

Working The Screen

October-November 2001 FREE



RealTime
+ *On Screen*

Under_score
Australian new media arts in Next Wave Down Under
part of BAM's 2001 Next Wave Festival, New York

Working The Screen

Introduction

Welcome to the third of RealTime's annual surveys of developments in Australian new media art. Working the Screen provides a rare overview of exhibited works, works-in-progress, trends and issues.

Working the Screen 2001 celebrates the Australian new media artists and works selected for the Brooklyn Academy of Music's (BAM) Next Wave Festival. Now in its nineteenth year, Next Wave has long had a reputation for innovative programming. This year the festival includes Next Wave Down Under, a month-long celebration of contemporary Australian arts. The BAM website will feature the work of nine Australian net.artists, provide links to the sites of fourteen new media artists, two net.sound sites, an online documentary on Chunky Move dance company and audio-on-demand broadcasts of works from ABC radio's The Listening Room. This online exhibition has been titled Under_score: Net Art, Sound, and Essays from Australia (www.bam.org/underscore).

Under_score has been curated by Wayne Ashley (Organising Curator, Manager of New Media, BAM) who has also commissioned online essays by Allen Feldman, an American cultural and medical anthropologist, and Australian new media theorist Darren Tofts and new media producer/curator Alessio Cavallaro.

For Working the Screen, RealTime and its film and new media supplement, OnScreen, have commissioned two essays and selected another that focus on significant trends in new media art, here and in the USA. New media commentators Mitchell Whitelaw and Alex Galloway (Director of Content & Technology for the USA-based site Rhizome.org) focus on net.art, while new media curator and writer Kathy Cleland provides an overview of the kinds of work being created in Australia and the infrastructure fostering them.

We've also commissioned a set of critical appreciations of the nine net artists in the Under_score online exhibition. For the other featured artists we've given accounts of the selected works and, where possible, forthcoming works.

Next Wave Down Under has programmed, among others, Company B Belvoir's production of Tim Wintons' Cloudstreet, Bangarra Dance Theatre, Chunky Move dance company, the David Chesworth Ensemble and Killing the Koala: Australian Films of the 90s, a festival featuring more than 20 films. The inclusion of new media art in a major performing arts festival is a significant event and will doubtless expose the work of many Australian artists to a wider audience.

We congratulate BAM and Wayne Ashley, BAM's first Manager of New Media, for their timely celebration of Australian art. The Australia Council has part funded Next Wave Down Under in partnership with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through the Australia International Cultural Council and the Australian Film Commission. We thank the Australia Council for its generous support for this edition of Working the Screen which will be available to Next Wave audiences in print and online and to readers across Australia.

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Editor, OnScreen

Cover image: Patricia Piccinini *Protein Lattice – blue portrait* 1997 (detail) 80x80cm, C type print

Wayne Ashley

Organizing Curator, Manager of New Media, Brooklyn Academy of Music

In July 1999 Wayne Ashley was named the first Manager of New Media at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (BAM), hired to establish BAM's New Media Department; design, direct, and implement Arts in Multimedia (AIM), a research, art and technology project with Bell Labs; and begin exploring works that confront assumed ideas about performance in the context of rapidly changing information and interactive technologies. Ashley has produced web documentaries on choreographers David Rousséve and Ralph Lemon, and managed three collaborative projects involving Bell Labs researchers and artists exploring robotic cameras and live performance. He is currently directing a two-year online multidisciplinary project with Ralph Lemon. Since 1995, he has taught digital-imaging software to designers and photographers at Ivey Seright, the largest photo-imaging establishment in the Pacific Northwest; and in 1997 became the Program Director of Open Studio at the Seattle Art Museum. He has a Ph.D. from New York University's Department of Performance Studies, and has taught at the New School's Vera List Center, New York University, Cal Arts East, and Seattle's Antioch University.

In developing Under_score Wayne Ashley has worked together with and received recommendations from Australian curators, educators, media theorists, and producers: Alessio Cavallaro, curator, Cinemedia; Leah Grycewicz, curator, dLux media arts; Kathy Cleland, curator and President dLux media arts; Honor Harger, curator, r a d i o u a l i a; McKenzie Wark, lecturer and author; Amanda McDonald-Crowley, Associate Director 2002, Adelaide Festival of Arts; Lisa Colley, Manager, New Media Arts Board, Australia Council; Robyn Ravlich, Executive Producer, The Listening Room, Australian Broadcasting Corporation.

Online essays

BAM has commissioned two online essays in conjunction with the exhibit. Allen Feldman, an American cultural and medical anthropologist writes from the perspective of the political anthropology of the body, violence, and the history of self-acting instruments. Australian new media theorist Darren Tofts and new media producer/curator Alessio Cavallaro discuss the curated Under_score works in relationship to the Australian national art scene and how they intersect with, draw from, contribute to, or are overwhelmed by the global emergence of net.art and aesthetics, information technologies and computerization. www.bam.org/underscore

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net.art: a polymorphous survivor

Mitchell Whitelaw



The Men Who Knew Too Much, Virtual Humanoids

Image: Adam Nash

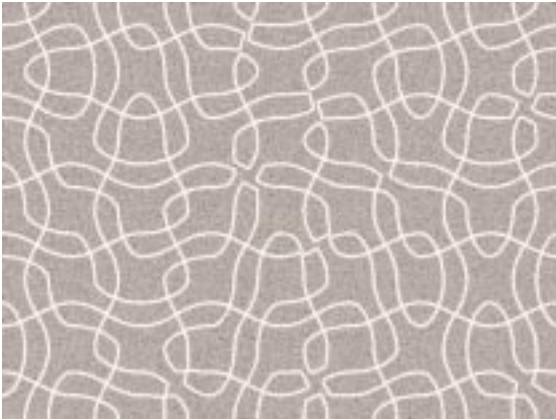
Back in 1999 some internet veterans—art types included—were feeling miffed. Mainstream, commercial culture had got hold of the internet—their internet—and was acting as if networked culture was a concept invented by dot-com aspirants in a pitch to their venture capitalists. What tasted like sour grapes, for a moment, turned into quiet *schadenfreude* as the whole thing deflated. Having been shown that the net was no place for brash commercialism, the corporates could now go back to their offices and leave the net in the tender care of those who knew it best: geeks, hackers, slackers, subculturalists of all varieties, and artists. That's a caricature of some of the sentiments of the time. Of course there's no going back—not that there ever was a wild and free net utopia. As well as having changed materially, the net now is a very different idea, culturally speaking, than it was two, not to mention five years ago.

Yet the net's main asset, its strongly decentralised structure, is unchanged, as are the sustainable micro-economies of hosting, serving and browsing; these are the bare necessities for independent online cultural practice, including net.art. So the space remains; the questions are, what does it contain, how is it supported; how is it hooked up with the cultural and institutional structures of RL (real life)? The waves of hype, greed and utopianism have subsided; the romance of the network pioneer is unsustainable; the novelty of online art is long gone. The processes and tools involved in making work online have stabilised, to a certain extent, in line with the wider consolidation and industrialisation of the net. Where does Australian net.art go from here?

One simple answer is, it continues. Most of the artists represented in this collection are experienced practitioners; many have been working the net for five years or more. The lines that they have pursued speak to the range of contemporary practice, as well as the shifts in form and approach which have marked out its brief history.

One striking thing, which may sound odd, is the number of web pages here. On the web the page, as a technological form, is old news; the space once imagined as a hypertext—a network of interthreaded documents—now operates more like the slick front end of a giant, largely obscure database. The page has by no means outlived its creative usefulness though, as much of this work shows. Part of the reason for this is that, for all its flaws, the page remains the everyday baseline of internet experience. International net.art has been for some time preoccupied with the formal demolition of the web page, grinding it up into component pixels and code—see for example Jodi.org and Mark Napier's Feed (<http://feed.projects.sfmoma.org/>). Strangely ninemsn and f2 seem not to have noticed; in fact with the recent industrial shakedown of the web, and the dominance of the doctrine of usability, its formal and stylistic language is more rigid than ever. Cultural content, too: for better or worse, the dot-com boom has left us with pop-ups, pop-unders, banner ads, portals and e-tailing.

All hearty fodder for satire and subversion, which seems to be a particular strength in local work—in this collection see Ian Haig's Web Devolution, in which American cyber-icons Wired and the MIT Media Lab appear as members of an insane post-human apocalyptic webbing. Elsewhere there's Van Sowerine's Girlplay (<http://www.microslut.f2s.com/>), which last year earned the honour of a threatening letter from ninemsn, and Natasha Dwyer's Appeal (<http://www.stalled.au.nu/appeal>) which trashes e-commerce with an elegant minimum of fuss. Fellow Melbournians The Men Who Knew Too Much (<http://tmwktm.axs.com.au/>) produced some disarmingly awful and extremely funny material for their 2000 Virtual Humanoids show—like Haig they draw on the web's massive stores of lurid, poorly-constructed scam-sites, dodgy backyard businesses and dead homepages.



Paul Brown, Sand-lines

Pages are also bodies of text, and there's a strong centre of activity here: Australia's net.writers recently dominated the Electronic Literature Organisation's international awards. The strength of this work is in the directness of its voice, its candour. The text is often residual, documentary and performative, as much as concrete and composed; and in mez's work concrete text-strings dissipate endlessly into nested, coded eddies and inflections. Elsewhere text joins image and sound in conjunctions which are simple in principle, but materially evocative—as in the dark, suffocating mass of Francesca Da Rimini's dollspace. Like mez, geniware, and to some extent Melinda Rackham, Da Rimini's vocation is that of "networker", immersed in the texture of email, chat, lists, newsgroups, MOOs and sites. Page-building is part of that same process, which is the real subject here: the ongoing experiment of acting in and through the network. There's more than a trace of the old school about the idea: a lingering sense of the net as a space of potential, a liminal, lateral zone. As the net, and especially the web, become culturally normalised, is that investment in a life online anachronistic, or all the more necessary?

What makes this networked practice feel retro is the rise of an approach where the net is the platform rather than the milieu—where the work somehow sits 'on' the net, rather than 'in' it. The page here is not a work surface but a shell, a delivery medium. The browser is a ubiquitous technical wrapper for work in any number of other forms: Flash, Shockwave, Java, streaming audio, VRML, Quicktime and so on.

This shift is conceptual and cultural as well as formal; the three are entangled, of course. It means different aesthetic surfaces—the anti-aliased swoosh of Flash-based interactivity has been the most recognisable—but more importantly it reshapes net.art into something more diverse, more polymorphous, and more closely entangled with other lines of creative practice. Paul Brown's online works are a good example: these generative visual surfaces have a long

Linda Wallace, Lovehotel



ancestry, having moved over years through a series of manifestations in print, CD-ROM, and now online. As it happens these latest pieces work very well on the web: they're compact and efficient, with an elegance of means that is both technical and aesthetic. However the net itself is never a concern of the work—here it's just another platform, a new distribution channel for a project which has developed over decades.

So in this case, generative visual art gets piped neatly onto the net; the same applies to other pre-existing forms and practices. A parallel development has been the complete absorption of the net into wider electronic arts practice; the norm now is for any project—installation, audio, video, CD, performance—to have a web presence of some sort. The site is an all-purpose resource for documentation, advertising and archiving as well as actually delivering the work, or a version of it. The buzzword is "multiplatform"; artist and work shift media forms tactically. While Linda Wallace's video Lovehotel (featuring the work of Francesca Da Rimini) has spent most of its life online, it hopped off recently to share first prize at the Palermo International Video Art Festival (see <http://www.leggera.it/html/award.htm>). Any distinction between primary and secondary material—'the work itself' as against its supporting ephemera—becomes unsupportable.

Used in this form, the net has had an immensely positive influence on local creative practice. Nowhere is this clearer than in experimental electronic audio, which has moved online through streaming projects like l'audible (<http://laudible.net>) and r a d i o q u a l i a (<http://radioqualia.va.com.au>), as well as through the sites of innumerable artists and labels. International projects and collaborations flourish, and the scene's major figures are talked up, signed up, and released, online (I'm thinking here of Pimmon, aka Paul Gough).

But is it net.art? This question surfaced in recent discussion on US net.art hub Rhizome, after the linear, non-interactive, Flash-based work of Young Hae Chang, Heavy Industries (www.yhchang.com), received the Webby award in the art category—edging out works more deeply and typically embedded in the net (see <http://rhizome.org/object.rhiz?2773>). There has been a strong trend internationally towards abstract, reflexive, conceptual work, grappling with the net as a data-space, and providing interfaces and tools for reimag(in)ing it (see for example Lisa Jevbratt's 1:1, <http://www.c5corp.com/1to1>). This is internet art in the purest and most self-referential sense, and some of it is striking, but surely net.art's total project must be more than formal, and broader than the net itself. Any move for a kind of purity of the medium is questionable, especially in a field where that medium is so polymorphous and unstable, and so tightly coupled with the proliferating hybrids of cultural practice.

What we imagine net.art is, or can be, is of course bound up with how it operates in our cultural experience, and that is one aspect of this field which is very closely tied to locality. Net.art in the purest sense receives a tiny amount of support and exposure in Australia; the backing of major cultural and research institutions is conspicuously absent. Like so much of local arts culture, the developed practice represented here has few visible means of support, subsisting on a mixture of public funding and personal and tertiary institutional subsidy. Paradoxically one of the other hallmarks of local practice is its international connectivity; a relative lack of local opportunities, and the mobility of the work, results in artists showing, and often premiering works, offshore.

