

The Film-maker and Multimedia section C : SEMINAR

"Later, at a seminar when Gary Warner selected five works, the individuated creator remained the tag for referring to the pieces, and these are described in the next issue." ArtMaster 4



Subsequent to this seminar, many column inches of comment appeared about one of the titles we were demonstrated, *Myst* - (*Wired* November 1994; *Object* - Crafts Council of NSW : Jan 1995, etc). Two brothers, Rand and Robyn Miller, who made the game in a studio with the help of friends took an approach to production that had much in common with the maker of *Cosmology of Kyoto* by Koichi Mori, who similarly recruited a large number of helpers in an informal way. Both titles are at the vanguard of popular interactive multimedia and, though not commissioned on an industrial scale, share the glow of success from critics and retailers alike. They have in common a move away from narrative dominated by chases and shootouts and a move toward a *edutainment* narrative which merges gentle option taking, interaction, with re-discovering Arcadian myth and, no doubt, other facts....

What is offered in return for the player, having traded and exchanged across the interface, is the gentle glow of Achievement, having successfully 'found the way'. More recently the other less gentle side of the industry, (now officially recognised in the Creative Nation statement), gave us DOOM, the high noon of all interactive shoot-em-ups.

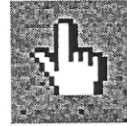
The interactive, interaction and interactivity has long been part of the modernist project and was discussed in the first part of this series. Fundamentally the modernist project foregrounds the materials present, the processes which brought to them the state they adopt and the act of looking, a complex series of interactions where the protagonist, the viewer, is between, amongst and reciprocating with the work confronted.

As a summary, such assumptions are made by the majority of contemporary artists, certainly those who have been trained to the ways of 20th Century art. These premises are, however, missed by a majority of non-artists who are still dealing with the questions raised during the 19th Century concerning the representation of post-Renaissance Cartesian space and, during the 20th Century, the operation of narrative space within cinematic and popular culture.

The systemic institutionalisation of film grammar, the primacy of the 'logical sequence', is the pre-requisite of drama and documentary in cinema and television. Placing anecdotal photo and audio evidence into the seamless stream, the method of the illusionist, separating the viewer from the ability to participate and reciprocate between the events depicted. The active viewer may react by identifying with a character or empathising with the details of a particular story but the element which allows the viewer autonomy within the contiguity of events is denied.

Being between one activity and another is characteristic of

what we would all describe as the daily round - *the betweenness of busyness* to paraphrase Joyce - the interaction with other people, machines, other environments, other situations. It's no wonder that the fatigue this produces by the end of the day delivers us to the neatly framed vignettes, on the screen and on the page, of our narrativised culture. But this arena of inaction is about to change. The interface is in the process of being re-designed, predominantly by artists.



The jargon use of the word, interface, between the computer screen and the computer user begun in earnest only ten years ago with the release of the first GUI, (graphical user interface), on the Macintosh. The process of defining the interface however, began sometime earlier, simply because of the attitude of certain artists working with words, objects and sound.

"What, or more specifically when is an interface? (The assumption is)...that it only exists in the cybernetic domain, when someone sits in front of a pc and clicks a mouse. An interface, on the contrary, is any act of conjunction which results in a new or unexpected event. A door-handle, as Brenda Laurel reminds us, is an interface. So too is the "chance encounter, on an operating table, of a sewing machine and an umbrella." James Joyce didn't write books. Duchamp didn't create works of art. Cage didn't compose music. They created interfaces, instances into which someone intervened to make choices and judgements that they were not willing to make. "

("Down the photoslope in syncopanc pulses": Thinking Electronically - paper by Darren Tofts at the Film-maker and Multimedia Conference, Melbourne, March 1995)

Such a tradition is continued currently forming even the basis of much post-modernist discourse in the areas of installation, performance and gallery art. The wider implications and potential of the term interface and the interaction with it, is recognised by those inhabiting these fields. But the very tools of the interface, developed by designers intent on clarifying the available options at any particular moment in the domain of the computer interface have already become its lingua franca, that ancient language of Mediterranean traders. As graphix they are the icons of the application software vendors and eventually will become the roadsigns for the infobahn and as such, establish authorial pre-determination and intent. Though the level of interaction with *Myst* and *Kyoto* can be immersive and even instructive, what are the consequences of avoiding the avoidable? Only the denial of success and achievement in *Myst* and *Kyoto*? Can we be motivated to go further toward the "network of ideas of indefinite possibility" and the Duchampian state of liberation for "an infinite play of interpretation", or Pierre Levy's "infinite semantic plain"?



Whilst some of this has already been foreseen and developed within the MOO, multi-user, text-based virtual reality, the work on developing the image-based equivalent by experimenting with the smaller space available with the CD-ROM medium has begun, predominantly in the games area but increasingly amongst artists. Indeed the hybrid between these two areas has already emerged with the sub-cultural industry which develops add-ons for the game of DOOM and creates new and bizarre stages and vistas in which the inane action can occur.

"The question of how to stage CD-Roms, how to give their writing dramatic form, is now open. Musical composition, poetry, film editing, garden design are some of the areas which might be called on for inspiration. "(Towards Interactive Writing: Jean Loius Boisser Revue virtuelle No 12 Hypermedia. Editions du Centre Pompidou, Paris 1994.)

