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Barbara, Leonardo 35:3, new media in South Africa ...
by Nisar Keshvani

In this issue of LEA, we remember Barbara Williams , an important
contributor to the Leonardo Network. She will be missed.

Catch a glimpse of Leonardo's spanking new 35: 3 (2002) issue via
the table of contents and abstracts. In the Leonardo Digital
Reviews, Stephen Wilson reviews Biorobotics, and much more of the
latest in the publishing world.

Our special feature this month sees, Marcus Neustetter discuss

the relationship between "new media art" and "visual fine art" in the context of South Africa. As the new media arts scene is still in a stage of new birth from the parents of traditional South African art landscape, there are many issues which dog this arena of interest. He highlights some of the pertinent problems faced by new media artists and also illustrates, with engaging examples, how these issues are taken care of. Ultimately, though, he paints a picture of hope for the fledgling industry.

Enjoy!

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< Barbara Williams: The Leonardo Network remembers >

We regret to inform the members of the Leonardo Network that ISAST Vice Chair Barbara Williams passed away two weeks ago. Barbara, an art historian, curator and art critic was an energetic advocate of the Leonardo vision. She headed the Leonardo Prize and Awards Committee, helped lead the Leonardo Defense Fund fundraising appeals, served as a knowledgeable and perspicacious reviewer for Leonardo Digital Reviews and, as Vice Chair of the ISAST Board, helped steer the organization into unchartered waters. We will all remember her with admiration and affection. A memorial service will be held later this spring and a full obituary will be published.

Roger Malina Chair, ISAST Board

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(Almost a Sermon)

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ATHENA TACHA: Chaos and Form: A Sculptor's Sources in Science

ABSTRACT
In the 1960s, the author sought to rethink the basic
concepts of sculpture - space, matter, gravity and light - by
studying the theories of relativity and quantum physics, the
connection of space to time and matter to energy, and the
relationship of all these to gravity. Subsequently, trying to
understand the fundamental forms in nature, she discovered a
continuity underlying them: spirals are not only forms of growth
or turbulence, but are also the link between spheres (forms of
balance and minimum volume/energy) and waves (forms of
energy/motion). Flow phenomena shaped the new style of her
landscape sculptures, which are expressions of fluid dynamics and
other non-linear processes.

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GARY R. GREENFIELD: Simulated Aesthetics and Evolving Artworks: A
Coevolutionary Approach

ABSTRACT
The application of artificial-life principles for
artistic use has its origins in the early works of Sommerer and
Mignonneau, Sims and Latham. Most of these works are based on
simulated evolution and the determination of fitness according to
aesthetics. Of particular interest is the use of evolving
expressions, which were first introduced by Sims. The author
documents refinements to the method of evolving expressions by
Rooke, Ibrahim, Musgrave, Unemi, himself and others. He then
considers the challenge of creating autonomously evolved artworks
on the basis of simulated aesthetics. The author surveys what
little is known about the topic of simulated aesthetics and
proceeds to describe his new coevolutionary approach modeled
after the interaction of hosts and parasites.

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ALFREDO ANDIA: Internet Studios: Teaching Architectural Design
On-Line between the United States and Latin America

ABSTRACT
This article analyzes the pedagogical use of high-end
computer graphics and low- and high-bandwidth Internet technology
for international architectural education among numerous
universities in the Americas. The findings can be applied to any
discipline that involves a large number of participants within a
design setting. The experiments have allowed design studios from
seven schools of architecture in the U.S. and South America to
work concurrently in a semester-long design studio. Most of the
collaboration was accomplished by using low-bandwidth Internet
communication such as web publishing, chat, computer-assisted
design software and other technologies such as ISDN broadcasting.
The author anticipates future experimentation with high-bandwidth
technologies on the Internet 2 Abilene Network.

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GREGORY P. GARVEY: The Split-Brain Human Computer User Interface

ABSTRACT
The author describes his prototype for a split-brain
user interface developed for the interactive documentary Anita

und Clarence in der Hšlle: An Opera for Split-Brains in Modular Parts. Using documentary video from the 1991 Senate Judiciary Committee hearings on the nomination of Clarence Thomas to the U.S. Supreme Court, this interface delivers two independent video and audio streams in parallel to each hemisphere of the brain. Inspired by accounts of split-brain research and anticipated by experiments of the Surrealists, this interface-like work in augmented virtual reality and wearable computing aims at enhanced interaction while creating a new aesthetic experience.

