic tracking. Miranda and Neumark extend the parameters of the digital archive by foregrounding the relationality of aesthetics in the psycho-corporeal zones of new media art.

The affective wizardry of their work always seems to involve a rethinking of the role of the information archive in artistic and networked culture as a fluid space of interactive reflection and sentiment. This is why I am excited to introduce their newest piece of art for the internet, *The Fourth Floor :: Le Quatrième étage*, as the inaugural commission for the relaunch of *Metamute*. For *Metamute*, Neumark and Miranda found themselves contemplating the paradox of creating online art at a moment when they were hearing artistic declarations of the death of 'net.art'. Attempting to explore possibilities beyond this 'canon' (while also wishing to tamper with the predictable seductions of flash and animation), they aimed to craft a piece of interactive art made for the net, which would capitalize on the commonplace cultural equation of speed and digitality. Visitors to *The Fourth Floor :: Le Quatrième étage* will find themselves confronted by the slowness of their art and by the pensiveness of the digital pause within the variations of each link. In creating the work, the artists wanted to represent the internet as a spirited place of 'expanded' reading, as a place where the intimacy of reading is maintained within the public folds of the blog. Users will find in this piece a place of variations that encourages contemplative reflection on digital difference and repetition rather than a venue for rapid channel changing and nervous surfing.

By thus staging the interpellation of the new media archive, *The Fourth Floor :: Le Quatrième étage* enigmatically disrupts critical dependency on the narrative of history, the psychology of identification, and even the heroics of artistic authorship (evocative, perhaps, of the authors' earlier casting aside of the proper name to be Out-of-Sync). The piece traces a moment in the life of a fictional blogger after s/he took up residency in a studio in Paris's Cité Internationale des Arts (a little biographical teasing by the Australian duo who resided in that same space). There the blogger was faced with the enigmatic pull of two DVDs of four Gigs of unedited video, labeled 'rue Simon-Crubellier', which s/he found abandoned in a cupboard. Struck by the uncanny return of this streetname, which is central to Georges Perec's *Life: a User's Manual* (the book s/he has been reading during sleepless nights), the blogger begins a quest not only to organise and log the raw video material, but also to search through the streets and archives of Paris for the virtual place without a site, Rue Simon-Crubellier.

The result is a blog in which the orphaned video clips are categorised in drop-down menus not by subject matter but by spatial relation, attesting to virtuality's inscription in the deferrals of presence and proximity: with, between, behind, front, inside, outside, far, near, above, below. The drop-downs provide access to video clips of Parisian sites and sights, which are accompanied by blog entries across a seemingly arbitrary field, from sequences of 'waiting/alone/studio' to 'stairs/intently/counter'. The vertical series of pop-up lists never appear simultaneously along the horizontal access, thus frustrating

another archival dependency – on the grid or tableau. Sequences related to space, time, and perception ('out there/ blur/perhaps') further refuse to lend any phenomenological or cognitive stability to more conventionally empirical groupings ('windows/train/pair'). Within each entry, the user finds gridded video stills whose in organisation is then thrown topsy-turvy by the roll or click of the mouse, leading to parodic reversals, anamorphic extensions, graphic indications, erasures, colour variations, etc. The artists also provide users with the option of viewing the video clips in two other variations, in multiple compositions of small videos or in 'micro moments' of a single large frame. Each variation is accompanied by variant blog reflections and citations from Perec and others, as well as sounds whose hearing does not necessarily match the sight (thus troubling the videomatic relation, as the artists say, between 'hear and there').

The disjunction between phenomenological and haptic space turns the construction and reception of *The Fourth Floor :: Le Quatrième étage* into a project of artistic re-search. Here the happy event of reading and thinking on the net is metacritically reflected by the protagonist's entries about the delightful and frustrating events of thinking, reading, and creating in response to the enigmatic signifiers of the digital archive and quest for virtual place. To Out-of-Sync, the artistic blog lends itself to a similarly expanded field of reading, one in which perceptions of intimacy and documents of facticity are rendered variable by the creative event of archival art.

As a site of archival writing, their English/French bilingual project displays the double 'hand' of the art blog. It performs the ephemeral main-tenant, the 'now', of the comment and the deliberate main-tenance, the 'archive', of the flow of time's commentary. Its conceit is to sensitise the user through fiction and art to the incremental power of the archive as a performative place, and thus to allow her to receive the imprint of digital culture as an interactive event. No longer in accord with the conventional truth-value of the archive where the certainty of fact can be discovered as if embalmed, the fluid archive of the network empowers the user to respond to enigmatic traces of coded facticity through the intense creativity of fabulation and the excessive affect of thought.

A word of critical caution. Users should be forewarned that they too might find themselves confronted by the uncanny unfamiliarity of research and recognition, as recounted by the artwork's blogging protagonist:

Now I'm back [at the video] and looking at this woman alone on the train. Thinking. Like Sophie Calle I'd like to follow here. But I'm not Sophie Calle and I'm not on this train. I imagine that she is an internet enthusiast and alone at night, in her tiny apartment, she surfs the internet. One night she stumbles onto this blog. She reads it distractedly, quickly. Until she sees the video of herself, sitting alone on the Metro.

**CTHEORY Multimedia* is the title of the online exhibition space I co-curate, with Arthur and Marilouise Kroker of CTHEORY

Timothy Murray
Curator, The Rose Goldsen Archive of New Media Art, Cornell Library
Department of Comparative Literature
Cornell University
Ithaca, New York 14850
e-mail: tcm1ATcornell.edu

<http://www.turbulence.org/studios/rumor/museum/white.html>

<http://www.out-of-sync.com/>

<http://3d.openmute.org/4thFloor/>