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EDITORIAL

< Troping the Pacific Rim >
by Joel Weishaus

"Perhaps in the next generation or two, a great artist from one of the cultures of the Pacific Rim will create the formative work for this new culture, to do for the Pacific what Homer did long ago for the Mediterranean world. This imagined masterpiece may not be literary, for it is hard to deny that the use of film,

television and computer graphics has created a new sensibility that cannot be expressed in exclusively literary form." (William Irwin Thompson, "Pacific Shift," San Francisco, CA., 1985. p.109).

The Pacific Rim is also known as the Ring of Fire. Containing 76 percent of the world's active and inactive volcanoes, it traverses my home in the Pacific Northwest, rising as evidence in a truncated Mount St. Helens that, 22 years ago, blew its top. From here, the Ring runs north to British Columbia, bending westward at Alaska, peppering the Aleutian Islands, along with Russia's Kamchatka Peninsula, with fumaroles, down to Japan, the Philippines, Java, and New Zealand, turning east toward South America then north, where, in 1943, Popocatapetl and Paricutun suddenly rose from a placid cornfield in Mexico, bursting into mountains. Closing in on itself, the Ring snakes up North America's West Coast, a uroboros of sudden destruction and relentless creation, dancing the inevitable steps of the Hindu god Shiva. A.K. Coomaraswamy, the renowned scholar of Indian art, writes that Shiva "Éloves the burning ground. But what does he destroy?," he asks rhetorically; he then replies, "Not merely the heavens and earth . . . but the fetters that bind each separate soul." "The disaster," wrote Maurice Blanchot, "takes care of everything."

Thus we are joined by disruptively productive forces of our shared planet, a tectonic avant-garde flowing back to the very beginnings of hominid relationship with fire. Some anthropologists believe this fascination extends at least two and a half million years into the past, when lightning was perhaps seen as an angered god throwing jagged bolts of light that erupted into fire. Surviving because of our ability to turn even dangerous opportunities to our advantage, we learned to capture the effect, and later the cause. Recently, Pascal Simonet, at the University of Lyon, discovered that lightning strikes play a significant role in bacterial evolution, promoting genetic diversity by making cell membranes permeable, thus increasing the likelihood of gene-swapping, or "horizontal transfer." Closer at hand, Rodolfo Llin‡s, of New York University's School of Medicine, points out that "all brain activity is basically electrical chattering between cells." "I sing the body electric," wrote Walt Whitman.

Electricity also fires up computers, driving packets of information over the World Wide Web, fabricating web rings that invite disparate cultures into contributive electronic communities. With this in mind, I suggest that the "new sensibility" of which William Irwin Thompson speaks will be collaborative, and "the formative work for this new culture," perhaps including some "masterpieces," to morph the modernist trope, will be made by networked artists and writers linking the Pacific Rim. For them, the challenge in this third millennium is to embrace cyberspace as an opportunity not to appropriate but to breach cultural and linguistic barriers with equal signs and intonations; a circle, then, as Blanchot would say, "bereft of a center."

FEATURE

< Being Universal: A Dialogue on the Process of Collaboration >
Joel Weishaus and Fatima Lasay

The following dialogue between Joel Weishaus, in the U.S.A., and Fatima Lasay, in The Philippines, inaugurates their collaboration on “Being Universal,” a literary/visual art project. As artists from different cultures who share an abiding interest in science, philosophy and comparative spirituality, their plan is to explore the notion of being with reference to extraterritoriality, and what is seen when imagination is relaxed into invisible realms. This dialogue is representative of an extensive and ongoing exchange of e-mails between the two artists, in which they attempt to formalize the parameters of their project. FL: Being Universal does open interesting space and makes me think again about how I personally find the possibility of us working on this together as rather frightening, there being a world of difference between us! I liked your post on validation a great deal, probably because of, or in spite of, all existing or imagined differences, the idea of a “tradition” - a collaboration in thought - that crosses space and time. I figured that Being Universal would be a kind of “astral projection,” not so much on the level of thought or the spirit but on [the level of] chemistry, biology - but how did your “projection” towards universal beings come about?

JW: It is a way for me to exit the Skull-House [1] and move from inner space to outer space. Then I realized (as you know, creativity is a thought trail) that I did not have to go that far: it may be [that] universal beings are all around us, and have been for thousands of years, existing on wavelengths that our brains cannot perceive. It “is what the English neurologist McDonald Critchley called a sense of presence. This is described as a feeling or impression, sometimes amounting to a delusion, that one is ‘not alone.’ There is a sense of presence of someone beyond the self.” [2] This “beyond” has always interested me.