What's striking is that the work survives, and that a small but significant number of Australian artists have created sustainable practices, and international profiles, online. This is an ongoing experiment in how to be an artist which is, in some ways, as interesting as the art. It carries a romance of its own, of a transnational microculture of creative practice, constellations of like-minded art geeks emailing, collaborating and festival- and conference-hopping; of course the reality is quite different. In particular the tenacity of this practice should never be taken for granted, or used to justify underfunding. Still, waiting for net.art's next Great Work (has it had one yet?), or plotting its infiltration of official, high-art culture, is perhaps less interesting than participating in the net's familiar, everyday achievement—wired-up cultural practice.

Mitchell Whitelaw (<http://comserver.canberra.edu.au/~mitchellw/>) is a writer, artist and researcher with a focus on digital cultural practice. In 2000 he completed a doctorate looking at artificial life in new media art. He currently lectures in new media production at the University of Canberra. Recent creative work includes else, part of the Fällt invalidObject series (<http://www.fallt.com>), and sound for Melinda Rackham's VRML work Empyrean (<http://www.subtle.net/empyrean/>).

Conversions: a phase shift in net.art

Alex Galloway

Net.art is about conversions. Why conversions? Perhaps because net.art needs data like paintings need pigment, and converting data from one form to another gives net artists the basic materials they need for artmaking. The conversions stem also from our fascination with transformation, a type of digital alchemy where the use of an intermediary substrate (ones and zeros) lets artists convert IP addresses to colours, video to ASCII text, HTML to animation, and so on. In recent months net.art has become more and more focused on this "phase shift" process whereby one data mode is translated into another. Let's have a look.

A member of the ASCII Art Ensemble, Vuk Cosic has focused on converting various media formats into the dots and slashes of the ASCII character set (<http://mail.ljudmila.org/~vuk/>). His ASCII History of Moving Images is a video-to-ASCII converter that transforms clips from films such as Hitchcock's Psycho and Antonioni's Blow Up into full motion green-tinted text. In Instant ASCII Camera, which premiered at the Dutch Next 5 Minutes 3 festival in 1999, the ASCII Art Ensemble created a small machine to take passport-style photographs of passers-by. But instead of printing a photo, the machine returned a small scrap of paper imprinted with the user's ASCII portrait. In a more absurd piece titled ASCII Art for the Blind, Cosic uses a text-to-speech converter to read aloud the text characters in ASCII images, with the ostensible goal of making ASCII images audible to blind art-goers. The result is a monotone recitation of garbled punctuation marks as a computerized voice phonetically reads ASCII images left to right, as if the images were words. The focus here is precisely the concept of conversion itself—there is little in the way of narrative, form, or other traditionally aesthetic qualities.

A variety of current projects also rely on data conversion. The new Rhizome logo, designed by Markus Weisbeck and Frank Hausschild (www.surface.de), is a conversion piece that translates IP addresses into a dynamic visual icon. A very literal conversion happens in Time As Color, an elegant net.art piece from Christopher Otto (<http://rhizome.org/object.rhiz?2144>), that converts seconds, minutes and hours into RGB colour values. Andy Deck's Bardcode (<http://rhizome.org/object.rhiz?2230>) does something similar. It translates works of literature into visual symbols. Vinyl Video (www.vinylvideo.com/) makes art out of the conversion between the video and vinyl record format.

The art of conversion figures also in the curatorial philosophy behind the recent exhibition BitStreams (www.whitney.org/bitstreams) at the Whitney Museum in New York. For, the story goes, since much new art practice hinges on the intervention of digital technologies at crucial steps in the production process (such as when a photograph is touched-up using Photoshop), the digital world as a whole has infected artmaking through a forced conversion to ones and zeros, at some basic if invisible level.

BitStreams was not strictly a new media art show. There was video, there was photography, there was sculpture and painting and installation. A few computers are tolerated here and there for variety's sake. In particular, work from Leah Gilliam, John Klima and John Simon stood out. The Whitney should be applauded for showcasing digital art, but this exhibition proves once and for all that Photoshop does not new media art make. BitStreams falls short in that respect. It's too hesitant, too technophobic. Consider for example Warren Neidich's banal photograph Remapping 2, Sally Elesby's silly doodles, or Robert Lazzarini's sculptures of skulls—where's the bit stream?

To be sure, several "old" media artworks stand out in this show. Jason Salavon's The Top Grossing Film of All Time, 1 x 1 is captivating. The piece takes the entire film reel from the top grossing film of all time (whatever that may be) and re-samples it such that each frame from the film becomes a single pixel on the canvas. Stripes of colour appear left to right as the film's scenes play themselves out in miniature.

Another sleeper is Jim Campbell. In two fascinating artworks, Campbell uses low resolution LED screens to explore the thresholds of our sensory perception. Instead of trying to make technology invisible (which ultimately may be BitStreams's biggest crime), Campbell looks to the

liminal point between clarity and confusion—that point of "flicker fusion" where our eyes grab legible images out of pure static. Writer Marina Grzinic has identified this phenomenon in a recent essay where she notes that "delays in transmission-time, busy signals from service providers, [and] crashing web browsers" are not simply the undesirable side-effects of technology, but are the very aesthetic of that technology. Campbell understands this, while many others in the exhibition do not.

Running in parallel at the Whitney was a much smaller exhibition called Data Dynamics (www.whitney.org/datadynamics). While not all the pieces require the web to function, this is essentially a net.art show, and an exciting one. Curator Christiane Paul (formerly of the pioneering but now defunct tech art magazine Intelligent Agent) met an interesting challenge: how to stage a net.art show using Americans when net.art has historically been very non-American. Thus, the art stars of Europe are decidedly not in this show—people like Jodi, Knowbotic Research or Etoy—such is the personality of the Whitney. Instead Paul picked from the New York net.art scene, hanging recent work from Mark Napier, Maciej Wisniewski and others.

Perhaps the most successful piece is The Apartment, an artwork by Marek Walczak and Martin Wattenberg that hinges on a conversion between words and spaces (www.turbulence.org/Works/apartment/). First, the user types sentences on the keyboard. Next, each word is converted into a room in an imaginary apartment building. An invisible dictionary performs the translations. Words like "you" and "love" become the bedroom, while "book" or "sentence" become the library. The semantic connections between words and spaces were arrived at by the artists themselves, who created a mini-dictionary of the couple hundred most common terms they were likely to encounter. Finally, the artwork renders the imaginary apartment in 3D, creating a warped domestic space wallpapered with a collage of images.

Three thousand miles away, in the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art's recent exhibition 010101 (<http://010101.sfmoma.org>), a new work from Entropy8zuper! titled Eden.Garden 1.0 (<http://eden.garden1.0.projects.sfmoma.org/>) is also based on a fundamental conversion. A three-dimensional landscape appears on the screen. At the same moment an HTML page is fetched and parsed word by word for its component mark-up tags. Using a special reference chart created by the artists, the HTML tags are converted into animals, plants and other objects within the virtual landscape. For example, line and paragraph breaks appear as bushes and flowers, while images become butterflies, and fonts become small bunnies. Using the Eden.Garden, the user can quite literally "visit" a webpage—walk around inside of it, seeing what it might look like converted into a virtual space.

Mark Napier's Feed (<http://feed.projects.sfmoma.org/>) does something similar. Webpages are fetched via the internet and converted into various charts and graphs. As the artist writes, "Feed reads HTML and images, reducing web pages to a stream of text and pixels. That stream is fed to nine displays that chart, graph, and plot the data." Where Entropy8zuper's conversion is lush and organic, Napier's is statistical and analytic. The qualities of pure data are brought to the fore, unbuffered and indifferent in this cold interface.

This essay first appeared at Rhizome.org.

Alex Galloway is Director of Content & Technology for the USA-based Rhizome.org (<http://rhizome.org>), a leading online platform for new media art. Alex is currently working on a web-based artwork called Carnivore—after the FBI software of the same name—that uses packet-sniffing technologies to create vivid depictions of raw data.

net.art

The net.art works selected by Wayne Ashley and his Australian advisors largely focus on the body. This is not surprising given the theoretical and artistic preoccupation, obsession even, with the body over the last two decades, let alone a peculiarly Australian commitment to the body in sport, dance and contemporary performance. What does surprise are the myriad bodies that have evolved in this period, destroying any monolithic notion of corporeality, and revealing artists, as ever, to be astonishing fantasists. What's more, given the interactive actualities of more and more online work, artists increasingly implicate us in their art, drawing us as interactors deeper into a bracing phenomenological loop.

Francesca Da Rimini

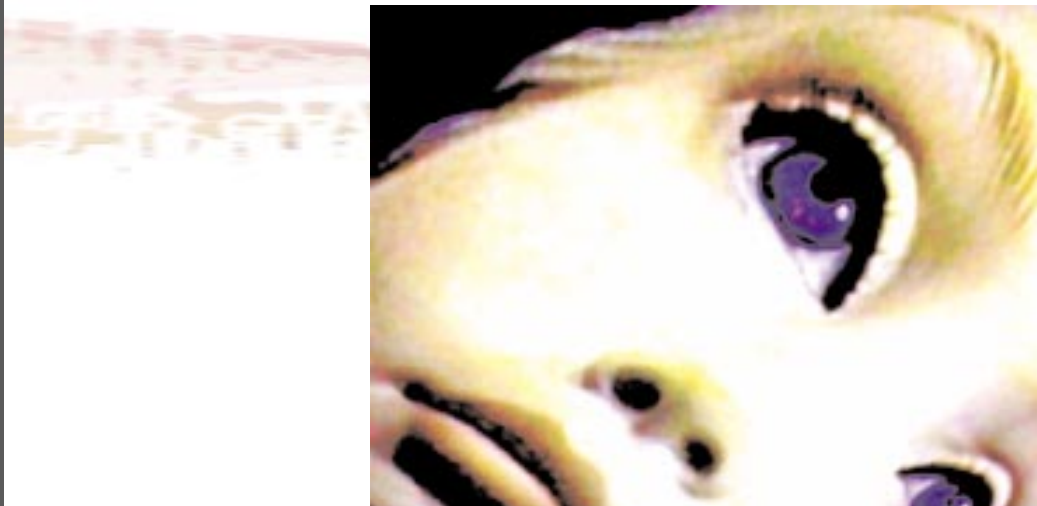
GashGirl

<http://sysx.org/gashgirl/>

The 'body in cyberspace' is such a freakin' annoying creature. Sure, it's infused with enough cultural theory to burst a blood vessel and juiced up on more than enough digital tech to blow, well, itself up. But why is it only ever one gender? How does it never age? Why is it always a pristine modernist dream about the triumph of pure information over messy materiality? The work of Francesca Da Rimini is a sustained and fiery response to these questions: "fingering my suppurating holes, extending my oozing boundary." This site collects a number of Da Rimini's confronting net projects, collaborative visual explorations, erotic hypertextual correspondences and web activisms from over the last ten years. *los dias y las noches del muertos* (the days and nights of the dead), for example, is a stark conflation of hyped globalisation rhetoric and the pained and warring bodies of WTO demonstrators. The flight from history—intimately connected with modernity's dream of escaping the demands of the fleshly body—is a persistent concern of Da Rimini's art. In particular, the "dossier about violations of civil and human rights" at Genoa 2001 is an eloquent reminder that global economic discourse is manifestly an embodied and historical encounter. Da Rimini's work is disquieting and resolutely not quiet or quiescent: "wars are made by men who fuck their daughters" proclaims the blood red text of *Smear of Roses*. In this collaboration with Ricardo Dominguez and Michael Grimm, 'doll yoko' operates as a kind of cipher where images of socio-political control mesh with lyrical speculations about gender resistance.

Da Rimini's avatars are well known facets of her net.art: "I am my own freak show. My devoted puppets do my bidding." Yet neither are these doppelgangers passive or acquiescent tools of their master. Tracking though this site you can watch the "cyberbitch" GashGirl fighting with newer incarnations such as doll yoko for ideological and electronic space. As Da Rimini puts it: "I like doll a lot, she's cool, and to me makes gash look very late 80s. Playing with the construct of cyberbitch from hell was fun, but there's a limit to how many times one can snarl 'suck my code' without yawning." Starring in a number of the narratives, doll yoko is sometimes an epistolary partner in an exchange of techno-porn emails while at other moments she becomes a series of beautiful 'doll like' images of Japanese gender struggle: "doll yoko was born in a deep muddy pond in the mountains of Kyoto where women used to drown their infant daughters—so she is coded with a particular sadness and multiplicity of identities/voices which were silenced too young...She's a ghostgirl with a deep doll hunger for the impossible." Corporeal demands of hunger and desire run like fault lines through these works. From LambdaMOO transcripts and VNS Matrix manifestos to dangerously eroticised photographs complete with haunting soundtracks, Francesca Da Rimini presents a technologised, cyberfeminised and poetic body of work.