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    |     LEONARDO DIGITAL REVIEWS    |
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This month, Leonardo Digital Reviews welcomes a contribution from one of its newest reviewers, Stefaan Van Ryssen, who is based in Belgium. His brief review reflects his own backgrounds and interests in art and design education; understandably, he would prefer more heat in Esther Dudley and Stuart Mealing's collection of essays, Becoming Designers: Education and Influence. Also from Europe, regular contributor Yvonne Spielmann takes a long, critical (and argumentative) look at Paul Levinson's attempt to revisit McLuhan. Robert Pepperell, meanwhile comments on the quarrelsome neighbors in the philosophy of mind camp, concluding that William Hasker's book The Emergent Self clarifies the dispute but does little to untangle the guy ropes at this camp site. More affectionately, David Topper renews his friendship with George Gamow's befuddled bank clerk, Mr. Tompkins, who it seems still has something to teach us about physics despite being reprinted (and revised) from the 40-year old original. Stephen Wilson has provided this month's review article as he draws together two apparently opposed emerging states of being - the physical and the cyber world Ð in the field of biorobotics and online robotics. Finally, in the reviews section, the misrepresented painter Gustave Caillebotte gets some overdue attention in Norma Broude's collection of essays on this nineteenth-century painter, while Barbara Stein's biography of Annie Montagu Alexander is regarded as something of a missed opportunity. All in all, Leonardo Digital Reviews appears to be in an irascible mood this month. All these reviews and the archive are published in full at: <http://mitpress.mit.edu/e-journals/Leonardo/ldr.html>.

Michael Punt
Editor-in-Chief
Leonardo Digital Reviews

Regular visitors to Leonardo Digital Reviews will know that in October 2001 we carried a dialogue between two very good friends and supporters of our project, Sonya Rapoport and Barbara Lee Williams. Sadly, we learned that Barbara Lee Williams died last month (see the obituary for Barbara from Executive Editor, Roger Malina, earlier in this issue).

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In this Month's Leonardo Digital Reviews:

Gustave Caillebotte and the Fashioning of Identity in
Impressionist Paris, by Norma Broude Reviewed by Michael Punt

The Emergent Self, by William Hasker Reviewed by Robert Pepperell

The NEW World of Mr. Tompkins (George Gamow's classic Mr.
Tompkins in paperback), revised and updated by Russell Stannard
Reviewed by David Topper

Biorobotics: Methods and Applications, edited by Barbara Webb and
Thomas R. Consi Reviewed by Stephen Wilson

Beyond Webcams: An Introduction to Online Robots, edited by Ken
Goldberg and Roland Siegwart Reviewed by Stephen Wilson

Becoming Designers: Education and Influence, edited by Esther
Dudley and Stuart Mealing Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen

On Her Own Terms: Annie Montague Alexander and the Rise of
Science in the American West, by Barbara R. Stein Reviewed by
Michael Punt

Digital McLuhan: A Guide to Information Millennium, by Paul
Levinson Reviewed by Yvonne Spielmann

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< Biorobotics: Methods and Applications >

by Barbara Webb & Thomas R. Consi (eds.), Cambridge, MA: AAAI
Press/ MIT Press, 2001 208 pp., ISBN: 0-262-73141-X

< Beyond Webcams: An Introduction to Online Robots >

by Ken Goldberg and Roland Siegwart (eds.), Cambridge, MA: MIT
Press, 2002 331 pp., ISBN: 0-262-07225-4

Reviewed by Stephen Wilson, San Francisco State University,
<swilson@sfsu.edu>.

Robotics is a growing field within the tech arts community. As
computer technology matures, there is increasing interest in the
intersections between the physical and cyberworlds. Artists are
creating installations that sense actions by physical beings
moving in physical spaces and cause actions by physical devices.
Theorists in the last decades have attempted to explicate the
power of the virtual world to dominate perception and thought and
to decrease the importance of the physical world. As information
technology becomes more capable of sensing and acting in the
physical world, it is no wonder that artists would be intrigued
by the challenge of unraveling the relationship between the cyber
and material worlds.