The human brain interprets information with reference to the survival of the organism. But these parameters are changing, and just what it means to survive when you are the dominant species, the most dangerous on the block, needs to be re-thought. Fats, this may seem wacky, but looking at the political situation now, where it is heading, the tremendous military power in the hands of a philosophically immature nation, it may be that what are usually called “extraterrestrials” (and that I call universal beings or “UB”s) have to make their presence known to us soon to save us from ourselves.

FL: From this perspective, UBs could be grace. Thus, with some rethinking, this changes our reference from survival to redemption, indeed to save us from ourselves! In science fiction, these are aliens coming down at a G7 summit, which is wacky too. But how do you imagine this “presence” will (or has) manifest(ed) itself?

JW: The late Terence McKenna thought that they make themselves known when we enter non-ordinary states of mind. He was steadfast

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in the use of psychedelic drugs. But many other techniques have been discovered by shamans around the world over more than 30,000 years. Another researcher thinks they use the Internet, and there are times when I am reading my email that I think this is true. Maybe the insistent upgrading of powerful computers is driving us toward a more inclusive form of communication with Universal Beings. However, my suggestion is that UBs communicate through artists, and have done so since at least the time when Paleolithic cave art and other formats of primal rock art around the world were made. What we call the "muse" is really a symposium of UBs chatting to us, in whatever medium the artist chooses, or is chosen, to appropriate.

FL: I got your quote on being strange ("Éto attempt to experience the strange, we need not become the strange; we need only to incur the risk of comprehending it." - P.C. van Wyck, "Primitives in the Wilderness," Albany, NY: State University Press of New York, 1997, p.91). This reminds me of surrealist literature jaywalking towards absurdity, taking the risk but not sustaining permanent mental damage!

JW: We would not want that!

FL: That there is life on another planet? That there is life after death? There is some physiology behind delusion so perhaps the brain makes up its own affecting presence and pretends it does not know? On the journey out of the Skull House, how much of the "beyond" has been touched and how much remains to be "disinterred" on Being Universal?

JW: Whether or not these presences are fabricated by the brain - there is a surge of research into whether what we call "spirituality" is endemic to human neurophysiology, a cunning survival strategy. I would see this as a road along which the spirit travels, just as the Navajo people of the United States weave such a path into their rugs. As for what remains to be disinterred, let us think in terms of remains, a misreading that infers there had to be something.

FL: This seems like a case of science explaining away spirituality, does it not?

JW: Most neuroscientists working in this area are careful about giving the impression that they are trying to define the indefinable. Some even call themselves "religious." It is our need for transcendental experience that interests them.

FL: Their discoveries actually seem to be making the realms of the unknown smaller and smaller, but I do like the thought that this inward direction would later make us say that all positive knowledge we have accumulated thus far is "like straw!" (the words of St. Thomas Aquinas who, near the end of his life, had stopped writing, as everything he had written suddenly seemed to him "like straw" [3]). It is not that his ideas were not viable, but that they paled in comparison to his transcendental experience.

JW: Straw is dry and brittle. You cannot weave with it.

FL: I am glad you mentioned weaving, which also finds use in the Internet, the Web. It seems that the warp structures, the oscillating and mesmerizing repetitive work, delivers the weaver to a non-ordinary state. Weaving seems also a technology and medium well suited to engaging and communicating visual and

ritual forms unapprehended in textual terms or other artforms.

JW: One thinks of Penelope weaving every day and undoing her work every night, in a ploy to fend off her suitors until Odysseus returns. But he never did, you know; the Hero (I use this term as a metaphor for the brain) is never the exact person twice, just as repetition is never an exact trace. This is why each Zen master answers the same question differently, although they are all fishing in the same pond. I wonder if exactitude has any reality in nature; or, perhaps, there is a tolerable range of error, so small that we do not have the ability to measure it.

FL: Maybe [the question is] not so much to measure but to search for patterns, also a form of measure that admits a discrepancy. Pattern searching, it seems, is a human obsession it seems, that eventually leads to a cycle and then a center. I do not believe in exactitude in nature but I do believe in patterns and in a certain degree of repetition that is manifested as symmetry, for example. I believe in cycles, too, just as in Yi augury, corresponding the profoundest realities of life with the accuracy of the four seasons. The Universal Being seems to be also a measure of something.

Do you suppose the parietal lobe sleeps when we are immersed in the Internet, which makes this "inclusive form of communication" a sort of meditation, entering into the same religious sense of transcendence? This suddenly brings to mind the electronic archetype of the man who wears his brain outside his skull, his nervous system spread out across the electronic networks of the world. Then imagine having your parietal lobe permanently impaired, so you become forever detached from yourself and are "one with God."

JW: This may be more like acute schizophrenia than spirituality! When we are immersed in anything, not just the Internet - reading, watching a movie, having sex or meditation, the parietal area is dim, and one loses reference to where he or she is in space, and to oneself - Freud's "oceanic feeling."