Esther Milne



GashGirl | dollyoko | LiQuiD_Nation | has worked with new media since 1984 as arts manager, film/video maker, curator, corporate geisha girl, cyberfeminist, puppet mistress and ghost. During the 1990s she investigated the anarchic potential of negotiated email relationships, virtual communities and new narrative architectures, reverse engineering her experiences into multiple immaterialities, poems and personas.

dollspace / smear of roses has been presented live in lecture and festival events in the UK, Russia, Rome, Zurich, New York, Boston and Australia. dollspace (1998) was featured at FOLDBACK in the 1998 Adelaide Festival of Arts, exhibited at trAce International Online Writing Community (UK), Aleph (Spain) and The Critical Eye (USA). dollspace and soundtrack for an empty dollspace (composed by Michael Grimm) were awarded equal first prize at Arts-Edge (Art Gallery of WA, April 1998), a special prize at the COMTECart 98 Media Art Competition in Dresden. dollspace was acquired by the University of Westminster. los dias y las noches del muertos (1999) has been featured in festivals and exhibitions in Europe, USA and Australia and has been nominated for a B(if)tek WINK Award, Melbourne, Australia, 2001. dollyoko@thing.net



John Tonkin

Meniscus

www.johnt.org/meniscus

Prototype for a Universal Ideology

www.johnt.org/prototype

John Tonkin's artistic practice tests science, subjectivity and technoculture, poking fun at some persistent ideas about determinism, reductivism and empiricism. Since 1992, he has appropriated specific scientific histories for a body of work exploring enlightenment sciences, delving into Eugenics and the Human Genome Project as the means for exploring identity and the corporeal. In her catalogue essay "Disreputable Science", Elizabeth Wilson describes the works as reflecting on and exploiting the "generativity of the phenotypical body...Tonkin establishes an interchange with Eugenics...that is focused on the inventive contingencies of biological matter." The body is readable and malleable and, in each of the works, Tonkin has inscribed a particular corporeal site with emotional and personality traits.

Meniscus (1995-2000) comprises 3 works. In Elective Physiognomies and Personal Eugenics, the head and face are the locus for social mappings, and in Elective Masculinities body shape is contorted. Tonkin tests the assumption that physicality generates character and, in the process, cartoonish portraits of character result. Within installation-based interactives, the mutable possibilities of human desire make it possible to become (or evolve into) anyone or anything else. Simple, fast and usable interfaces belie the parodic complexities of Tonkin's works. Jacqueline Millner has observed that "liquid identity is the ultimate promise of the internet...Create an avatar which allows you to re-territorialise, to see the world, and be seen, through a radically altered perspective."

Prototype for a Universal Ideology (2000-2001) tinkers with our desires in a different way. Users input their 'universal theory' in spoken word which is stored as 'raw material' for subsequent users to 'breed' new theories. According to John Tonkin, the process is analogous to the genetic recombination of DNA. "The audio waveforms are broken down into fragments and rearranged with the phrases of other users. Users can breed different statements together and decide which new recombinant theories survive and, consequently, how they develop collaboratively over time to form a gene pool of ideas."

During his recent two year Australia Council New Media Arts Fellowship, Tonkin commenced work on A Grand Unified Theory of Self, focusing on the collection and correlation of 'data.' Again driven by user interaction, this work will let users correlate behaviours (eg how much coffee one drinks) with global activities such as share performance on the stock market. Engaging Chaos Theory, to a degree, individuals will monitor how their actions and habits are impacting on the world. Like Prototype, this work emphasises the individual—as centre of one's universe—in a strange twist on notions of New Age selfhood.

John Tonkin's fascination with the data derived from his interactives has a quality similar to obsessive collecting. Gathering body types, cranio-facial attributes and ideas provided by the users of each work, he stores, correlates and mutates that data in a virtual archive. The works operate as a kind of surveillance gleaning and mediating the mores of our time. They mirror society—we see ourselves reflected to the nth degree, distorted beyond recognition in the image of our own desires. Like science, Tonkin's work generates its own truths.

Linda Carrol

John Tonkin began programming and making computer animation in 1985 after studying biological science. His current works involve building frameworks/tools/toys in which the artwork is formed through the accumulated interactions of its users. These exist both on the web and as occasional installations. Most recently, his work has toured Australia as part of Cyber Cultures - Posthuman Bodies (2000-2001) and appeared in the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, Queensland Art Gallery and Artspace, Sydney. Winner 2nd prize National Digital Art Award, IMA, Brisbane. john.tonkin@bigpond.com

geniwate

rice

www.idaspoetics.com.au/rice/riceheading.html

The irreconcilable jumble of effects that Vietnam has on an un-tourist traveller—exhilarating, bewitching, disorienting, often gut-punch visceral—is dramatised in rice (1997) in compact and carefully unsentimentalised poetry.

A random collection of memorabilia detritus, from chewing-gum wrapper to beer coaster, has been spread out onscreen like anecdotal props on a hotel bar: prompts for stories, proof of almost-made connections, alibis for confessions. There's no attempt at authority, no neat overview or pre-fab responses. It's not an identikit profile ("my Vietnam"), more a hawker's set of fractured cubist Polaroid postcards, sardonic and reflexive, self-accusatory and bruised, framed by a traumatic but exploitable history in which there are corners of inescapable complicity.

There's no pretence to some easy, spurious flowchart structure, which would have been disturbingly untrue to the experience, just a cumulative series of sidetracking vectors out from the main collection of cluttered artefacts and back again. There are moments of hard tight imagist focus—"At dawn a sampan splits the silence / on the Mekong River"—that open out into surreal episodes (target practice with AK-47s at the military museum anyone?), miniaturised psychological and ethical morality tales, propaganda snapshots (oh look: a poem from Ho Chi Minh), brittle platitudes, anti-romantic epiphanies ("the going rate for a smile is two American dollars"), discomfiting burlesques on the Lonely Planet mentality ("Right then, how much?") and an intricately interlocking series of tight meditations on alienation, stereotyping, culture shock and authenticity (from many more angles than the predictable)... "The hawkers are selling dog-tags for two bucks each. We don't reckon they're real." That unwillingly-paranoid sense of permanent mistranslation, of not knowing how much you'll never know—and owning up to it—is



unnervingly captured throughout, with none of the easy slides into moralism, comfortable irony or the hypocritical hierarchies into which Western travellers escape ("He's a package-tour exploiter, you're a tourist, but I'm getting the real Vietnam" or "Yeah, but hey, wait till you hear MY Hanoi horror story").

The multiplying perspectives are rendered in an apt diversity of multimedia techniques: pseudo-kitsch flipbook animations, abruptly-distended panoramic vistas, hyper-cute interactive Shockwave, and a startlingly effective, often affecting, use of soundtrack elements, from the raw writer's voice through to Viet-pop, travel-doco-style ambient mixes to Nixon speechifying. They're never allowed to overwhelm the narrative and there's no sense at any point of gratuitous web technophilia driving the design or loose formatting forcing the text into too-explicit caricature or banal symbolism. Every new section, like each new city or situation encountered (oops, we're in Nha Trang now: beach, photo-overkill, satire, nausea, allegory), is dislocating at first, asking you to find your way around, to rethink and reorient. The nuancing in voice and tone that this allows is unusually successful.

The rhythms of the reading experience solicit immersion, then shift or shuffle or shock you into questions and because of—rather than despite—the reflexive, multiple approaches and detours, it builds to a complexly satisfying but compact performance.

Dean Kiley

geniwate entered new media art via performance poetry. Her work for CD, Nepabunna, explores the mythology of technoculture with reference to Aboriginal mythic paradigms. She is currently working on collaborations with Dane and Mark Amerika. Her work-in-progress, 6 Calabi-Yau poems, addresses epistemological and psychological questions as they might be revealed in contemporary theoretical physics. rice has appeared in web-based exhibitions in South Korea and Brazil and has been featured on the trAce website, UK. Co-winner of the 1998 trAce-Alt-x International Hypertext Competition.

Gary Zebington

Fossil

http://murlin.va.com.au/eyespace/fossil/index.html

"Do words preserve appearances?" could be a central question for all writers, particularly those who spend time reporting on the visual arts. With so much work from the past 30 years concerned with the gestural, the ephemeral—processes of production, of meaning-making—surviving only in words, it could become the epithet of a generation, pre- and post- net.art.

Gary Zebington's living Fossil (2001) weaves in a shimmering dance on the face of the monitor, before an alternating backdrop of old photos of Times Square and the Place de la Concorde, the sound of a rushing crescendo and then diminuendo as the mirror-image spectre triggers associations ...this is the ground plan.

The introductory text raises the opening question and discusses the inkblot test (Rorschach) and feedback loops. Apparently, as we interpret the blots—or allow our sub-conscious to do so—and key-in the word association, a database of previously keyed words is consulted: "Your perceptions will be displayed and measured if they match the preserved ones."

A semi-circle begins to appear to one side of Fossil, displaying your 'score' and the movement begins to slow its recursive waverings. The more you are a part of the tribe, it seems, the slower the dance until petrification is reached. I never attained that state with Fossil but was left reflecting upon Herr Hermann Rorschach's 10 inkblots from 1921 when he delivered them to the world in the monograph "Psychodiagnostik." Just in the nick of time—he died the following year at the age of 37.

His heritage, and its influence, has lasted. There are many other websites related to his proposals (eg www.rorschach.org/). "Psychologists and psychiatrists in Europe and elsewhere soon saw the inkblot test as a useful tool. Using it they could explore the fantasy life of their patient without direct questioning, thus reducing the time for psychoanalysis." There are many warnings that only qualified members of the profession can usefully interpret responses to the 10 cards.

In Fossil the digital graphics image of the inkblot is ingenious, split perfectly down the middle, though less of a blot and more like 'finished art' graphics, with a neat line separating the rendered gradations of the interior from the background photo. If the inkblot doesn't work for you, a bit of gameplay with the database is also on offer, as you are given the word clues with which to work, having hit the first match.

As successive matches are made and blotches superimposed to the left of the mirror image, the Fossil slows its floating dance—fossilising it, I suppose. Maybe this part is the inkblot that alleviates the guilt and psychosis? Or are we left, at the end of the visit, with only the words that preserve the appearances of our encounter?

Mike Leggett

Gary Zebington converted from painting to digital media and posthuman theatre in 1990. His graphics and software have appeared inter/nationally in CD-ROMs, interactive installations, websites and cyborg performances. Solo and collaborative works include Metabody, Repossessed, Termite, Unstill Life, Bodysey, Pin Cushion, Fractal Flesh, Ping Body, Parasite and Stelarc's Movatar. Fossil has been exhibited in Ctheory, Tech Flesh; dLux media arts's d>art 01; New Zealand Film Archive; Machine Hunger's ::contagion::, and Medi@terra Festival. garu@eye.usyd.edu.au



Ian Haig

Web Devolution

http://media-arts.rmit.edu.au/NewHuman/ok.html

"Upgrade the species!" belts out as a gross pink mosaic as I deliberate whether to go for a "complete body transfer", upload to "the evolutionary kingdom level 1", or link to "zombie media." This is ugly, irritating and frustrating. The Digital Truth Generator spews out more of the same crazy technobabble and Wired, Visa, Yahoo and The Heavens Gate Cult hustle deals along with a string of other digital marketeers, all snapping for your attention. MIT Media Lab is promising a Negroponte Master Race, and Stelarc's obsolete body is primed for digital supremacy as the Net Wizard obliterates the world of old media. You'll need a password, but don't worry about it—some geek's hacked the site. It's cool and interactive. You're in what Philip Brophy encountered as "the colon of digital Babylon" (RealTime 29). Why try and escape it? That link will get you nowhere.

The strength of Ian Haig's Web Devolution (1998) lies in its invitation, insistence even, to re-encounter the counter-site of offline worlds. The only trouble is they mightn't be too different. Forget the idea that the web is some sort of autonomous zone. It's more viral than that. Trash culture, digital Darwinism, crank evangelists and remediated sci-fi constitutes the dialectical antagonism between online technologies and a media archaeology of the present. And Haig perspicaciously articulates this relationship as the necessary condition of encounters with the web. This tension is one that the smooth dumbness of much discourse and design practice in new media art and IT seeks to obviate. With Web Devolution we encounter the persistence of schlock found in crappy cartoons and nasty sales pitches, and experience an aggravating banality reminiscent of channel surfing on cable TV. In so doing, we are reminded of the prehistory of the web.