Robotics is the place in the technology/scientific research world
where these questions are addressed. Activity has picked up in
the last years, with researchers addressing many interesting
issues: miniaturization, new kinds of motion, smart sensors, new
kinds of approaches to robotic cognition such as artificial life
and subsumption, bottom-up techniques. This research is a
critical resource for artists – both in its elaboration of
techniques that can be appropriated and in its identification of
theoretical issues important for cultural analysis.

Biorobotics: Methods and Applications is a collection of presentations made at the 1998 American Association for Artificial Intelligence Symposium on "Robots and Biology: Developing Connections." The symposium brought together frontier researchers in the emerging field of biorobotics - "a new multidisciplinary field that encompasses the dual uses of biorobotics as tools for biologists studying animal behavior and as testbeds for the study and evaluation of biological algorithms for potential applications to engineering." The book is divided into three major sections: Sensory Systems, Motor Systems and Cognitive Systems.

Some of the topics the chapters address include: building robot navigation systems based on understanding the way crickets use sound to move through the world; creating navigation systems based on chemical detection similar to systems used by marine animals such as lobsters; building motion systems based on an understanding of cockroach legs; and investigation of embodiment as a key determinant of cognition. Most of the articles are clearly written without extensive jargon and are easily understood by the educated layperson. This body of research is a provocative resource for thinking about artistic robotic experimentation and the fact that much biorobotics research is funded by DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Administration) suggests an array of cultural implications to explore.

Beyond Webcams: An Introduction to Online Robots surveys another increasingly important area of robotics, in which robots are controlled at remote distances via networks such as the Internet. Ken Goldberg is a professor of robotics at UC Berkeley and an internationally recognized artist, known for his telerobotic installations such as the Telegarden. Roland Siegwart is professor at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Lausanne.

Beyond Webcams offers 18 articles divided into topical sections on remote manipulation, remote mobility, remote control and time delay, and other novel applications. The publicity describes its coverage: "robots that navigate undersea, drive on Mars, visit museums, float in blimps, handle protein crystals, paint pictures, and hold human hands." It includes information on how the systems were designed, how they function and what engineering challenges they confronted. The collection is interesting - it stretches from very practical engineering treatises on the unique problems of sensors and actuators activated at a distance to descriptions of projects undertaken by artists and other kinds of researchers - for example, there are descriptions of a project to allow Internet visitors to navigate a museum collection.

Internet robotics is a provocative area for artistic exploration. The articles in this collection provide rich ideas for topics to explore and engineering issues that might serve as an artistic focus, such as the latency (time delay) that accompanies remote robotics. Goldberg and Siegwart should be commended on the range of articles included. Unfortunately, however, there is not much philosophical reflection in the book. For such reflection, readers will need to consult Goldberg's marvelous other book, Robot in the Garden (MIT Press, 2000), which brings together scientists, philosophers and artists to reflect on telepresence. Also missing from Beyond Webcams is mention of some of the extraordinary artistic experiments in telerobotics, such as Survival Research Laboratories "Lethal Weapon" work, in which

Internet visitors could launch dangerous projectiles, and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's "Vectorial Elevation," which allowed visitors to control spotlights over Mexico City. Both books are highly recommended for those interested in emerging research in robotics.

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< Becoming Designers: Education and Influence >

Edited by Esther Dudley and Stuart Mealing. Intellect, Exeter, UK, 2000. 158 pp., paper. ISBN: 1-84150-032-1.

Reviewed by Stefaan Van Ryssen, <stefaan.vanryssen@pandora.be>.

This is a collection of papers on a wide range of topics concerning contemporary design, its place in a changing world and the problems arising for the design educator. Readers with a general interest in design will be interested as well as educators in art, design property, multimedia and web-building. This is not a book on pedagogics or teaching, but a contribution to the ongoing debates in and about the design world. The undercurrent is strongly academic but there is enough practical wisdom to interest or entertain the lay practitioner.

The editors, both teaching at the Exeter School of Art and Design (University of Plymouth), have selected papers by authors who understand the balance between a well-informed overview and a substantial contribution to the ongoing debate about design and about what it takes to be a (good) student of design. Not surprisingly, Stuart Mealing brings to the front the skills or qualities a budding designer should possess: creativity, drawing skills, intelligence, determination and literacy. But this generally undisputed list is nicely complemented with computing, maturity, a tinge of the scientific and awareness of gender and global issues.