FL: It is interesting how people have devised ways to control or simulate these without being actually immersed, the hallucinogenic and now electronic being the most pop. Like the shaman, whose medium is the soul, being the active or passive host of mediating with the spirit world. I am curious, and just might as well ask, how is your relationship with your Muse/UB coming along? I ask this alongside the fact that you have used various artistic media and now predominantly digital media and the Internet, which has tribalizing power.

JW: There was a period of four years in my life when I could not write; I could not go any further with the modernist poetry I had been writing for many years, work that was almost indistinguishable from that of many other poets. It was a depressing experience, a very dark night. Through steps I will not go into here (they are in "Reality Dreams," [4] my autobiography) I returned to a practice I had done before, but had given up to write: sculpting. Working with clay and wood again, shaping a world with my hands, turned out to be very important. I realized that language processes through my fingertips - I am not orally expressive. If it was not for the typewriter, the keyboard, I would never have been a writer. And when I finally returned to writing, I was no longer a poet, but an experimental prose writer - cutting out sentences, paragraphs, pasting them back in - shaping texts rather than laying them out.

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So that when, a few years later, I purchased my first computer, it was a natural move. My Muse, in effect, never deserted me. Nor I her.

FL: My Shaman and I have a very strained relationship right now, as I insist on accuracy and he wants ambiguity; he must be blind and he says I am lame. But to engage in the imaginary requires a certain ambiguity, so he wins, for now. On the horizon I see a common ground on which we might work out our differences - the aural, as the sense of hearing is the theological organ of faith, and the algorithmic accuracy of resonance moving across scales, is also there.

JW: There are "certain medieval theories that Christ was conceived through the ear of the Virgin Mary. The angel of the Annunciation appeared and told her she would conceive and bear a child; some theologians took that to mean Christ was supernaturally conceived through the word entering by the ear, and that is called the conceptio per aurem, conception by the ear [5]." However, like Michelangelo, I prefer the hands, the fingertips, as synapses.

FL: I was told that sculptors make exceptional painters. In your case, sculpture seems to have changed the way you see written media. This could also mean simply that creativity may exist but does not flourish in a vacuum, that the tactile will always be important in order to flourish in the age of the virtual. Children are allowed to go around barefoot, as it is believed they grow up more creative; discalced nuns in all their charity forget they get hungry. Language processed through the fingertips. How would Being Universal now be manifested, with lessons learned from "Reality Dreams" and "Skull-House"?

JW: "Reality Dreams" was a sort of summing up to that point, a gathering in. "Inside the Skull-House" was movement through a particular area of one's being. "Being Universal" is a turn outward, opening to the implausible. It is more abstract, slippery and, I hope, humorous. It is also a collaboration between you and I and ( ).

FL: I have been reading about, of all things, divine illumination, and found this: "A recent biography of the Nobel-prize winning mathematician John Nash describes his long period of mental illness, during which time he held various odd beliefs such as that extraterrestrials were recruiting him to save the world. How could he believe this, a friend asked during a hospital visit, given his devotion to reason and logic? 'Because,' Nash said slowly in his soft, reasonable southern drawl, as if talking to himself, 'the ideas I had about supernatural beings came to me the same way that my mathematical ideas did. So I took them seriously [6].' "

JW: This brings up whether some forms of mental illness, such as schizophrenia, are not what we think they are, because of our need to grip ordinariness in order to accomplish our workaday stuff. However, where you have sanity you also have insanity, which sometimes assumes the guise of the sane. There is a story presently in the newspapers here of a woman who murdered her children, and her defense lawyer has to convince the jury that she was insane! (The English psychologist R.D. Laing used art as a method for patients to find their way of the kind of schizophrenic state from which Nash suffered. Of course there is a school of art by mental patients, championed by Jean Dubuffet. But that is not my interest. I am looking to redeem what it means

to be sane.)

FL: Yes, to survive, which is allowed by the legal system. Then a system of sanatoriums is meant to redeem her eventually.

JW: I think the state would rather put her to death. "An eye for an eye" is very strong in the American psyche. "Frontier justice," it is called. My favorite bit of wisdom comes from an old TV series titled "The Highlander." This being was of an immortal race whose members could only die if their heads were cut off. They were usually trying to kill each other, as with this act they were able to appropriate the spirit, the power, of the departed, until, in the end, there was supposed to be only one left - a supreme being. However, the Highlander was not only a great warrior but had also, over his long life, gained some wisdom. Anyway, I remember one line that he said: "There is no justice, only mercy." An extraordinary insight.