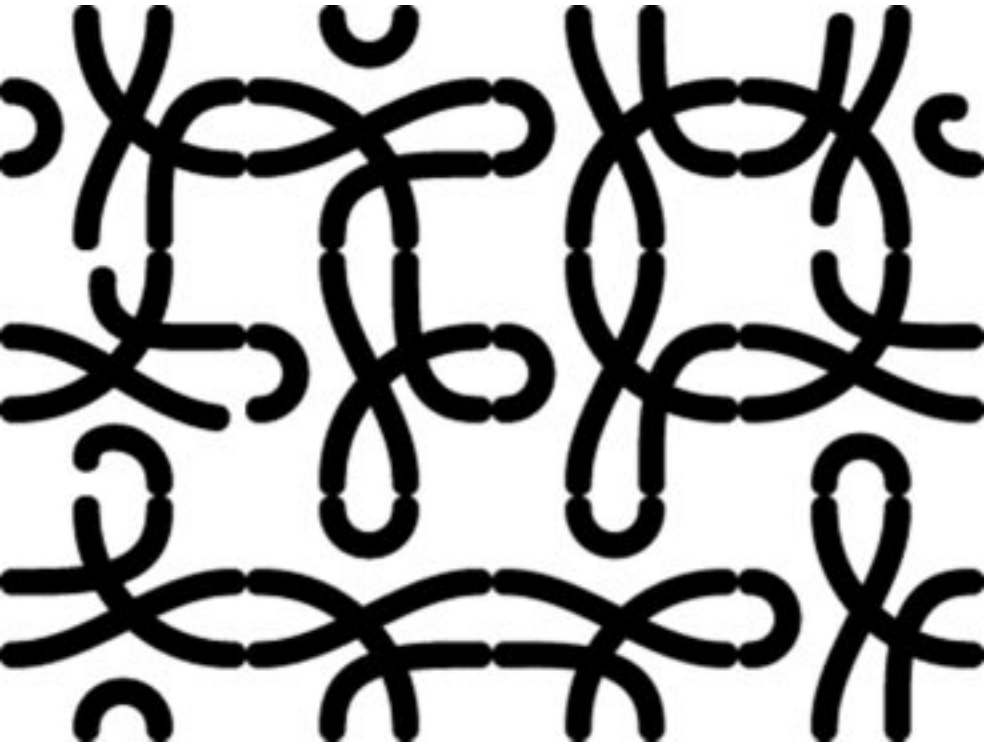


Amidst all this is the persistence of the body and the still dominant assumption that with new media technologies comes the possibility of posthuman futures, or what Ian Haig prefers to interrogate as the 'transhuman' condition. In placing an emphasis on the figure of the transhuman, Web Devolution foregrounds the mutant or monstrous aspects of evolutionary discourses, otherwise refused in much work in new media, particularly in high-end VR and AI offline production.

Web Devolution contests the pernicious delirium of technotopianism, which seeks to advance posthuman or cyborgian entities flitting about in digital edenic futures. Haig recognises the figurative role that modern media culture has played in constituting our understanding of what it is to be human. And it ain't always pretty. Web Devolution can be considered as a necrophilic rhapsody on the logic of technological convergence, assaulting us with iterations of both the technics of the net—testing what it can do—and what it is to be human, when subjectivity is constituted as an aggregate of mediated relations.

Ned Rossiter

Ian Haig's work explores the perverse relationships of the human body and technology, following the trajectory of human devolution and mutation. He has worked across the media of sound, video, film, web, animation and installation. His work has been seen in galleries, video festivals, adult cinema video booths, and on cable TV and the internet. Web Devolution has toured in Australia and appeared in exhibitions in Brazil, USA and Japan. i.haig@rmit.edu.au



Paul Brown

Time Based Art

www.paul-brown.com

Art and Tech. The web. Sometimes it's good, sometimes it's info incommunicado, Photoshop frenzy, the cut and paste marathon. But www.paul-brown.com. How clear can you get? Log on straight to the front page: text, index, take it all in at a glance. Missing some colour receptors? Don't worry about it—Paul Brown caters for the colour blind. How's the visual acuity? Oh well, upscale those fonts. Paul's site is a model for communication over the web. Fast, simple, you get what you see, you go where you click.

So what's in it for the tech-art punter? There are some essays, some demo images and a few dynamic works. The essays give us Brown's astute and uncluttered musings on his working practices and aesthetic, as well as some general ArtCrit. In "Stepping stones in the mist", Brown's most recent description of his work and practice, he writes, "I only really know where I am at this moment or, perhaps, where I have just been." Finite-state consciousness.

And so it is with his time-based work, where cellular automata generate the dynamics from simple rules that are local in both space and time—and not in machine time. The black and white wedges in Brown's Where's the Red Wedge? (2000) move in human time with a collective personality that belies state changes and clock rates; they're checking something out, having a look about, pausing for breath. In chromos (2000), tubular lines hook up, touch base, shake hands and move on in a calligraphic dance. The elements are simple; the tiling modules organise space, and the line segments dynamically articulate the tiles. But the effect is not simple. There's a pattern there somewhere. It isn't noise, but it isn't simple repetition either. Likewise for Sand-lines (2000): thin white lines, novel pathways across gritty pixels. Sometimes it seems like just one line curled back on itself in a smooth tangle, at other times the system seems to generate a series of independent loops and loose knots.

Brown's use of cellular automata—a technique that stretches back at least 30 years—challenges the computing industry's philosophy of the perpetual revolutionary product update. But whilst the computing technique might be old, Brown goes simple and subtle with graphics, process and execution. The cellular automata provide the dynamics which in turn drive recombinant calligraphy, figure-ground relations, aesthetic choices. This is Art, not a maths visualisation demo.

The website though is just a taster for the time-based works. The small animations are segments of realisations at larger and longer scales. And as we can't get the look and feel of ink-on-paper over the web, we can't see Paul Brown's prints fully either: we can only view them as jpegs. His prints explore variations in tiling-the-plane: angles, blobs and boundary conditions. And the boundaries wrap around so they tile continuously onto a larger surface. Like a PC desktop.

And when you've got your Paul Brown wallpaper, what about the outside world? In Idoru, William Gibson writes about buildings where the surface is dynamically articulated. Trouble is the changing surfaces make some a little queasy. I know a guy who can fix that.

Greg Hooper

As artist and writer Paul Brown has been specialising in art and technology for 30 years. He began using the internet in 1984 and from 1992 to 1999 edited fineArt forum, one of the internet's longest established art zines. He returned to Australia in 1994 after a two-year appointment as Professor of Art and Technology at Mississippi State University to head Griffith University's Multimedia Unit. In 1996 he was the founding Adjunct Professor of Communication Design at QUT (Queensland University of Technology) where he has since taught part-time. His computer generated artwork has been exhibited internationally. He is currently a New Media Arts Fellow of the Australia Council and spent 2000 as artist-in-residence at the Centre for Computational Neuroscience and Robotics and School of Cognitive and Computing Sciences at the University of Sussex in Brighton, England.

Jason Sweeney

The Last to See Them Alive

http://pleasurecraft.va.com.au/last_alive

Jason Sweeney interrogates lust, death, lurking and webcam violence in The Last to See Them Alive (1999-2001), an interplay of audio, text, beefcake and RealVideo that rails against truth and authenticity with a queer aesthetic. As we investigate the disappearance of two boys, we're repeatedly frustrated in our attempts to navigate and search for clues. As we scroll, the text and images evade, always a step ahead.

A black and white mosaic of a young man's body, naked. Another man sitting, pensive, frightened. Pixelated images that slice through the screen, men opened up to observation, manipulation—"he was the perfect lover"—grotesquely eroticised, digitally Baconesque. The images get more distressed as the text gets more distressing: "he has found blood on his dress." White noise erupts, a garbled voice like Stephen Hawking on Prozac, high pitched feedback, sounds of a morgue. Rollover popup boxes—is there anything more arousing—accuse, seduce and crucify: "you never told the truth"; "you were always under threat"; "were you always this hungry?" Three vertical frames cut our attention and try to divert us, leading to a conversation between a criminologist and a trainee detective.

A turned-on trainer describes the death scene to her eager-eared trainee while watching a video of two boys writhing and covered in blood. Her tracings of methodology are a nifty mechanism of narrative manipulation, guiding us to question our own perverted motivations. For Jason Sweeney's characters are an adjunct to his own lurking on the web: there were "parallels with my own queer reading of 'investigation', and the time I was spending meeting guys in gay webcam rooms (I didn't have a webcam, I was a 'lurker', an amateur detective in my own bedroom) viewing intimate scenes of men behind their computers, totally sexualised or body-doubled."

A webcam aesthetic is the site's fuzzied focus. A boy's body is enlarged—eyecandy. We are poised to click, rub over a nipple, a shoulder, a "slot machine body." Put your money in and watch him perform. He's there for the taking. Murder becomes eroticised as we caress the bodies of beautiful men with our eyes/mouse. The flashing photo/montage catches men at the moment just before death, snuffed. Pieces of bodies coming together and sliced through and cut fast and faster and spliced into and off. Images Sweeney gleaned from webcam streams: "these men that seemed to be 'connected' for a brief, staggered/stuttered period of time would then be frozen images on my screen...I became the last viewer to see these bodies as moving, sexual...then disconnected, dead...gathering snapshots of moments of mid-orgasm or playing up to the camera...the modem stole that moment."

Sweeney's concepts are oblique and condensed. He sexualises the screen image and embraces us with audio, building a site from the raw materials he's collected in the "fluid, glitchy and imperfect space" of the web. The Last to See Them Alive draws on a "fascination with the whole 'viewing room' (like pieces of live evidence or, in some cases, prerecorded porn) and the performative nature of webcam video transmission." Sweeney hopes to develop this web idea into a performance work "with a space full of microphones, webcams, private jerk-off booths."

Kirsten Krauth

Jason Sweeney is a musician/sound designer, netivist/radio pirate and performance maker. His music is internationally released under various guises: Prettyboy crossover, Other People's Children, Simpatico and more. He is currently creative collaborator and assistant director with Doppio Para//elo on their 2002 Adelaide Festival performance/installation. The Last to See Them Alive was presented at Banff Centre for the Arts, Canada, 1999. Jason was runner up in Arts SA New Media/Electronic Writing Award, 1999.



Melinda Rackham

carrier

www.subtle.net/carrier

empyrean

www.subtle.net/empyrean

Like many artists engaging with new media, Melinda Rackham is preoccupied with the fate of the organic body. Having worked online since 1995, her major works have focused on the links between embodiment, information and mortality—combining political and spiritual resonances.

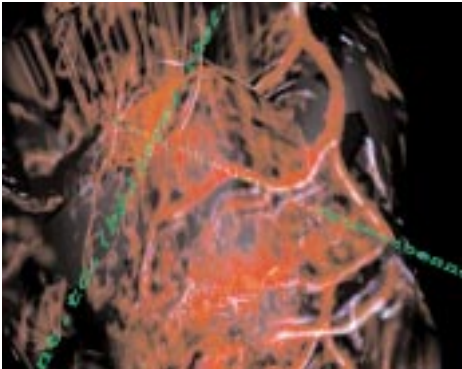
carrier (1999) stems from Rackham's own experiences of living with the Hepatitis C virus. However, carrier offers something more radical than medical account or personal narrative. As an interactive web-based work, carrier explores the intimate world of our own bodies and the microbiological beings that inhabit them—"viral symbiosis in the biological and virtual domains." Navigating carrier involves implicating yourself in the world of the work. You enter your name and the work talks to you and asks you questions. You then have to decide whether to take on the infection and live with the consequences. carrier uses the Java agent "sHe" as a viral provocateur to guide you through the site and to links containing information about Hepatitis C, and is therefore like a cross between an informational medical site and an expressive artwork. Here, viral infection is a positive, even erotic, biological merging with the flesh, with the virus presented as an intelligent agent, rather than taking the classic defensive medical response of the detached, reactionary body. Evocative imagery and soundscapes push the web browser's capacities as far as possible, while the work's message boards also utilise the community-building properties of the internet. carrier provides an intimate experience to an "infectious agent", which is uniquely determined by our singular responses.

empyrean (2000) is an equally experiential work, featuring a unique online environment constructed entirely in Virtual Reality Modelling Language (VRML). This atmospheric browser interface to an open 3D landscape of images and sounds was once anticipated as becoming a commonplace on the web, but it remains a fragile, novelty experience (for Mac users, the fact that some computers may crash at any moment ultimately becomes part of the experience). The user-participant can move through the scenes and constantly change viewpoints. Embracing the notion of the visible heavens suggested by the title, Melinda Rackham describes empyrean as a "parallel universe...beyond space and time—the void where all things are possible, the realm of the spirit, embracing the folds of the soul, a soft world of gaps and intervals, fluidly traced and transversed by in-tensions, relations, attractions and transitions between energetic avatars." Dispensing with the familiar "markers" that guide people in the real world, such as walls, signs and the horizon, the world of empyrean allows multiple online users to inhabit and interact in the "newness" of electronically constructed spaces—which the artist calls "soft scapes". The experience is otherworldly, a sensory journey in which we encounter elements of the microscopic (cells) and the macroscopic (stars). This world is made up of fluidly curved spaces as well as floating lines and texts that appear as fragmented blocks of meaning. In this sense, empyrean is at once a metaphor for human interaction within global communications networks, a subtle critique of disembodied fantasies of virtuality, and perhaps betrays a utopian longing for connection and genuine sociality.

Daniel Palmer

Melinda Rackham is a net.artist and writer working online since the mid 1990s. Her widely exhibited web environments address the nature and construction of virtual space, the technological and psychological aspects of online identity, locality, sexuality and community, as well as viral symbiosis and trans-species relations. She is currently completing a PhD in Virtual Media.

carrier has been featured in festivals and online and gallery exhibitions in Austria, Switzerland, France, Canada, South Africa, Brazil, USA, UK, Spain, Germany and Australia. Winner Faulding Award for Multimedia, Telstra Adelaide Festival 2000, Australia; 2nd Prize National Digital Art Awards 1999, IMA, Brisbane, Australia; and Honourable Mention Art on the Net 2000, Machida City Museum, Tokyo, Japan. empyrean has also been exhibited internationally and was winner of the Sound-Space Award for Virtual Worlds in SoundSpace, Stuttgarter Filmwinter 2001, Stuttgart, Germany. melinda@subtle.net



mez

the data][h!][bleeding texts

What is called 'art' or 'artistic practice' means first and foremost the enacting of an experimental material. Before being a matter of aesthetic judgement, of beauty, of the sublime or even just of form and sensitivity, it is a matter of experiencing: art articulates experiencing. We must allow it to articulate us, which also always involves disarticulation. We should remain flexible, even brittle: sense and truth should not be already in our speech.