Contributor John Astley proves that this is essentially a UK book. His personal account of the influence of William Morris in his own and the trade's development over the past century or so is at the same time an insightful re-definition of the field of design in culture and an exemplary history. Kevin McCullagh pleads for a design context rooted in practice. He urges educators to keep an open mind and to listen to the contributions on design theory from sociology, anthropology, epistemology and general systems theory but guards against an approach that would "lead to an inability to make theory relevant and engaging to designers, which in turn reinforces many of their anti-theory prejudices." This quote could as well have been used for the book as a whole.

Further chapters address more specific issues like multimedia design (Stephen Boyd Davis), gender issues (Erica Matlow), the emerging art of Web design (Mike Hope), design and development (Mirjam Southwell) and globalization (Stuart Durant). The book concludes with a discussion on "ethical design" (Alex Cameron) and an attempt to sketch some outlines for the future of design education and even design in Britain (Gerard Mermoz). All the contributions are well researched and stocked with references. As a whole, the strength of this collection is its scope and the quality of the individual articles. Its weakness is a certain lack of determination - a quality to be desired in education as much as in design. Some authors stick to what is, while others poke into what ought to be. Some have a view and take a stance,

others refrain - out of modesty or from lack of vision, one never
knows - to speak out. This is well illustrated by the contrast
between the chapters on design and development and globalization.
The former offers an analysis of the issues at hand and engages
in the debate while the latter remains distant and descriptive,
without getting involved. I certainly would have preferred a bit
more heat.

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< OLATS (Observatoire Leonardo des Arts et des Techno-Sciences)
News Ð April 2002 >

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* New notice in Pioneers and Pathbreakers: Alexandre Scriabine,
by Nathalie Ruget-Langlois, <http://www.olats.org/setF4.html>:

Born 6 January, 1872 in Moscow, Scriabine was surely one of the
most fascinating musical figures of the last century. Like
Rachmaninov, Scriabine belonged to a new Russian music influenced
by Chopin, Liszt, Wagner and Debussy. But with works such as his
Pome de lÕextase (1907), and the Sonata n¡6 and Prometheus
(1911), Scriabine turned to a modernism that established him as a
pioneer of twentieth-century music.

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* New in Virtual Africa: "The Mirror that Changes," by Annette
Weintraub,
<http://www.olats.org/africa/projets/gpEau/genie/contrib/contrib_weintraub.shtml>

Leonardo/Olats sont heureux de pr□senter, dans le cadre de leur
projet Ç Le G□nie et pouvoir de l'eau È, l'oeuvre d'Annette
Weintraub : Ç Le Miroir qui change È, une recherche de
l'architecture en tant que langage visuel. Annette Weintraub est
une artiste qui travaille avec les nouveau m□dia. Ses projets
sont compos□s de r□cits qui se superposent ˆ l'int□rieur d'un
environnement architectural. Son travail a □t□ pr□sent□ ˆ la 5□me
Biennale des Media et Architecture de Graz, Autriche (2001), ˆ la
Biennale de Whitney (2000), au Festival International du Film,
Rotterdam (2001) et dans plusieurs autres expositions nationales
et internationales.

Leonardo/Olats is pleased to present, within the context of its
project " The Spirit and Power of Water," Annette WeintraubÕs
work " The Mirror that Changes," an investigation of architecture
as visual language. Weintraub is a media artist whose projects
embed layered narratives within an architectural environment. Her
work has been presented at the fifth Biennial of Media and
Architecture in Graz, Austria (2001), The Whitney Biennial 2000,
the Rotterdam International Film Festival (2001) and in numerous
other national and international exhibitions.

Annick Bureaud <annickb@altern.org>
IDEA online/International Directory of Electronic Arts:
<http://nunc.com>

OLATS/Observatoire Leonardo des Arts et des Techno-Sciences:
<http://www.olats.org>.

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< Aesthetic Computing Workshop >

Aesthetic Computing Workshop, Dagstuhl, Germany, 15-20 July 2002

Leonardo/ISAST is co-sponsoring a workshop led by Paul Fishwick
of the University of Florida on Aesthetic Computing (Artist
driven computer science) to be held at Dagstuhl, Germany from
15-20 July 2002. See <http://www.dagstuhl.de> or
<http://www.cise.ufl.edu/~fishwick/cap6836/ac.pdf> for further
information.