FL: This "frontier justice" is what seems absent in the Philippines; mercy or folly, here convicts are elected into office and decades of oppression forgiven and forgotten. Justice writes edicts and mercy seems to send us into oblivion, which we prefer, because we had leapfrogged into post-literacy. Of course, both mercy and folly have their (mis)advantages, like alms for mendicancy. Perhaps mercy is best in the domain of the Highlander, the immortal, than the human.

JW: Or the "posthuman"?

FL: What could posthuman be when human evolution has halted? I just got a news post via e-mail, how the old tenets of natural selection have allegedly stopped because everybody's genes are making it to the next generation, at least in the West, where lifestyles and medicine have kept virtually everybody alive. Hmmm . . . maybe this explains philosophical immaturity and is what gives ammunition to world domination. If UBs date back from the Paleolithic, they had really better be here now!

JW: The genes of everyone who chooses to reproduce have always made it to the next generation. It is mutations that are the dynamic aspect of evolution, and that continues. In evolutionary theory, the egg comes before the chicken. If anything, because of pollution, there are probably more mutations than before, more creativity, though maybe less viability. We just do not see this in the short-term.

The posthuman, if I understanding Kate Hayles [7] correctly, has to do with prostheses; value-added. I have a problem with the "post" because of the immaturity, the neoteny, of which you speak. Do we want to be posthuman before we have a mature sense of what it means to be human? The posthuman is a step toward being universal, while I think - a point of my project - that we have the tools, we do not yet have the wisdom. Like with nuclear weapons, we are playing with fire. But like the brightest scientists, we cannot help but play.

FL: The word "post" must be a location from which we just begin to understand something. Sometimes I imagine that there must have been a gaping discontinuity in human history to account for such a discrepancy between our tools and our wisdom. Do you think that Being Universal might step into the danger of homogenizing what it means to be human, discarding our integral idiosyncrasies?

JW: This "we," or "our" is bothersome, a fictive collective

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within which a species gathers itself. You say that the Internet has "tribalizing power," but is not a creative collaboration a sort of ping-pong match that consists of each player individually hitting the ball? Or are we beginning to tap into a different way of experiencing ourselves, one more like C.G. Jung's "collective unconscious"?

FL: Must be, as now we are conscious of the unconscious and we are working with media that has the speed and malleability of thought. Creative collaborations are difficult, though seem to be a given in networked communications, with individualism and tribalism tugging at opposite ends of the rope. With this dialogue, perhaps the next time we say "we" the UBs will always be there!

JW: I think we are coming close now. I would restate "UBs will always be there" as: They are the third that are almost always there.

FL: Earlier, I mentioned I felt rather frightened about this collaboration; I am not afraid of doing work that speaks my own culture but to deal with a project that attempts to envision universality is something else. In fact, I cannot attempt to envision UBs unless this culture fades somewhere into the background, which is highly unlikely.

JW: You recently sent me an interview [8] with a professor at The University of the Philippines who says that he sees angels, which makes me feel that individual seers are not very important, except for their testimonials, and that what must be regarded is what the species can see as a whole. That is, what is wholly revealed, what can be agreed upon. So that, when one says, as he does, "In my reality God created the universe," I become suspicious, as he is working within his cultural conditioning. Also, the fact that he saw an angel when he was sitting with his family, but that he was the only one who could see the emanation. "They just saw me turn pale," he says. "But then it just hit me - all of a sudden I knew intuitively what it was. No, he didn't have wings. What he had was this swirling colored aura around him, still does, and it seems like there's this light bulb inside him. He's just glowing all over. He looked very human, not like a ghost, and the whole feeling I got was joy, peace, love."

I am not saying that he did not see what he says he saw, only that he sees what he expects to see, what he has been taught to see. What I find very interesting is when two persons, from different cultures, take the same psychedelic drug and see the exact same non-ordinary entities. This actually happens. When UBs reveal themselves, we will all be invited to the party.

FL: I personally find it unnecessary to go to a seer to see your own spirit, UB or angel. I also find it odd that someone can actually see somebody else's UB; I am sure all that he sees there is his own.

JW: I do not think it is a matter of a possessive, but, as I said, "a different way of experiencing ourselves." One can even say that UBs are a mass hallucination, that they are "Catholic." After all, would you want your work to be seen, literally seen, only by yourself?

FL: Yes, I would! What I can do at best is devise a ritual object that can create a bond between people and Universal Beings. Human and UB are a matter of possessives, but when there is a ritual

object (like your psychedelic drugs), that is when mass hallucination comes in!

JW: I very much like your idea of bonding. Yoga means "to bond," and the root of "religion," religare, means "to re-tie." As I now think that when we speak of UBs we are speaking of secular angels (although I would not use this hackneyed term), bonding is not only an instructive metaphor, but a procedural one? If so, just how language can bond to your ritual object, or objects, would be the next problem.