Jean-Luc Nancy, "Experiencing Soun-gui"
www.usc.edu/dept/comp-lit/tympnum/3/nancy.html

thedata][h!][bleeding texts act as a www archive of mez's (mary-anne breeze) networked writing practice. ".these t.ex][e][ts r remnants from email performances d-voted to the dispersal of writing that has been n.spired and mutated according 2 the dynamics of an active network." In a wounded sort of way, perhaps like a scar, the website takes pleasure in bad design (lots of flashing, busy things) and sometimes cheesy text ("a challenge wrapped in velvet visuals"). _mezangelle_ ("polysemic language system") acts amongst the social and directly political realms of traffic between those of us engaged in any sort of networked art/writing practice in English speaking world(s). If you are subscribed to any list related to net.art then these in(ter)ventions are probably familiar. mez's production includes viral actions on various mailing lists, real time agent provocateur in IRC and MOO environments, poster sessions at conferences, collaborations (for example, see sky scratching with Talon Memmott) and a list of quotations from reviews, commentary, fans, etcetera.

mezangelle is ficto-criticism gone algorithmic. De-ciphering (undoing) reveals what could be thought of as mez's bad girl writing. Sometimes it is very funny (eek!][.o][g]nomic) in a phonetic/literal kind of way. mez's network(s) operate as both the subject(s) and the vehicle(s) for operatic, strident and sometimes provocative actions.

The writing (the arrangement of alphabetic letters, words and punctuation) articulates its operations amongst: (a) the way the word looks (making a chunky sort of texture), (b) the way it sounds (because you probably have to 'think' it aloud to make it work), (c) its instrumentality (the ghost of its meaning and what it makes now), and (d) its point of reception (its affects). This chunky texture makes a palpable 'thingness'—as if the text can touch, be touched and exchanged. Deciphering the code uncovers an array of subject matter that includes corporate banality and power-over, subjectivity shifts in the networked zones of email list serves and web salons and MOO meetings, and questions of theology in the realms of bio-cybernetic production.

Teri Hoskin

Awards include the 2001 VIF Prize from Humboldt-Universitat, JavaMuseum's Artist Of The Year 2001, and shortlisting for the 2001 Electronic Literature Organisation's Fiction Award. The lite version has been selected for the finals of the First International Lite Show: Flash and Other Low Bandwidth Media Festival. _the data][h!][bleeding texts_ has appeared at festivals and exhibitions in Frankfurt, Moscow, Sydney, Amsterdam and is included in forthcoming events in Wellington (New Zealand), Athens and Brisbane. netwurker@hotmail.net.au

Australia's new media arts: going the distance

Kathy Cleland

The environment

Is geographical isolation, internally and internationally, the reason the uptake rate for mobile phones, computers and the internet in Australia is amongst the highest in the world? Australian artists have been quick to incorporate new media technologies in their work, often making them the very means, and sometimes the subjects, of their expression.

Distance has certainly been an issue for Australian new media artists. When it comes to the exchange of ideas and visions, collaborations, exhibitions and gatherings, virtual presence still comes a poor second to being there. Organisations and events that have allowed artists to travel and to gather have been pivotal in developing a new media arts scene. Pioneers like Peter Callas, Stelarc, Jill Scott, Simon Penny, Linda Dement, Jon McCormack and cyberfeminist group VNS Matrix closed distances by quickly establishing Australia at the leading edge of artistic experimentation with new technologies. Their travels overseas to undertake residencies and make festival appearances were often assisted by the Australia Council, the Federal government's arts funding and advisory body, and the Australian Film Commission (AFC).

The Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT), initiated in Adelaide in 1985, has played an important strategic role in bringing artists together from across Australia as well as providing international connections. In 1992, ANAT hosted the Third International Symposium on Electronic Art (TISEA), held in Sydney, and has played a crucial ongoing role in training and support for artists working with new technologies. Training has also been offered by state-based screen culture resource organisations like Metro Screen in Sydney and the Media Resource Centre in Adelaide. Universities have also been quick to integrate new media technologies into their fine arts and design courses.

Corporate sponsorship of the arts is, unfortunately, a rarity in Australia. New media artists and cultural organisations rely heavily on the financial support of government funding bodies. As well as the Australia Council, the key player in new media funding, and the AFC there are also a range of state based funding bodies such as Cinemedia (Victoria), South Australian Film Corporation, QPIX (Queensland), FTO (New South Wales Film and Television Office) which offer funding for screen based and new media projects.

In the 1990s, the AFC's Interactive Multimedia Fund played a significant role in supporting the production of CD-ROMs and websites by artists as well as supporting screen culture organisations. However, while the AFC has continued its support of screen culture organisations through its Industry and Cultural Development Fund, the pool of money for experimental (ie non-commercially viable) projects in the Interactive Digital Media Program has been substantially reduced. As a result, new media artists will be more reliant on the New Media Arts Board of the Australia Council and funding from the states.

Screen culture organisations and contemporary art spaces provide a range of opportunities for new media artists to exhibit and screen their work. In 1996 The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, hosted Burning the Interface, a major exhibition of international CD-ROM art. Sydney-based dLux media arts hosts two major annual events: d>art is an annual showcase of national and international experimental film, video, animations, CD-ROM, sound and internet art; futureScreen is an annual symposium exploring artistic, cultural and social issues surrounding new technological developments. Experimenta Media Arts in Melbourne showcases a variety of experimental screen based and media arts and Brisbane-based Multimedia Art Asia Pacific (MAAP) hosts the annual MAAP festival with a focus on online art from the Asia Pacific region accompanied by screenings, exhibitions and forums. Also in Brisbane, the Griffith University Gallery will soon feature exhibitions highlighting the new media arts component of the Griffith Artworks Collection. Perhaps the most significant national development is the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in Melbourne, scheduled to open in 2002. Funded by the Victorian Government's Cinemedia, ACMI will be a major centre dedicated to all forms of the moving image including film, television and new media.

The development of an engaged and critical discourse through print and electronic publications has also been an important factor in supporting emerging digital art forms in Australia. The bi-monthly RealTime is published as a free street magazine and online. Its ongoing OnScreen supplement reviews and critiques the screen-based arts. Online journals focusing on art and technology include fineArt forum, based at Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Experimenta Media Arts' MESH. Print publications Artlink, Art AsiaPacific and Photofile have published special issues on digital media. Internet lists such as ::fibreculture:: and ::recode:: are also playing a role promoting and facilitating debate about Australian internet culture and new media technologies. While at first glance the range and variety of coverage of new media arts appears ample, in reality much new work still goes un-reviewed with mainstream media paying only very occasional attention to new media arts in general.

It is also unfortunate that the Australian population's rapid uptake of new media has not inspired major corporate investment in new technology research. Similarly, in arts funding the investment in new media work overall is small. However, the support offered by funding bodies, ANAT, screen culture organisations and publications is critical and has more recently included development of new media skills in regional areas and among Indigenous artists. As well, the exhibiting and touring of new media art has been more extensive in 2000-2001, with the vision and commitment of curators and support from government funding bodies playing key roles. The national touring exhibition of new media works, Cyber Cultures (2000-2001), the Space Odysseys exhibition (Art Gallery of New South Wales and Australian Centre for the Moving Image, 2001-2002), the hybrid<life>forms exhibition of Australian new media art in Amsterdam along with the ACMI opening in 2002 and the digital art skills embodied in the displays in the new National Museum of Australia, Canberra, offer hope of a more popular engagement with and support for new media arts.

The works

New media art is a vigorous hybrid that incorporates existing art forms and engulfs new technological developments as soon as they come online. Including 2D digital prints, websites, CD-ROMs, installations, digital video, sound, performance and 3D sculptural forms, new media art is a discipline with very permeable boundaries.

The internet in particular has emerged as a key area of engagement for new media artists. The convergence of telecommunications and audio-visual and computing technologies has initiated a new virtual arena for artistic expression and exhibition giving artists the opportunity to gain instant and ongoing feedback from a global audience. From the online sonic explorations hosted by r a d i o u a l i a and l'audible to the intimate poetics of geniwate's web work, rice, and the point and click frenzy of Ian Haig's Web Devolution, the internet supports an array of artistic practices and sensibilities.

The ease with which digital media can be modified and reconfigured means that new media art can exist in a variety of formats taking advantage of different exhibition and viewing situations. As bandwidth increases, works that once existed only on CD-ROM, such as Linda Dement's In My Gash and Cyberflesh Girlmonster and Patricia Piccinini's and Peter Hennessey's LUMPCD, are now migrating to the internet.

CD-ROM and internet based works are also achieving parallel lives in gallery exhibitions where they join other new media work living on computer hard drives or output as 2D digital prints or even 3D sculptural objects such as Patricia Piccinini's Truck Babies. Gallery installation allows artists to move outside the 'screen' and experiment with new configurations in physical space. The screen image can be augmented with physical objects such as sculptural housings and digital prints and artists can experiment with different spatial relationships between the image, the audience and the gallery environment, moving from the intimacy of the one-user computer terminal to multiple screens or large-scale immersive cinematic projections with surround sound.

Anita Kocsis' digital garden Neonverte (www.anat.org.au/projects/login/anat_anita/neonverte/) is an internet/installation hybrid. The animation component is created and exhibited online using Macromedia Flash. The work is then 'harvested' onto video, projected onto a 3D screen with surround sound and accompanied by a series of flashing LED lights that line the walls leading towards the projection. Melinda Rackham's award winning web-based carrier has also been exhibited as a gallery installation. The carrier website is data-projected onto a large screen and accompanied by digital prints of magnified nerve cells. Continuing the medical/viral theme of the work, a stainless steel medical trolley provides a surface for the keyboard and mouse.

While in many new media works the interactivity is of the point and click variety that foregrounds the technological interface, in others the interface between equipment and user becomes almost invisible. Artificial vision systems and alternative interfaces— where the movements of the audience act as input devices—are some of the most fascinating and engaging examples of new media installation practice.

In Dodg'em, by Martine Corompt and Philip Samartzis, audience members drive around the gallery in two pedal cars, their movements tracked by a video camera connected to a computer. As audience members drive into different zones of the gallery they trigger an interactive soundscape. Garth Paine's immersive interactive sound environments (www.activatedspace.com.au/installations) also use video sensing techniques to initiate responses to the physical movements of people in the installation space.



Mari Velonaki, Pin Cushion

Mari Velonaki's Pin Cushion (<http://mvstudio.org/>) uses acupuncture needles as the interface between audience and artwork. The needles are embedded in the digital image of a woman's face projected onto an oval screen hanging on a wall. From the first touch of a needle each cumulative interaction degrades the face further until it becomes increasingly monstrous and unrecognisable. In another of Velonaki's recent works, Unstill Life, an artificial vision system is used to track audience members' interaction with the work—they trigger responses from the digital portrait of a reclining woman. Both pieces are collaborations with fellow artist Gary Zebington whose own work incorporates a variety of exploratory human-machine devices such as voice recognition.

Virtual bodies and performance

The number of artists and companies in Australia engaging with new media in performance is considerable. They use new technologies to further the multimedia possibilities of their productions exploring the relationships between performers and between spaces actual and virtual.

In the performance work of Stelarc and Company in Space, what is magical is the relationship between the physical and the virtual—their juxtaposition and how they interact. Seeing Stelarc's physical body tethered by cables to computers and machines, and watching virtual projections of his body in performances like Ping Body and Movatar, we are suspended between the real and the virtual, simultaneously here and elsewhere. The virtual image can be seen on the internet, by anyone, anywhere in the world, but they are only getting half the picture. Less than half the picture, because the movement of the eyes between the virtual image of Stelarc and his flesh body—the 'inbetween-ness' of Stelarc's simultaneous physical and virtual presences—is where it's really at.

Company in Space's dance-technology works also explore the virtual realm as a site for performance. Crossing geographical locations and timezones, Company in Space links dancers in sites such as Hong Kong and Australia using a variety of technologies to enable them to perform together in real time in a shared virtual space. The attention of both dancers and audiences forms part of a distributed network of consciousness between the physical presence of the individual dancers in their separate geographical locations and their combined virtual performance. The isolation of the dancers in their physical spaces is counterpointed by the intimacy of their interaction where bodies appear to touch and even caress. In Company in Space's most recent work CO3, the dancers take one more step away from the flesh and into the virtual. Wearing motion capture suits their movements animate avatars (virtual characters) which perform together in virtual film environments.

These new forms of interaction across time and space with human and virtual participants exemplify some of the most intriguing areas of development in the new media arts. Whether it's a video image or an avatar bobbing around in a virtual environment, it's a 'reach out and touch somebody' moment. With increasingly rapid advances in communications and new media technologies, we're going to be seeing a lot more of them in the future.