Dagstuhl seminars have from 25 to 60 participants, with roughly
twenty percent of attendees being young researchers.
Participation at the workshop is by invitation only. Leonardo
associate members who may be interested in attending should send
an e-mail to <leo@mitpress.mit.edu> with the URL of their CV.
There is a waiting list for participants, and attendance will be
on a space-available basis.

There is a permanent mailing list on the topic at
<http://www.yahoogroups.com> under the group "aestheticcomputing"
(no spaces). Please feel free to subscribe, should this suit your
interests.

For more information, contact: <leo@mitpress.mit.edu>.

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< SYSTEMSIMPERFECT? New Media in South Africa >
by Marcus Neustetter, Johannesburg,
<http://www.onair.co.za/mn>

Currently in South Africa - SYSTEMSIMPERFECT? In the South
African context, the relationship of what is being labeled, "new
media art" and "visual fine art" is a complex one. In this text I
aim to address this relationship, identify some of the problems
that are evident locally, and illustrate by examples how these
problems are being dealt with in alternative ways. The use of new
technologies for creative expression is growing at an extremely
fast rate, but the current systems and structures are not
equipped for this growth. I have picked out five areas in the
South African art system that could be seen as problematic for
incorporating the creative uses of new technology under the
headings of 'category', 'facilities', 'audience',
'art-structures' and 'education'.

Let me start by looking at the 'new media' category. Though it
seems to explain the use of new technology, it is still all
encompassing and immediately alienating. It increases the divide
between what one would traditionally call an artist and someone
that creates creative products or interventions using computers
or other digital technology. The hype around 'new media' is

convenient. I use it too in order to easily explain the vast new forms of art production to local audiences. However, it is equally easy for the audience to dismiss work that is not understood by labeling it as new media. Locally the emerging categories for alternative production processes are not yet defined enough and its discourse is only being engaged by few on a less superficial level.

The local art audience is largely not equipped to understand or deal with many of the artworks that are technology or new media based. A traditional approach to art, lack of interest, technophobia and a lack of knowledge around what the medium is capable of are contributing factors to a limited knowledgeable art audience. To build this audience it almost seems as if one needs to pursue an educational approach when it comes to displaying digital, and electronic art.

However, education in terms of emerging art forms and alternative production goes beyond imparting knowlegdge to just gallery-going audiences. As in any third world country, the general need for education in this country is evident. In terms of learning about technology, there is currently a range of initiatives that are providing scholars and rural communities with exposure to computers. This education, however, is one that is mostly concentrated on the basic facilities of computing and software. In order to reach scholars and students on a conceptual and playful level, one could use creative interventions in new technology as an educational vehicle.

While the facilities are being put in place to educate underprivileged communities, even though it seems to be at a slow rate, very few people in the cities, let alone in the rural areas with a few hours of or no electricity, have the luxury of engaging with anything other than a radio or a television. The facilities such as the latest television set top boxes that allow for internet access via the TV would surely make the most of the currently technology. However, it would not necessarily create a massive audience, since the day to day survival needs to overpower the patience and understanding that is required in coming to terms with the literacy of such technology.

Similarly, the local art structures are slowly starting to address the emerging production of new media art. Yet the investment that is required to understand and cater for facilitating, exhibiting, and educating creative production using new technologies is one that few can afford or understand.

Few local galleries are now only equipped for exhibiting video art, whereby the quality of the exhibition equipment is often questionable. The simplicity of the technology and a growing awareness of video art have allowed for this medium to become accepted by many institutions and their audiences, but the more complex and expensive technologies are still being dismissed. Artists interested in creative interventions in new technologies have to cater for these interests on their own initiative. An example of this is the respected annual ABSA Atelier Art Competition for which the artist has to provide the technology with which the work is being viewed or accessed for a lengthy period of time during the judging and exhibiting process. In addition, there is a lack of support structures for the local traditional arts, let alone the experimental art that has no defined category in the National Arts Council and other funding bodiesÕ infrastructure.