FL: What I do find fascinating in language, the written and spoken word, are the magical powers attributed to it, as they are used in ritual and with ritual objects. A more contemporary example is something called Paper Remedy [9]. Here, words are written on a piece of paper to remedy any conceivable problem, and the words are followed by its potency, the decimal/centesimal scale, the same used in preparing homeopathic medicine [10]. Words, written or spoken, have also been used to empower sacred objects and images. Then while thinking over the UB project, I come across a Nigerian voice disguiser, whose primary function is to bond people with the dead.

Now I realize the difference seems to be that you are looking at UBs as universal, while I am looking at the process by which they get there!

JW: You mean how they become universal? "Becoming-universal," as Deleuze would say. I must think about this.

FL: Yes, I find that universality needs a bit of coaxing out.

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During the 1980s, Joel Weishaus <weishaus@pdx.edu> was the adjunct curator of video art at the University of New Mexico Art Museum and wrote feature pieces on photography for Artspace: A Magazine of Contemporary Southwest Art. His work as a literary artist has been shown in several museums and is widely published. Presently, Weishaus is finishing work on "Inside the Skull House: A Neuropoesis," hosted by The Center for Digital Discourse and Culture, Virginia Polytechnic Institute. His homepage is: <http://web.pdx.edu/~pdx00282>.

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[9] From "Paper Remedies Experiments Report, History Surrounding Paper Remedies?," By Dr. Eileen Nauman, <http://www.medicinegarden.com/Homeopathy/remedies1.html>. Henrietta Lala sent the following: "This is a very ancient concept with a continuing lineage of use throughout history in many cultures. Mankind has always felt there was power in first the object, then the picture of the object and later the writing that represented the object. There is a tradition in oriental medicine, for example, that goes one step further; there is power in the instrument used in the writing. The belief completes the circle; the writing once again 'becomes' the object. One washes the ink from the prescription into water and then the water is drunk, as if it were the medicine (the ink is not toxic). It is interesting here that actual ingestion (entering into the body) of the representation was part of the cure. (I will not get into power ingestion of representations, transubtantiations.) The use of power objects, images and words had expression all over the world and continues into modern times. My point is that if you want the power you have to focus, you have to know the entry point. The paper remedy is a vehicle. A Hermes."

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< Ritualization through Art >
by Ma. Corazon A. Hila

Mythology and politics, religion and history, anything that juxtaposes the old and the new, the mundane and the sacred, the established and the unorthodox compose the multiple strata of Filipino artist Roberto Feleo's art and make up his personal agenda. His artistic techniques bring together these various interests, the most apparent being his use of the layered method where various materials and subjects are placed one above the other, in the manner of the Filipino native delicacy, sapin-sapin, indeed an apt metaphor for his concept of art and art-making and for his idea of the Filipino in the contemporary world. The sapin-sapin image captures and celebrates with such a strong impact the country's collective memory of a long brush with two contrasting, yet complementary, cultures - the romantic Hispanic and the pragmatic American. Sapin-Sapin is in fact the title of two of Feleo's works done in the 1980s. The first of these was made using layers of plywood, each carrying images such as the pre-Hispanic anitos or ancestral spirits; the Pintados, the tattooed Visayans in Spanish missionary accounts of Filipinos in the seventeenth century; and Darna, the local version of America's Wonder Woman, who became a popular icon in the 1960s for many Filipinos. The second work, entitled Sapin-sapin sa Kahoy at Salamin (1987), used layers of broken pieces of wood ("kahoy") and glass ("salamin") to form a coffin, a memoriam to the slain student leader Lean Alejandro.

An interesting technique Feleo uses in some of his works is binura, which involves erasing colors on paper; in his case, poster colors on stretched tracing paper. This can be seen, for instance, in the artist's "Ang Inakay ni Mebuyan," a 1998 work that shows the Bagobo goddess of the underworld, Mebuyan, in her benevolent form, nourishing with the milk from her multiple breasts several babies and children who have yet to be weaned and who have all gone to the afterlife. When the children are all weaned and ready to eat rice, they will go back to their own

families who, like them, now live in the afterlife. In the Bagobo origin myth, Mebuyan is herself one of three children Ð the other two being Wari and Lumabat - of Tuglay and Tuglibong, the original man and woman said to have been shaped from two lumps of earth and given life by the goddess Diwata. Mebuyan and these other characters of the Bagobo myth form the subjects of Feleo's "Tau-Tao" series, subtitled "A Retelling of the Bagobo Myth of the Afterlife." The works were first exhibited as a series of three-dimensional images in 1994, then "retold" in two-dimensional form in 1998 and shown as part of the artist's 15-year retrospective in 1999 at the Metropolitan Museum of Manila.