* * *

I have mentioned only a few of the many Australian artists working in new media arts or incorporating new technologies in their practices. However, it is clear that whatever the constraints of distance, financial support and slow public recognition, much has been achieved. The vision, energy and the commitment of artists continue to yield high levels of technological and artistic invention, awards won and works regularly exhibited internationally. Recent developments guarantee new media arts a greater presence in our own culture while Next Wave Down Under's Under_score is one more significant step in confirming its global presence.

- Australia Council www.ozco.gov.au
- Australian Film Commission www.afc.gov.au
- Australian Centre for the Moving Image www.cinemedia.com.au/fedsqr
- Cinemedia www.cinemedia.com.au
- SA Film Corporation www.safilm.com.au
- FTO (NSW Film and Television Office) www.fto.nsw.gov.au
- QPIX www.qpix.org.au
- Australian Network for Art and Technology www.anat.org.au
- dLux Media Arts www.dlux.org.au
- Multimedia Art Asia Pacific www.maap.org.au
- Experimenta Media Arts www.experimenta.org
- MESH www.experimenta.org/mesh
- fineArt forum www.fineartforum.org
- RealTime www.realtimearts.net
- Griffith Artworks www.gu.edu.au/centre/artworks
- Media Resource Centre www.mrc.org.au
- Metro Screen www.metro.org.au
- ::fibreculture::
- <http://lists.myspinach.org/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/fibreculture>
- ::recode:: <http://systemx.autonomous.org/recode/>

Web addresses for the following can be found with their entries in this publication: r a d i o q u a l i a, l'audible, geniwate, Patricia Piccinini, Peter Hennessey, Melinda Rackham, Ian Haig, Linda Dement, Gary Zebington, Stelarc, Company in Space.

Kathy Cleland is an independent writer and curator specialising in new media. She is the curator of the Cyber Cultures exhibition series <www.casulapowerhouse.com/cybercultures> and is President of dLux media arts. She is the guest editor of Artlink, "The e-volution of new media", Volume 21, No. 3, September 2001. www.artlink.com.au

Patricia Piccinini

Biosphere

www.patriciapiccinini.net

Patricia Piccinini's practice focuses on the changing relationship between the 'artificial' and the 'natural' in the age of information technology and mass communications. Her work is about finding ways to question the extent and consequences of the naturalised status of consumer culture and technology without disregarding their beauty and importance. In many ways, her work is grounded in the everyday. Biosphere includes S02, Protein Lattice, Natural Beauty, Psycho and the Mutant Genome Project. Piccinini produces computer-generated photographs, sculptures and installations centering on digitisation, the Human Genome Project and on ideas of social construction.

The recent work Car Nuggets in the Autosphere series, writes Piccinini, "is a set of sculptures which looks at the gloss and seduction of consumer culture through the lens of automotive design. The idea is that these Car Nuggets are to cars what chicken nuggets are to chickens—an aesthetically refined essentialisation of car culture. Car Nuggets are also a critique of consumer desire, but from the point of view of the shop floor rather than the moral high ground. Car Nuggets are about compromise, being able to find beauty in a world that can never be perfect. Car Nuggets GL is the second series, similar to the original sculptures but new and improved. While producing them I became interested in car customisation, which I see as a distinctive and fascinating cultural form. A suburban folk-art for the new millennium. I have brought this into the new works, which are custom painted with flames, skulls and state of the art 'Kameleon Kolors' [sic]."

Under_score acknowledges fourteen works by Australian artists working in a variety of new media formats including CD-ROM, installation and the internet, sometimes in intriguing combinations. Again the body is largely the focus of the selection, including some remarkable scientific forays as well as playful and sardonic speculations on the bodies of the future. Stelarc and Company in Space add a very palpable dimension to this interplay of real and virtual bodies.

LINKS



Patricia Piccinini is based in Australia and in 2001 she had a solo exhibition at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography and was included in *hybrid<life>forms* at the Netherlands Media Art Institute and at the Berlin Biennale. Car Nuggets GL was launched October 2001 in the solo exhibition *One night love*. patricia@drome.com.au

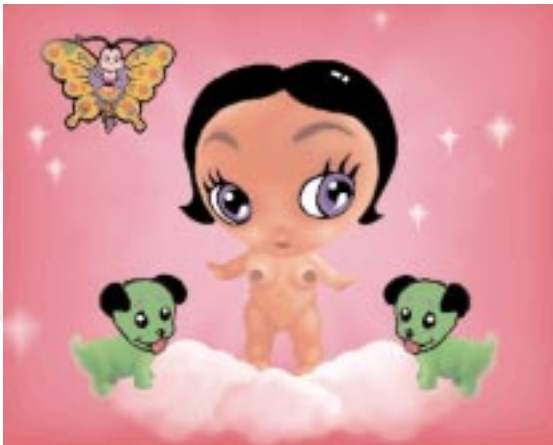
Justine Cooper

Scynescape and Transformers

<http://justinecooper.com>

One of the primary goals of Justine Cooper's work has been to create alternate spaces of meaning through physical installations that can be entered or engaged with. Scynescape (2000), a large maze-like installation, uses the physical presence of the audience to trigger sound and videoscapes created from SEM (scanning electron microscopy) animated sequences of high magnification topographical detail from the artist's body. These render out as geological or interstellar landscapes moving across large panels of skin-like tensioned latex. Transformers (2001), her most recent project, takes the genetic sequence of twelve subjects and interweaves their signifiers of identity, both visual and oral, into a complex layering of identity as the expression of both cultural and scientific value systems.

Australian-born artist Justine Cooper currently lives in New York. In 2001, funded by the Australian Network for Art and Technology, she was artist-in-residence at The American Museum of Natural History where she worked across departments including Education, Exhibitions and Molecular Biology. She is currently artist-in-residence in the Lower Manhattan Cultural Council's World Views program. mail@justinecooper.com



Martine Corompt

The Cute Machine

<http://media-arts.rmit.edu.au/martine/cm.html>

Martine Corompt's CD-ROM The Cute Machine is an exploration into the morphology of cute characterisation and iconography and its relationship to the biological world, seeking to analyse this "cute ideal" by correlating it with the zoological process known as neoteny. The Cute Machine proposes an environment where cute iconography and user friendliness have rampantly accelerated and reduced computer interface design to the look and sophistication of an infant toy, while also taking the premise 'Cute = young' to the extreme. The 'Cutest' becomes an abstracted mutation of the original sentiment.

The recent work Wild Boy (<http://media-arts.rmit.edu.au/martine/cm.html>) draws on the yearning and sense of loss that is the hallmark of a good pop song, and exaggerates this sentiment by personifying the singer as an accompanying animated singing head. This head, without a body and presumably also without a soul, is all the more tragic for its Frankensteinian predicament, of being "brought to life" (via animation and song) without history, purpose or consent.

In 1999 Martine Corompt participated in the Gertrude Street Pasadena Studio exchange program, spending 6 months as visiting fellow at the Faculty of Art Center College of Design USA. She lectures in Experimental Animation at Media Arts RMIT (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology). Wild Boy has been shown at the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, 2000 and Adam Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand, 2001.



Oran Catts & Ionat Zurr

The Tissue Culture and Art Project

www.tca.uwa.edu.au

Catts and Zurr grow tissue sculptures, "semi-living" objects, by culturing cells on artificial scaffolds in bioreactors. These entities blur the boundaries between what is born/manufactured, animate/inanimate and further challenge our perceptions of our bodies and the constructed environment

Catts and Zurr write: "In the Pig Wings project we have grown pig's bone marrow stem cells in the shape of 3 sets of wings. We are referring to the rhetoric associated with the developments in new biological technologies. This hype made us wonder if pigs could fly, and if they will, what shape their wings would take. We refer to utopian and dystopian views in regard to a future immersed with new biological technologies and our social responsibility in shaping such a future. The Tissue Culture & Art Project (established 1996) is an ongoing R&D project into the use of tissue technologies as a medium for artistic expression. We are growing semi-living objects that represent a contestable future."

The photograph (right) of the work Semi-Living Doll A, is described by the artists as: "Hand-crafted worry doll made out of biodegradable polymers and surgical sutures, and McCoy cells (epithelial cell line) growing over/into it. The image presents the doll before and after four weeks of cell growth. (Not to scale.)"

The Tissue Culture & Art Project brings together Oran Catts, Ionat Zurr, Guy Ben-Ary and other collaborators on a project basis. The work has been exhibited in Ars Electronica, Austria, 2000, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, 2000, 'Transhuman' Kendarline Art Gallery, Saskatoon, Canada, 2001. oran@symbiotica.uwa.edu.au



Linda Dement

In My Gash

www.lindadement.com

In My Gash CD-ROM (<http://sysx.org/dement/gash3.htm#>) takes you into the flesh of a depressed and dangerous girl. Four wounds are entrances to the nightmare interior where the stories and horrors of bodily memories emerge under the cursor on screen. Each gash leads to the black hole of despair where soundloops and suicide circle endlessly.

Linda Dement writes that her latest work, Eurydice, "was to have been a collaborative interactive digital work with author Kathy Acker, undertaken as part of an Australia Council New Media Arts Fellowship. Kathy Acker died of cancer in the early stages of our project. The starting point for the work was her story Eurydice in the Underworld, written about her experience with breast cancer. I continued with the work, making large still images inspired by places described in the story. The resulting seven digital images have been output as lambda mural prints, 1 x 2.25 metres each, mounted on aluminium." Exhibited as part of hybrid<life>forms at Netherlands Institute for Media Art, Montevideo, Amsterdam 2001, and hybrid<life>forms@home, Australia Council foyer, Sydney, 2001.

Linda Dement has been an exhibiting artist since 1984 with a background in fine art photography, writing, animation and film. She now works with computer imaging and interactivity. She is author of 3 CD-ROM titles: Typhoid Mary, Cyberflesh Girlmonster and In My Gash. linda@dot.net.au



Troy Innocent

Iconica

www.iconica.org/start.htm

Iconica (1997) is an interactive artwork and installation with two large projections that proposes an electronic reality constructed out of language. An artificial life model is employed to create an electronic space that evolves, grows and mutates through interaction with itself and with gallery visitors. A mythology of media is the concept which inspires the six distinct species of information-based lifeforms which inhabit this new reality. The website acts as a gateway to the exhibition space. Visitors can get a glimpse of the current state of evolution and have the opportunity to send messages to entities within the electronic space.

A new exhibition, Artefact (2001), explores the language of electronic games. The shift in perception between the real and the simulated is explored by accentuating errors, or "artefacts", in the representation of reality. The exhibition offers a mixed reality made of interactive icons and an immersive environment that investigates the idea of semiotic morphism. These works explore the dynamic between the iconic ideal and the personal specific, duality and multiplicity, and the way in which our identity is shaped by language and communication.

Troy Innocent has achieved international recognition for his digital media art. His work explores the 'language of computers' combining computer animation, generative systems, multimedia design, iconography and interactivity to create virtual worlds that explore the nature of electronic space. troy@iconica.org

Graham Crawford

MirrorWound

www.queer-arts.org/y2gay/MirrorWound/index.html

Graham Crawford established Urban Exile (artoz.com), Sydney's first online art gallery, in 1995. While maintaining the gallery, Graham has been the webmaster for a number of commercial, community and arts-based websites, including the award-winning site for the 1997 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival, Cyber Cultures, Advance Energy and Gayguys, the youth website of the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations. He is currently the Corporate Website Producer and lead Flash Developer for The Solution 6 Group, a leading provider of IT solutions for business, government and professional advisors.

Tool2.b was included in the Screenarts online archive, touring as part of Australian Network for Art and Technology's Foldback exhibition. Graham Crawford's Flash animation series, MirrorWound, is one of 4 artworks selected for the 2nd annual Net Art exhibition Y2Gay: QueerVisions of the Millennium (www.queer-arts.org) and was exhibited at the Sydney Powerhouse Museum as part of dLux media arts' futureScreen 99.

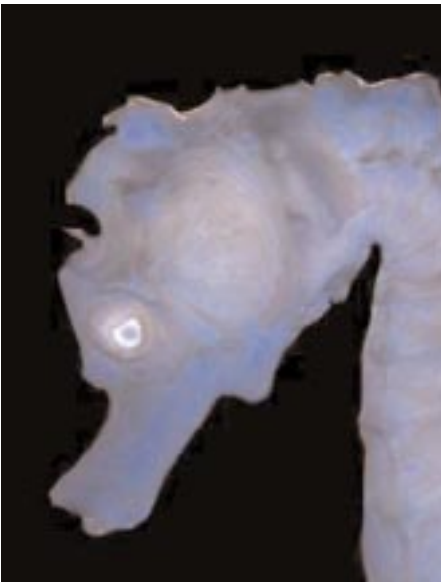
Anna Munster

wundernet

<http://wundernet.cofa.unsw.edu.au/>

wundernet is an online artwork that plays with the visual metaphor of a baroque curiosity cabinet (from the experimental interactive CD-ROM work-in-progress, wunderkammer). The possibility arises for an expansive and affective relationship between the arts and sciences through the passion of wonder.