Lack of funding has forced major restructuring processes that have resulted in the closure of galleries and theatres. This has also forced galleries to focus on financially viable products and not digital art for which there is no market yet. New media art is even less supported by traditional art structures locally because it is also misunderstood as a financially viable skill or even as a tangible product that a producer can use. To a certain extent this is true, since most producers are working commercially with these skills, but if anything, being forced to use these skills for mind numbing commercial work and not being appreciated by others in the creative production often dampens the true creative interests in the medium.

Despite these limitations and shortfalls in a sound support structure locally, the end of 2001 and beginning 2002 has proven to be an exciting time for the digital, electronic or new media arts community in South Africa. A range of occasions and projects, which are listed below, have recently emerged, facilitating alternative exhibitions and experimental works.

en/traced at the online|offline exhibition Towards the end of last year Johannesburg saw interesting collaborations by New York ITP graduate, Nathaniel Stern (www.nathanielstern.com) with Johannesburg based performer and choreographer, Jeannette Ginslov, for the online|offline exhibition (identity and aesthetics on and off the web, September 5-12, Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg, http://www.onair.co.za/onlineoffline). The performance resulting out of this collaboration is en/traced.

The artistsÕ statement reads: "en/traced is a composition of relationships between a highly trained human form, an enfleshed machine, and a real-time programmer. The three fractal parts (Or "fractionally realised"--' fractally' doesn't exist) form an extra-ordinary body whose organs are distributed between them.

In the en/traced trialogue, the machine watches the body, eliciting text with its motion; the programmer watches the screen, beckoning these characters with his keys; and each answers the other two in turn. The relationship between the three bodies is also a body itself Ð an/other form of consciousness. This composition disrupts the usual relations of looking. Viewers are invited to see the spaces between and in Ôseeing,Õ they are eliciting another new body between parts. This fractal composition begs questions of experience, relationships, consciousness and enfleshment."

Its presence at the opening of the online|offline exhibition at the Rand Afrikaans University set the tone for the concepts of the exhibition of focusing on web-related artworks and how they have manifested themselves in the physical space of the gallery. The exhibition was the cultural event for the 3rd Annual Conference on World Wide Web Applications. While the exhibition aimed to introduce and profile web artworks to the gallery and conference public, the display of the digital works on and off screen served to illustrate the relationship of the more traditional art-making process to the contemporary creative uses of new technology. This exhibition was one in a series of initiatives by sanman (Southern African New Media Art Network) to network communities interested in developing the electronic art scene in Southern Africa.

The Digerati electronic arts competition Simultaneously as the above mentioned collaboration and exhibition, the first electronic arts competition by Digerati took place, motivating

the commercial producers to create medium specific works in the category of internet, CD-ROM, animation, computer generated stills and video. Entries were diverse: ranging from experimental 3D animation and video to interactive sites and process oriented graphics. This competition and the resulting exhibition were part of a range of projects that aim to simulate commercial participation to expose their experimental interventions.

Adding to this, Digerati, a design company, exposed their clientele to a range of creative thinkers and producers in a series of presentations to encourage a working relationship with artists. This exhibition is one example of corporate support that has emerged; in this case it was funded by the digital design company Digerati and Vega School of Brand Advertising. They hosted the exhibition of the works, using it to expose the institution. Similarly, sponsorship, in kind and financially, for other projects and exhibitions, has come from technology companies such as LG Electronics and MTN (Mobile Telephone Network) that have realized the value in marketing themselves by supporting the arts and use these events as an opportunity to showcase their products. New Media Art Exibitions at The | PREMISES The Johannesburg Civic Gallery underwent a restructuring process and was closed down. It was not until September 2001 that a space for a small-scale gallery was made available by the Johannesburg Civic Theatre. This space has since been developed into a project room and an exhibition venue. It subsequently proved to be an interesting arena for exhibiting works in different disciplines in Ônew media artÕ. As the last exhibition of 2001, The | PREMISES (Braamfontein, Johannesburg Ð www.onair.co.za/thepremises) hosted a solo exhibition by New York artist William Scarbrough. ScarboughÕs 'The Trials of Dr Kawalski', is an interactive CD ROM, digitally projected and presented by researcher Dr Regina Garcia (http://www.geocities.com/drreginagarcia/). A series of digital prints and audio pieces complete this investigation into the life of a controversial scientist and medical doctor. This exhibition travelled to the Klein Karoo Arts Festival in Oudtshoorn, April 2002.