A second version of the Mebuyan, also featured in the 1998 "Tau-Tao" series, conveys the wrathful side of the goddess. Thus, if the "Inakay Mebuyan" nurtures and gives life, "Ang Mapanghasik na Mebuyan" (completed in 1997) destroys and takes it away. In this work, a male figure is shown lying stiff on a leaf that has just fallen to the ground from the vigorous shaking of the kalamansi tree, the goddess' way of claiming life. Through these contrasting images of life and death, Feleo questions our conventional notions of ourselves and confronts us with our hidden fears and anxieties, especially regarding our mortality and power, or the lack of it, over our life, over things, over people. The binura technique in fact makes for an effective metaphor for the act of slowly coming to terms with ourselves, with our nature, with our archetypal past.

If the "Sapin-Sapin" is additive and builds up the multi-dimensional nature of the Filipino experience and the Mebuyan binura works are subtractive, deliberately exposing the unseen, yet powerful, mythic elements of the Filipino psyche, the 1999 work "Shiva Doing the Twist," exhibited at the Asia Pacific Triennial in Brisbane, Australia, goes a step further. In the traditional Hindu version of the Shiva Nataraja, Shiva dances the Tandav, the cosmic dance of energy, while crushing on his/her right foot a dwarf-demon, Mahamaya, or "Great Illusion." In the Feleo version, Mahamaya is seen slowly rising and seemingly gaining strength and power while Shiva pathetically does the twist against the background of disintegrating astronauts in space. Shiva's torana, or body halo, the ring of energy surrounding him/her, has now fallen to the ground. Chaos is now slowly taking over order, and the universe is facing more and more disruptions. Thus with this Shiva piece, a mythic past is juxtaposed against the contemporary present, a scenario that generates dialogue and discussion. The work alternately probes, questions and disenchants us with respect to much heralded, yet increasingly ineffective, sources of power and strength in the modern world, and provokes encounters with religion and mythology. As in Feleo's other works, "Shiva Doing the Twist" oscillates between art and politics, art and religion, art and life, as it makes people realize the need for a new scenario, a new Shiva choreography to return order to our troubled times, a new gameplan for living in Asia or elsewhere.

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Philippine Art and Culture, such as "Balai Vernacular: Images of the Filipino Private Space" (co-authored with Rodrigo Perez III and Julian Dacanay); a monograph and script for a documentary on Philippine ethnic architecture for the Cultural Center of the Philippines' "Tuklas Sining" project and the architecture section for Grolier International's "The Filipino Nation." She studied Humanities at the University of the Philippines and Oriental Religions and Culture at the University of St. Tomas.

Born in 1954, Roberto B. Feleo obtained a BFA in Painting at the Philippine Women's University and is currently Visiting Artist and Teacher at the Philippine High School for the Arts, National Art Center in Laguna, Philippines, and Assistant Professor at the College of Fine Arts, University of the Philippines. Feleo is represented in collections in the Philippines and abroad, the ASEAN Institute of Art in Makati, Philippines, the Museum of Philippine Culture at the Cultural Center of the Philippines, the Fukuoka Art Museum in Japan, the Wilfredo Lam Center in Havana, Cuba and the National Gallery in Jakarta, Indonesia.

LEONARDO DIGITAL REVIEWS
2002.06

Leonardo Digital Reviews has no less than 15 items this month, including two from our newest member, Amy Ione of the Diatrope Institute in Berkeley. She sees much virtue in Anthony Grafton's book, "Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance," and draws our attention to the process of emendation, something that the Leonardo community will no doubt recognize as a contemporary fashion in some electronic art. Mike Leggett, one of our regular contributors based in Australia, has also filed two reviews this month, including another look at Ars Electronica Cyberarts 2001, edited by Christian Schrenk. This book reminds us of the funding divide in art practice. Two reviews by Mike Mosher (currently in Japan) have been posted later than expected (we apologize for this - their delay is entirely due to the endless shuttling of copy between different members of the editorial team, who themselves are dispersed across two continents). Buried in a hard disc, they have eventually surfaced and, concise as they are, they point to important texts on the first contact between the Bauhaus and America. Roy Behrens has again kindly allowed us to reproduce reviews from Ballast; his cogent reviews are valuable signposts to the more useful texts to hunt out. George Shortess finds Michael Tye's book, "Consciousness, Color, and Content," a daunting read for the non-philosopher but worth the struggle for the provocations it makes in the fields of consciousness studies and color. The Bauhaus reappears in Stephen Wilson's review of "Design by Numbers," by John Maeda. Wilson finds the opposite flaw in this book as it lacks sufficient philosophical detail. Many of this month's themes are also covered in "The Psychology of Graphic Images: Seeing, Drawing, Communicating," which Ian Verstegen (of Philadelphia) has reviewed for us. Another new panel member, this time based in Paris, considers "Metal and Flesh - The Evolution of Man: Technology," by Olivier Dyens (this book is published by MIT in collaboration with Leonardo). Julien