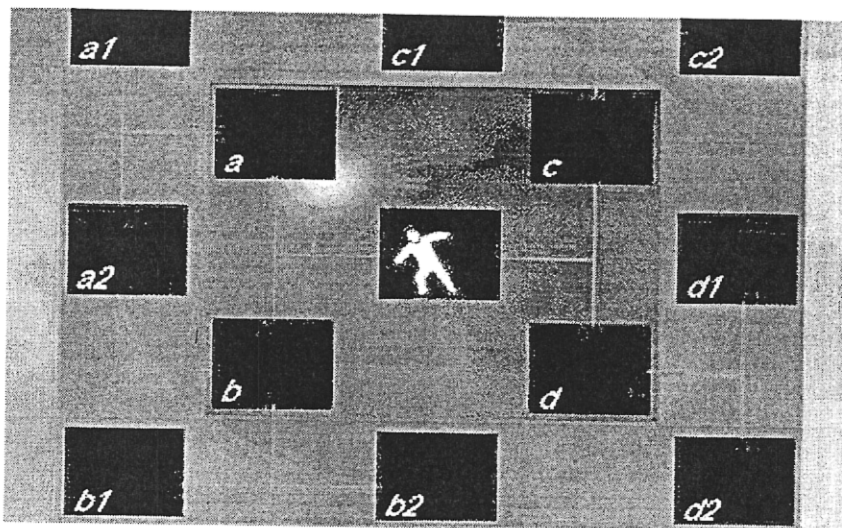
The existence of virtual spaces for the conjoining of the public space (of the gallery or the television channel) and private space, (of the studio or the desk), through a diffusion of networks which develop a practice tried many times before in different contexts - 'art collectiv': worked upon by many, from de-centralised points, where reception and creation exist side by side. Synchronised and unsynchronised modification of virtual spaces located in the space between associated computers as collaborative undertakings with groups of people linking-in individually made elements as pre-fabricated parts of the whole. The interface is 'worked' with icons that are invented from moment to moment, traversing the semantic plain, the interactivity being globalised, post-Gutenberg at least, and weaving possibility and interpretation.

Diversive Paths from Syracuse University in the US, is well, resourced, well designed, but vacillating over for what the site is to be used. (Given the approach of a Senate Bill, The Communications Decency Act, (sic) it is maybe no surprise that this is not stated. Should this Bill be approved, the Internet as we know it will simply be closed down.) However, the site has several years experience of on-line interaction through the efforts of Bonnie Mitchell and though taking its public service didactic role seriously provides a clear description of how this site operates: "The Diversive Paths project is based on the effects of creative influence, inspiration and collaborative vision. The project explores the concept of non-linear image development and manipulation of existing images. There are 30 different groups of images with one "parent image" each which is used to start the chain of manipulation. Each starter image is associated with a structure map which illustrates the nonlinear path that the image can travel as it is being manipulated. (The illustration shows the map for the Group labelled Autonomy.)

There are approximately 20-25 images to evolve from the starter image. Therefore the entire Diversive Paths project has the potential of containing over 600 images when the project is complete. It is our goal to involve as many countries and individuals as possible so that the vision of global diversity and collective artistic expression is realized.

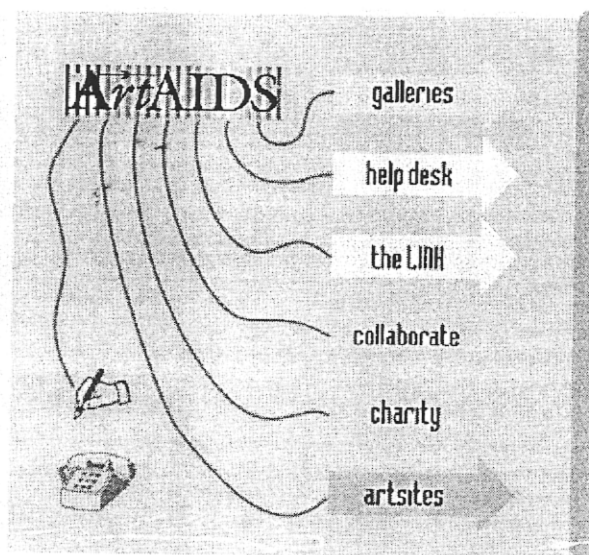
Participants from all over the world are invited to download images and manipulate them and send them back to us. As you travel through the Group pages, you will see small black boxes each of which are waiting to be filled with manipulated images. Download the medium sized image directly above the empty black boxes and creatively alter it, then send it back to us. The black boxes on the map pages show the images yet to be submitted. As you manipulate an image we only ask that you do not eliminate all traces of the previous image.

The large images are JPEG and are available for downloading. ONLY image with empty black boxes under them are available for manipulation. Images with filled boxes are for viewing only. Each Group has a map which will aid in the understanding of



the structure of the path and show you the images waiting to be manipulated. When returning the image to our FTP site, don't forget to put it in the directory with the same name as the Group where you downloaded the large image from. We look forward to traveling the Diversive Paths with you."

By contrast, the Home Page used by the ArtAIDS LINK site when it first came on-line on World Aids Day in December 1994 was an arresting series of horizontal frame image/word graphic buttons which hinted rather than stated what lay 'behind' should one be clicked - plunged into the virtual gallery headlong, from certain of the images



presented, a copy could be selected and downloaded from London to the hard disc of the machine at which you were sitting. The procedure - select/download/manipulate/upload - is becoming the most direct and popular form of the emerging 'art collectiv electronique'.

Some weeks after the site was launched, this Home Page was replaced with another, as illustrated - the reference book frontpiece approach. Had the users of the site complained? Had the site administrators in the computer section baulked at a home page which didn't immediately explain its function?

Clearly the aesthetics developing around interface design are as crisis-ridden as the politics emerging around who will and who will NOT use the Internet and its services.