Following this show, the | PREMISES hosted [f]originals digital legal art documents from the vote-auction.net controversy during the U.S. presidential elections by ubermorgen.com, a net art activism Ôartist companyÕ from Vienna/Berlin in March 2002.

During the last U.S. elections, potential voters could use the www.vote-auction.com website as a platform from which to auction off their individual votes. The concept of this site draws attention to the vote being a commodity and in a way which is "bringing capitalism and democracy closer together" (the slogan for vote-auction). Legal response from the U.S. government caused the site to be shut down, starting a legal battle that manifested itself in news coverage (for example CNN), online reviews, and legal documents that were showcased in the exhibition [f]originals. ubermorgenÕs legal or digital legal art actions to produce a range of byproducts and documents which then become representative of the actions. As such, these documents take on the status of the original artwork. Because these are printed documents as well as photocopies, distinguishing originals from fakes is often difficult. This is a problem recurrent in media that is easily copied, especially when electronic duplicating systems are used to produced the original in the first place. The exhibition [f]originals (fake Ð originals) evolves out of this process and focuses on the legal documentation resulting from www.vote-auction.net (initially www.vote-auction.com).

The approach that ubermorgen:: : artist | company has taken is
far removed from the traditional understanding of art practice,
resembling acts of social net terrorism or radical corporate
marketing strategy. However, this strategy is open-ended enough
for their innovations to be read as contemporary creative
practice. Operating largely within the web environment, but not
obeying normative approaches to performative public interventions
or structured net art activity, ubermorgenÕs interventions set
radical art practice and political and social interventions side
by side and challenges their relationship. It applies the
professional approaches of a corporation in marketing approaches
and brand building, backed by the understanding of online
communities and radical thinking to a range of projects that make
an impact on large audiences (whether directly or indirectly)
around the world. The response to this radical activity and the
social impact illustrates the position of power that the artist
can assume. The | PREMISES identified this as relevant for South
Africa as the current local art scene needs to engage more with
its environment and potential audiences as during the apartheid
era in South Africa when resistance art addressed social issues.
The Design Indaba and the NMUF in Cape Town Another project that
focused on presenting local and international designers and Ônew
mediaÕ artists to the South African audience is the 2002
International Design Indaba (www.designindaba.com) in Cape Town.
With local speakers like Durban's Garth Walker of i-Jusi and
WireframeÕs Andries Odendaal and international speakers like Mark
Farrow, Lucille Tenazas, Tom Roope, Hans Bernhard and Joshua
Davies, the three day event was packed with inspiring and
exciting presentations.

A few months before the Design Indaba a response to the high cost
for entrance tickets (R 3000.00 for the three days) started a
debate that resulted in the miscommunication of the intentions of
a new emerging platform that followed the Design Indaba. The
platform for alternative projects and speakers was the NMUF (New
Media Underground Foundation Ð www.nmuf.org) that held a fringe
event, a day after the closing of the indaba. Various
international Design Indaba speakers that have been involved in
other NMUF events were invited to contribute to the open
presentation and discussion evening.

Through misunderstandings generated by the debates around the
Design Indaba costs, the Design Indaba saw the use of their
speakers by the NMUF event as problematic and set down an
ultimatum for them. The result was that the NMUF event happened
without the indaba speakers that were meant to present. However,
they did appear later in the evening with informal performances
and discussions. Nevertheless the event went ahead with a range
of presentations such as Francois Naud▯ (altsense.net), Daddy Buy
Me A Pony (Peet Pienaar, Stacy Hardy and Heidi Pietersen), sound
artist James Webb and NMUF.org.

New Media facilities at the Michaelis University in Cape Town and
the Wits University in Johannesburg Encouraged by student
interest, Fine Art departments at local universities have adapted
to incorporate Ônew mediaÕ studies into their curriculum. the
School of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand
(http://www.wits.ac.za/artworks) has appointed a new chair of
digital multimedia, Prof. Christo Doherty. As the first step to
exposing the university community to the processes and concepts
of digital multimedia art, Digital actionLAB was launched in the
School of Arts with partners outside of the university structure.
The first phase of this initiative is a series of seminars by

visiting speakers from radical activists and new media experts as well as student and artists project pages on the schoolÕs website. With the developments of new media labs at the Arts Department of the University of Cape Town, a series of exhibitions around digital and electronic art are planned in their galleries. Currently selected works from the World Wide Video Festival in Amsterdam are on show at the Michaelis Galleries. On show are video artworks by Minnette V‡ri, Tracey Rose, Matthew Hindley, Malcolm Payne and Fernando Alvim.