Knebusch reviews “La plante des esprits - Pour une politique du cyberespace,” by Philippe Qu□au, a book that deals with the complexity of globalization. Mike Mosher also reviews “The Laws of the Web: Patterns in the Ecology of Information,” by Bernardo A. Huberman, which explores legal aspects of the new society. Mosher’s third review mirrors some of the historical discussions elsewhere this month as he tackles “The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from Constant’s New Babylon to Beyond,” edited by Catherine de Zegher and Mark Wigley. Finally, as Roy Behrens is somewhat aghast at the thought of Jeremy Bentham’s bones, preserved and clothed seated in a glass case in London University (see his review of Optimum, a film directed by Henry Colomer) so Mike Leggett is, I suspect, charmed by the hectic imperative of AUTOICON, a CD-ROM of artists’ work, which also has its own eccentricities.

We are, as ever, grateful to our panel spread across the globe who send their thoughts to us at Leonardo Digital Reviews so that we might share them. And given the volume of work this month, thanks go also to Bryony Dalefield and Robert Pepperell in the U.K. and Kathleen Quillian in San Francisco for their help in making all this happen.

The new reviews, listed below, are available in full together with the archive at <http://mitpress.mit.edu/e-journals/Leonardo/ldr.html>.

Michael Punt
Editor-in-Chief, Leonardo Digital Reviews

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Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance, by Anthony Grafton
Reviewed by Amy Ione

Ars Electronica Cyberarts 2001, Editor Christian Schrenk
Reviewed by Mike Leggett

The Bauhaus and America: First Contacts 1919-1936, by Margret Kentgens-Crai
Reviewed by Mike Mosher

Artist to Artist: Inspiration and Advice from Artists Past and Present,
compiled by Clint Brown
Reviewed by Roy R. Behrens

Consciousness, Color, and Content,
y Michael Tye
Reviewed by George Shortess

Design by Numbers, by John Maeda
Reviewed by Stephen Wilson

The Psychology of Graphic Images: Seeing, Drawing, Communicating, by Manfredo Massironi
Reviewed by Ian Verstegen

Metal and Flesh Ð The Evolution of Man: Technology Takes Over, by Ollivier Dyens
Reviewed by Julien Knebusch

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Henry Moore: Writings and Conversations,
edited by Alan Wilkinson
Reviewed by Roy R. Behrens

La plan□te des esprits - Pour une politique du cyberespace,
by Philippe Qu□au
Reviewed by Julien Knebusch

Surrounding Surrounded: Essays on Space and Science,
edited by Peter Weibel
Reviewed by Amy Ione

The Laws of the Web: Patterns in the Ecology of Information,
by Bernardo A. Huberman
Reviewed by Mike Mosher

The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures from
Constant's New Babylon to Beyond,
edited by Catherine de Zegher
and Mark Wigley Reviewed by Mike Mosher

donald.rodney:autoicon v1.0, Project produced and copyrighted by
the Institute of International Visual Arts (inIVA), STAR,
Signwave & the estate of Donald Rodney
Reviewed by Mike Leggett
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< The Activist Drawing: Retracing Situationist Architectures
from Constant's New Babylon to Beyond >

Edited by Catherine de Zegher and Mark Wigley,
152 pp., illus.
Cloth, $29.95.
ISBN: 0-262-04191-X.

Reviewed by Mike Mosher, Saginaw Valley State University,
University Center, MI 48710 U.S.A., <mosher@svsu.edu>.

As bookish 12-year-olds, another "faculty brat" and I redrew the map of Europe, arbitrarily grouping countries and simplifying boundaries with our Crayola crayons and colored pencils. In second-empire Paris, city planner Baron Hausmann called himself an "artist-demolitionist" as he leveled old neighborhoods to make room for new boulevards and blocks of elegant apartments lining them. In Germany's Third Reich, the creative young fascist Albert Speer envisioned heroically wide thoroughfares leading to mammoth state buildings. All of these tendencies seem to be found in the work of Constant Nieuwenhuys (born 1920), though his major political influence may be the Situationist theorists of the 1950s and 1960s with whom he associated. Centered around a quintessential Parisian named Guy Debord, the Situationists made the city their subject matter and their canvas, and saw many of their slogans adopted for posters by radical students in Paris in 1968.

Constant's work began with drawings resembling those of the COBRA group, comprised of artists in Copenhagen, Brussels and Amsterdam (hence the acronym) who sought a childlike expressionist purity after the devastation they had witnessed in the second world war. He soon moved on to creating works incorporating a methodical, serial alignment of small cubes on the surface of a canvas. Less organic than Larry Poons, less colorfully decorative than Victor Vasarely, the works strike me as resembling computer punch cards, appropriate for the cover of an IBM annual report or MIT

Technology Review, circa 1962.