Anna Munster is a media artist who works across time-based intermedia, digital art and writing. She also lectures in the School of Art History and Theory at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales. wundernet appeared in dLux media arts' d<art01, Sydney, 2001 and will be in Feast Festival, Adelaide (forthcoming 2001). A.Munster@unsw.edu.au



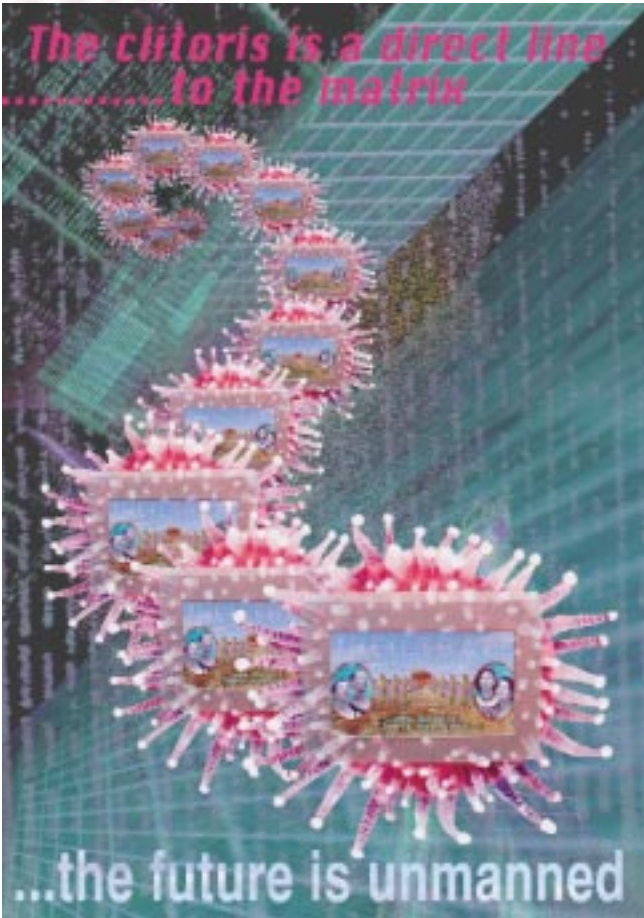
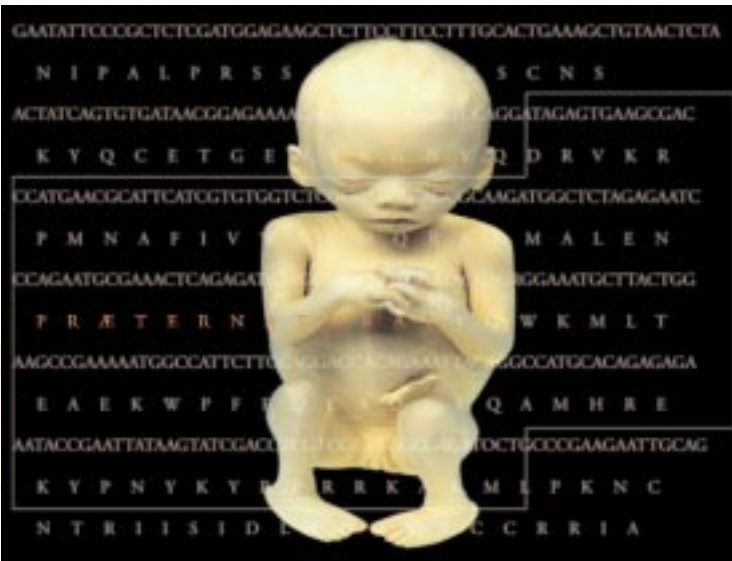
VNS Matrix

<http://sysx.org/vns/>

From 1991-1997, the artists Josephine Starrs (<http://sysx.org/starrs>), Julianne Pierce (<http://sysx.org/jules>), Francesca Da Rimini (<http://sysx.org/gashgirl>) and Virginia Barratt comprised VNS Matrix. They created installations, events and public art works in Australia and internationally.

With backgrounds in photography, film, video, music, performance, writing, feminism and cultural theory, VNS Matrix coined the term 'cyberfeminism' along with Sadie Plant in the early 1990s. The impetus of VNS Matrix was to investigate and decipher the narratives of domination and control which surround high technological culture, and explore the construction of social space, identity and sexuality in cyberspace. The project which they pursued was one of debunking the masculinist myths which might alienate women from technological devices and their cultural products. They believed that women who hijack the tools of domination and control introduce a rupture into a highly systematised culture by infecting the machines with radical thought, diverting them from their inherent purpose of linear topdown mastery.

An original html archive of VNS Matrix projects can be found at <http://sysx.org/vns>



Michele Barker

Præternatural

www.liquiddna.com

The CD-ROM Præternatural ranges through the 17th century to the present, exploring the role of the monster and the relationship of genetics to corporeality. It is not designed to be a textbook-accurate historical and contemporary account of the monstrous, but a critical genealogy based on myth, perception and the concerns of a given society at a given time. It is designed to critique contemporary attitudes to physical acceptability.

Michele Barker has been working in the area of digital media for over a decade, exhibiting extensively in Australia and overseas, and recently completing the interactive CD-ROM, Præternatural. She is presently completing a PhD that addresses notions of corporeality and otherness within the paradigms of medicine and science. Michele is the Digital Media Lecturer for the Photomedia Department at the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales. Præternatural has been shown in Milia 2000, Cannes, hybrid<life>forms, Amsterdam, d>art01, Sydney, and will show at Feast Festival, Adelaide, ::contagion::, New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington, and Experimenta 2001 Media Lounge, Melbourne. M.Barker@unsw.edu.au



Lloyd Sharp

www.chickenfish.cc

Lloyd Sharp writes: "My art activities entail a fascination with the interrelationship between biology, identity and imaging technologies. Conscious of contemporary theoretical debates about fluid identities, cyborg bodies and transgendered beings, the imagery, soundscapes, scale, perspective and structural metaphors I explore concepts of self and community. My interest is not in reconstituting psychological discourses of self, but in creating new ways of visualising the body. Whilst I draw upon contemporary medical imaging techniques and an interest in prosthetics, I seek to redefine the body as a sensual space, where the scientific gaze is exposed as an imaginary one. Moving from an earlier interest in live performance, I see my (primarily) interactive art works as fluid, performative representations of my body. 3D technologies (including form synthesis and VRML) allow me to explore a wide range of scales, however the images, sounds, memories, and emotions that inform my work still involve a rendering of my body as art. The above image is from a SONY Playstation-based project I'm working on called nano entities." isharp@ozemail.com.au

Drome

LUMPCD

www.lumpcd.com

Drome is a new media design company founded by Peter Hennessey with Patricia Piccinini in 1995. Recently Drome adapted one of Piccinini's creations, LUMP, for CD-ROM. Piccinini writes that LUMP "comes from my on-going The Mutant Genome Project (TMGP), a series of computer-generated photographs and new media installations that explore issues relating to genetic engineering and 'consumer medicine'. Recurring throughout the TMGP work is LUMP (Lifeform with Unevolved Mutant Properties) which is presented as the world's first commercially available 'designer baby.' LUMP is the human form completely redesigned by an engineer and an ad agency; physiognomically efficient and marketably cute...a cypher via which I can subtly introduce narratives that touch on IVF, genetic research and medical marketing."



Company in Space

CO3

www.companyinspace.com

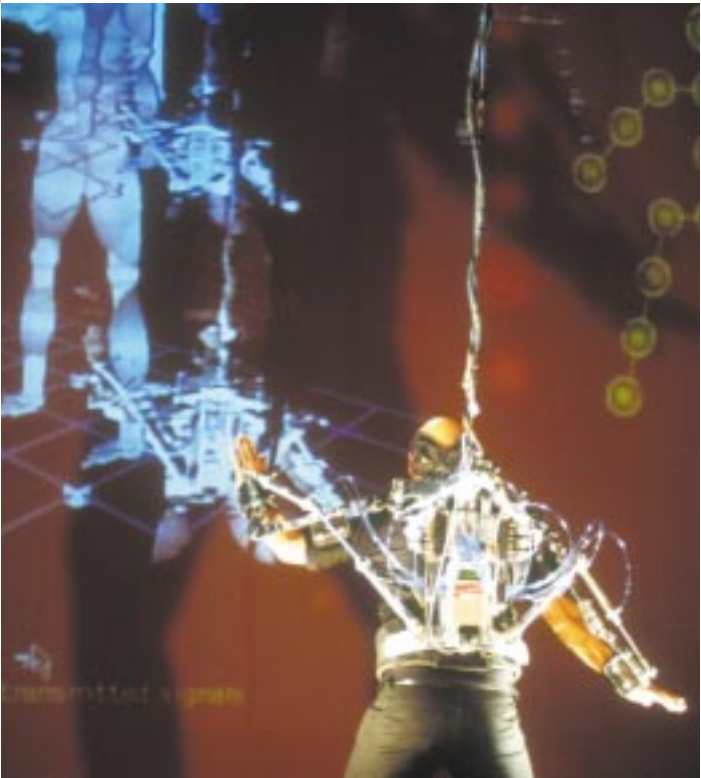
This new performance work by the Melbourne based dance-technology team, Company in Space, is a merging of live cinema, animation and dance performance facilitated by cutting edge technology. CO3 features two living organisms that have given their consent to be interfaced with state of the art motion capture apparatus. Engaging in the same computer generated space in real time, the relationship between the cybernetic and the organism can only be described as one of distrust. A choice is looming, but which direction to take? Animators and interactive computer designers Marshall White, Miriam English, Keith Robertson and John McCormick have created 3D environments for the virtual characters, driven by the movement data created by performers Hellen Sky and Keith Robertson.

Founded by co-directors John McCormick and Hellen Sky, Company in Space has consistently pioneered applications of new technology to movement in a number of new media formats including live performance installations, video and interactive virtual spaces accessible from anywhere in the world. In 2000 Escape Velocity and Trial by Video were featured in international festivals such as the Dare to Dream arts rave and performance exhibition in Hong Kong, new moves (new territories) 2000 dance event in Glasgow, and the Dutch Electronic Art Festival in Rotterdam. Incarnate opened the Digital Now 2001 Festival in Hong Kong. CO3 had its world premiere at Interact 2001 Asia Pacific Multimedia Festival, Melbourne. cis@companyinspace.com



Drome is currently working with Gideon Obarzanek from Chunky Move dance company on Biopsy, a major piece commissioned by Cinemedia for the Australian Centre for the Moving Image opening in Melbourne in 2002. Biopsy is a new media dance installation that allows viewers to interact with and create choreography through video projection and an evolving audio environment. For the same company Drome created the CD-ROM, Making Chunky Move (1999), which it has adapted for internet access for Next Wave Down Under.

Peter Hennessey is an artist and designer whose work encompasses architectural ideas of space, electronic installation practice and interactive media. He has worked with many commercial clients and arts organisations. Drome aims to combine a spirit of experimentation with technical expertise to produce works which investigate the boundaries between media, arts and design. Since 1999 Drome has been working closely with Cinemedia, the Victorian state government's film and new media funding body, on various projects for Melbourne's Federation Square including 3D visualisation, web design and multimedia production.



Stelarc

Movatar

www.stelarc.va.com.au

Stelarc has performed with a Third Hand, a Virtual Body and a Stomach Sculpture. He recently completed Exoskeleton, a pneumatically powered 6-legged walking machine actuated by arm gestures. In Movatar (2000), he is manipulated by an avatar via the net and through an exoskeleton controlling his upper body movements. During these performances, live images are uploaded and samples are archived for viewing.

Stelarc is an Australian-based performance artist whose work explores and extends the concept of the body and its relationship with technology through human/machine interfaces incorporating the web, sound, music, video and computers. He has performed extensively in Japan, Europe and the USA in dance festivals, new music and experimental theatre works. He was appointed Honorary Professor of Art and Robotics, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh in 1997. Stelarc is currently Principal Research Fellow in the Performance Arts digital Research Unit at Nottingham Trent University UK.

net.sounds

In the predominantly visual worlds of new media arts, sound has played a key role, not only as a supporting medium, but in its own right. This is partly because the new media sensorium allows a new focus on sound, partly because transmission is no longer limited by state and corporate control, and because a growing number of sound artists and listeners find it to be the most imaginative and provocative of virtual spaces. The Under_score selection includes two innovative online broadcasters plus sound works from The Listening Room, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's award winning sound art program.

radioqualia

www.radioqualia.net

Launched in 1998 and directed by Honor Harger and Adam Hyde, radioqualia is an online art collaboration aiming to open an electronic portal into the eccentricities of radio space. Using various streaming softwares, the artists experiment with the concept of broadcasting using the internet and traditional media forms, such as radio and television, as primary tools. The Frequency Clock (www.frequencyclock.net) is a multi-platform system which enables users to timetable webcasting content for broadcast on the internet and on FM radio. radioqualia are currently researching how this system can be used to create a hybrid of webcast video and television. A version of this project has been exhibited as a gallery installation at the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide, Ars Electronica in Linz, Austria, Video Positive in Liverpool, UK and Sonar in Barcelona, Spain.

radioqualia's website or projects have featured in events in Germany, Spain, USA, UK, Latvia, Austria, Japan, Italy, Canada, The Netherlands and Greece. Finalist, Art on the Net, Machida City Museum of Graphic Arts, Tokyo, Japan, 1998. radioqualia@va.com.au, honor@va.com.au, adam@xs4all.nl





I'audible

<http://laudible.net>

Launched in 1997, I'audible is an expanding archive of audio created by Australian and New Zealand producers and maintained by artists Zina Kaye, Mr. Snow and caleb.k. The site holds examples of audio from over 70 artists including RealAudio material by Minut, Parmentier, David Haines, Joyce Hinterding and Pitch Black. The work focuses on new and experimental sound production, is situated in the area of contemporary experimental digital audio and covers a range of (sub)genres within this framework. The site is a node in the vibrant sonic scene in Australia/NZ, part of a loose network of audio producers working in a localised and international environment. The internet based archive makes the audio available free to an international audience who are starting to discover the quality of sound being produced in this part of the world. I'audible has participated in Ars Electronica, Linz 1997; hybrid<life>forms, Amsterdam, 2001; ::contagion::, NZ Film Archive, Wellington 2001. laudible@laudible.net

Under

Australia's new media artists

Under score is a small selection from the many artists working with new media in Australia. Here is a list of other notable practitioners working in a variety of forms—CD-ROM, video, sound, online, installation and permutations of these.