Online Making use of the online space, local initiatives have developed interesting websites in order to build an awareness of South African contributors to online culture. dplanet.org was re-launched in February 2002. This site has been developed by Damian Stephens and features interesting interviews, articles, sites and projects such as one(1)CYCLE.OCCUR and altsense.net.

Artthrob.co.za is an online South African Arts publication incorporating news, critical reviews, projects, websites, feedback and exchanges pertinent to the SA art scene locally and abroad. Aside from its informative database and up-to-date content, it has an interesting project page section that has been underutilized by local artists. This section invites creative web project contributions to be profiled on the site on a monthly basis. This underusage is being readdressed by publicizing the resource to students, web developers, designers and collaborative creative teams in order to expand the interest, participation and debate around web specific art production.

All of the current alternative digitally focused activity that has emerged from a seemingly inappropriate traditional art landscape, has enhanced audience interests for artists experimenting with technology and will therefore encourage more support and motivation. This support is much needed. Investment and interest has been focused on new technology companies in South Africa and as one of the few Southern African countries that has shown interest in developing creative production in this direction, it has become a place to turn to for artists in other parts of Africa. Also with the current hype of a South African, Mark Shuttleworth, being able to recently make more than hundred million dollars with his web software company and currently being the first African in space, more people are entering into similar businesses and hoping to make their fortune with new innovative concepts using the new media industries. The time seems right for setting up supportive structures that can carry and promote not only artistic production in new media, but develop a relationship between emerging and growing industries in the arts and technology in Southern Africa.

Marcus Neustetter
Johannesburg 2002

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< Marcus Neustetter >

In the last five years, Marcus Neustetter has been conducting research and developing projects in the field of new media art. His interests have been as an artist, producing and exhibiting a range of creative projects both for the corporate and cultural environment, as a researcher, completing his masters degree in fine arts focusing specifically on new media art within South Africa, and as facilitator and curator for exhibitions and conferences, including Switch On/Off (KKNK 2001), online|offline

(RAU 2001) and the MTN Digital/ Electronic Art Exhibition for
Urban Futures 2000 (Jhb).

He has also been involved in coordinating and participating in
international online projects, workshops and residencies aiming
to develop the discourse of contemporary art in relation to the
South African context, business, technology and society. He has
convened and participated in discussions, such as the Symposium
on South African Visual Art and the Web (RAU, 2000) and
presentations on creative uses of new technologies to companies
such as TBWA / Hunt / Lascaris and LG Electronics. He has
participated in projects such as the DH2 symposium and workshop
with Type01, dplanet.org, Tom Roope, etoy_hans, eyeRIZ and Damian
Stephens in Cape Town and served as a judge in The Digerati
Competition, the first electronic arts competition in South
Africa. As a creative online consultant, he has worked with a
range of institutions, consulting on and coordinating online
projects such as Wits University (JHB), Camouflage (JHB), a
residency with CCASA and Sussuta Boe in Brussels, Belgium and
participating in PostCITY, an online postcard project in
collaboration with Samuel Herzog in Basel, Switzerland. Recent
projects include collaborations with choreographer Jeannette
Ginslov on Clinical Capsule for the Arts Alive International
Dance Festival and The Grahamstown Festival, as well as see/saw
at the Johannesburg Art Gallery, online process games with
Christian Nerf, web and public space interventions and
collaborations with a virus.

A current developing project is sanman (Southern African New
Media Art Network), a resource that promotes new media art and
technology amongst audiences and artists in Southern Africa and
networks companies, institutions and individuals that share
similar interest in this field.

As joint director of The Trinity Session, a creative solution and
production company, Neustetter has developed various projects in
collaboration with Stephen Hobbs and Kathryn Smith in the last
year. These include setting up and managing The | PREMISES (a
project room in Johannesburg), SAFE FOOD (an interactive project
for the BIG Torinio 2002 Biennale), a research project for the
International Labour Organisation on the visual arts and craft
industries in the SADC region and a series of residency and
workshop projects locally and abroad.

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