Keith Armstrong; Arterial; Robyn Backen; Kathryn Bird; Rebecca Bryant; Linda Carroli & Josephine Wilson; Damian Castaldi; Leon Cmielewski & Josephine Starrs; Daniel Crooks; Paula Dawson; Denis del Favero with Tony MacGregor; Kiersty Garbett; Phillip George; Michelle Glaser, Andrew Hutchinson; Marie-Louise Xavier; Nigel Helyer; Joyce Hinterding & David Haines; Teri Hoskin; Megan Heyward; Stephen Jones; Zina Kaye; Horst Kiechle; Anita Kocsis; Derek Kreckler; Mike Leggett; John Lycette; Rainer Linz; kaz madigan; Wade Marynowsky; Katherine Mew; Fiona Macdonald; John McCormack; Norie Neumark & Maria Miranda; Tatiana Pentes; Debra Petrovich; Robin Petterd; Sally Pryor; Dominic Redfern, Kate Richards & Ross Gibson; Lisa Roberts; David Rosetzky; Alyssa Rothwell; Philip Samartzis; Robyn Stacey; Paul Thomas; Suzanne Treister; James Verdon, Martin Walch; Linda Wallace; Mitchell Whitelaw; Vikki Wilson & Erin Hefferon; Garth Paine; Sophea Lerner; Shiralee Saul; Lynette Wallworth; Sarah Waterson.

Performing with new media

More and more performance and dance companies are integrating new media into their work in collaboration with leading new media artists. This list comprises just a few of these innovators.

Arena Theatre Company; Art Dragon; Arterial; Australian Dance Theatre; Back to Back Theatre; Denis Beaubois; Cazerine Barry; Bonemap; Kate Champion; Company in Space; Tess De Quincey; Doppio Para//ello; Tim Gruchy; IRAA Theatre; Sam James; John McCormick; The Men Who Knew Too Much; Margie Medlin; Party Line; Deborah Pollard; transmute collective; Marrageku Company; PACT Youth Theatre; Anna Sabiel; skadada; Stelarc; Louise Taube; Trash Vaudeville.

For websites for these and other artists go to RealTime's New Media Index www.realtimearts.net

The Listening Room

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation's The Listening Room is the long running, award-winning sound art program heard on the ABC's Classic FM station (www.abc.net.au). From the program's archives Under score curator Wayne Ashley has made a selection of works for streaming. The program includes leading sound artists and composers whose work ranges from radio to CD to collaborations with Australian performance and dance companies.

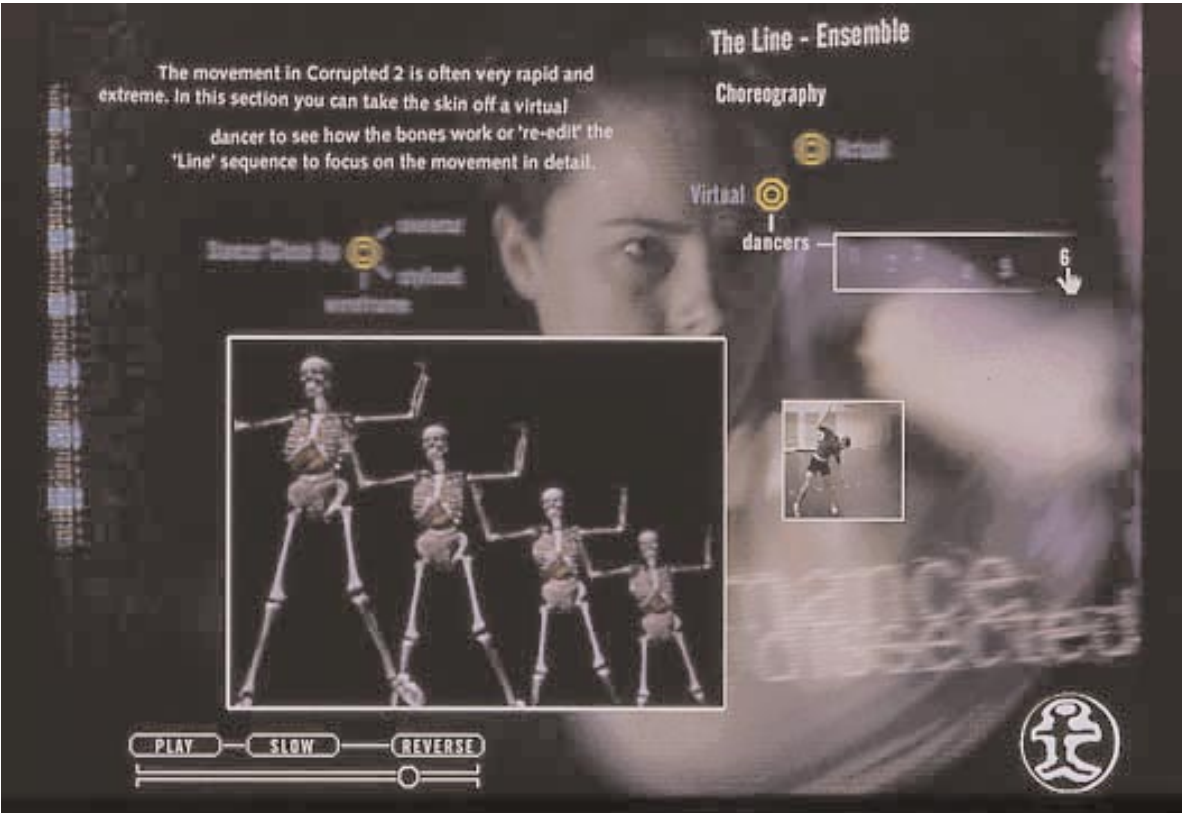
In 1994-95 The Listening Room commissioned and produced 3 minute productions in the form of audio clips, each the length of a pop song with all the ingenuity and imagination and technique applied to the program's radiophonic production. From the Audioclips Series come: The Last Chances of Johnny Zhivago by Paul Charlier & Susan Kerrigan; Last Known Resting Place by Peter Breuer & Eryn Tooey; Letter To A Future Place by Cathie Payne; and A Course in Camel by Paul Smyth.

From Earshots! (1997) comes Arcana from Lost Cults - Vol.1 No 1. (the cult of the vapour trail) by Shaun Rigney; Here's to the death of one over f by Darrin Verhagen; Organic Reflections (a snapshot of Rod Berry) by Solange Kershaw; Polski Organics (shipboard jollies) by David Thrussell; and Blas na gaeilge by Tim Gleeson.

Also selected for broadcast is the 20 minute, 1995 work, Vanishing Point, by Ion Pearce.

Streaming: www.bam.org/underscore

the Listening Room



Making Chunky Move

BAM has commissioned Australian new media company Drome to rework their 1999 CD-ROM Making Chunky Move: C.O.R.R.U.P.T.E.D 2 for the internet. The web work explores how one of Australia's most exciting contemporary dance companies created the dance work C.O.R.R.U.P.T.E.D 2, which will have its American premiere at BAM during the 2001 Next Wave Festival. The documentary follows the company from the germ of an idea to the stage, behind the scenes and beyond, with snapshot interviews with the key players, dancers, creative collaborators and other cultural identities as well as unique virtual 3D segments, sound bites, and extensive video footage.

Since its establishment in 1995 by Artistic Director Gideon Obarzanek, the Melbourne-based Chunky Move has positioned itself as Australia's boldest dance company, challenging pre-conceptions about contemporary dance and presenting provocative works which engage with contemporary culture. Working across all forms of media with a range of artists in dance, music, design, fashion and film, the company's work is audacious and rich in humour.

BAM's web documentaries

As part of BAM's expanding activities in new media, its website has begun hosting a series of web documentaries about some of the festival's artists. These documentaries simultaneously educate new audiences about BAM's Next Wave programming, create new ways of understanding the art-making process, and further define BAM as an institution consciously and critically investing in new media. BAM have produced a documentary on choreographer David Rousséve and have licensed another on director Robert Wilson. The most recent project, an online interactive work based on choreographer Ralph Lemon, transforms Lemon's travel journals, dramaturgical notes, musings, and rehearsal videos into a compelling new piece for the internet.

Associate artists, photographers, funding bodies, sponsors



Francesca Da Rimini, **dollspace** & **los dias y las noches del muertos**, sound by Michael Grimm, Australia Council; John Tonkin, **meniscus** & **Prototype for a Universal Ideology**, Australia Council; Paul Brown, **Time Based Art**, Australia Council, The Centre for Computational Neuroscience and Robotics (CCNR), School of Cognitive and Computing Sciences, University of Sussex, England, Kim Machan, Art Rage; geniuate, **rice**, Australia Council, Media Resource Centre, South Australia; Mez, **the data[h!][bleeding texts]**, Wollongong City Gallery's 2001 Artist-In-Residency sponsored by Connelly Temple; Melinda Rackham, **carrier**, sound Damien Everett, java John Tonkin, Damien Everett, ©Melinda Rackham/Viscopy, Australia Council; Melinda Rackham, **empyrean**, sound Mitchell Whitelaw, additional scripting and modelling Horst Keichle, College of Fine Arts, UNSW, Vislab, Sydney, Australia Council, Banff Center for the Arts Canada; Ian Haig, **Web Devolution**, with Philip Samartzis, Australia Council, Australian Film Commission; **radioqualia**, Australia Council, South Australian Government through Arts SA, Virtual Artists Pty Ltd; Anna Munster, **wundernet**, with assistance from Nigel Kersten, Faculty Research Grant, University of New South Wales; Company in Space, **CO3—Live Virtual Reality Performance**, co-directors John McCormick & Hellen Sky, animator, virtual world builder Miriam English, composer Garth Paine, composer David Franske, animation Marshall White, Keith Robertson, lighting Nik Pajanti, photographer Jeff Busby, Australia Council, Cinemedia Digital Media Fund, Corporate GVT Global Videoconferencing Technologies, RMIT Interactive Ideas Incubator; Justine Cooper, **Transformers**, Australian Network for Art and Technology, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Linda Dement, Australia Council New Media Arts Fellowship 1999-2000; Oron Catts, Ionat Zurr & Guy Ben-Ary, **The Tissue Culture & Art Project**, 'Semi-Living Doll A' photographer Ionat Zurr, Australia Council, residency in The Tissue Engineering & Organ Fabrication, Massachusetts General Hospital, Harvard Medical School, funding for the original installation by Ars Electronica, Department of Anatomy and Human Biology, University of Western Australia; Patricia Piccinini, **Biosphere**, photo Protein Lattice - blue portrait, 80 x 80 cm C type print, 1997, Patricia Piccinini, **Car Nuggets - they are good for you**, 3 pieces each 90 x 80 x 80 cm, high density polystyrene and automotive paint, 1998, sponsor House of Kolor, Arts Victoria; Troy Innocent, **Artefact**, with Ollie Olsen, James Sofra; Drome, **LUMPCD**, Nursery, Patricia Piccinini, Peter Hennessey, CD-ROM; Stelarc, **Movatar**, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, 2000, photo Heidrun Löhr.

The OnScreen film and new media supplement to RealTime is funded by the Australian Film Commission, FTO (NSW Film & Television Office) and the Australia Council, the Federal government's arts funding and advisory body.



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»»» Trash Website
 Utilises the web as a forum for the exchange of ideas, culminating in an online symposium on Sunday 14 October in association with MAAP 2001. www.experimenta.org/trash

»»» Memory Packs
 Explores personal and community stories attached to objects and will be presented in sites around the City of Port Phillip in Melbourne throughout October.

Experimenta promotes experimental and new media art through curation, commission and exhibition. For more information visit www.experimenta.org



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image from *Nerve 9*, 2001, Tess de Quincey, photo by Russell Emerson

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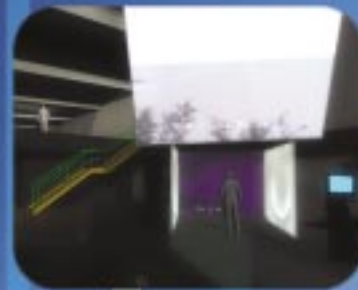
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