These works led Constant to create architectural-looking works, where his forms' movement into space came in concert with Situationist ideas of "unitary urbanism." He produced a multitude of sketchy drawings, which look like the plans of an architect as she or he moves towards a grand vision. Constant also proposed - then created - models of huge, labyrinthine interiors with reconfigurable walls, floors, lighting and environmental experience (color, texture, smell), their internal configurations supposedly driven by public desire, almost by whim. His high-level views of Lego-like "sectors" zig-zag diagonally over vast terrains and straddle national boundaries on the map, as if to rendersuch boundaries irrelevant in a globalized world and interconnected European Community (maybe they are).

Constant's work fits into the utopian tradition of Boull□e, Le Corbusier and Britain's Archigram group, or the more recent genre that mixes conceptual plans and gallery objects, like Christo and Jeanne-Claude's work or Mike Kelley's recent architectural model of remembered school buildings. Kelley's contemporary, Spelman Evans Downer, created many textured and scribed map-like paintings in the 1980s and 1990s, but these more often focused on natural topography than urban phenomena.

Constant must enjoy Minneapolis, Minnesota, where downtown buildings are connected by walkways to facilitate urban life and circulation during cruel winters. I could not help also seeing his "sectors" realized in ungainly and insecure Logan Airport in Boston - one imagines Constant spending a lot of time roaming airport terminals. His forms are echoed somewhat more successfully in 1960s buildings on campuses of public universities such as U.C. Berkeley, San Francisco State, San Jose State or Cal State Hayward (all in California). Their shadowy concrete plazas, beneath several floors of classrooms and offices, should be used more often in movies as settings for lovers' miscommunication and emotional strife.

The problematic "sectors" that Constant exhibited over the past three decades display urban life that is off the ground, away from the street-level existence that makes a city most vibrant. If built, they would keep the homeless and the unemployed at bay, serving as an easily-policed bulwark against the rabble and the rabble-rousers. They would function much as a shopping mall does in daily life. Their changing characteristics sound like little more than the aesthetic shifts of the department store window, delightfully entertaining, but spaces where nothing significant really changes as it remains a theater of its commodities.

Though it is germane to examine utopian architectural precedents for Constant's work (as it is to examine its science-fiction ones), comparisons of his projects to the Web in some essays in "The Activist Drawing" seem forced. Granted, he envisioned mammoth New Babylon buildings to snake over political and national borders, but water, sewer and electric power systems do the same thing. Constant's "scientific-esque" drawings, diagrams and other artworks are very much of their own time and straddle the borders between architecture and vintage-1970 conceptual art. Allusions to the Web seem an unnecessary marketing device to make contemporary and relevant creative works by a mid-century artist, works that are worth examining and enjoyable in their own right.

The handsome book includes Benjamin Buchloh's interview with Constant and contributions by Rosalyn Deutsche, Catherine de

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Zegher, Elizabeth Diller, Tom McDonough, Martha Rosler, Bernard Tschumi, Anthony Vidler and Mark Wigley. Catherine de Zegher is Director of the Drawing Center, New York City, which exhibited in 1999 many of Constant's works pictured in "The Activist Drawing."

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< Leon Battista Alberti: Master Builder of the Italian Renaissance >

By Anthony Grafton,
Harvard Univ. Press, 2002,
417 pp., illus., $18.95, paper.
ISBN: 0-674-00868-5.

Reviewed by Amy Ione,
P.O. Box 12748, Berkeley, CA,
<ione@diatrope.com>

Anthony Grafton's well-researched and extensively annotated biography of Leon Battista Alberti is a superb book. Reading through this engaging publication, I was particularly impressed with Grafton's ability to effectively breathe life into Alberti as a human, and to simultaneously place his achievements in the context of his culture. Born out of wedlock (in 1404), Alberti's illegitimacy created some measure of complication for him within the structure of his society. Grafton exposes this and examines how the social difficulties were abated due to his father's commitment to providing him with a quality education. Building on this fine educational foundation, Alberti went on to achieve recognition in a number of fields.

When examining the various trajectories, Grafton acquaints the reader with Alberti's role in building the Italian Renaissance in art, architecture and engineering. We come to better understand how this historical figure made manifest his desire to fuse distinct cultures and occupations. In addition, Grafton not only analyzes Alberti's work as a humanistic writer but also speaks in great detail about how his training in rhetoric influenced his theories in other areas. As a result, we come to see why Alberti defined creativity as "not making something completely new but as reusing a classic idea or theme in a novel way." Finally, Grafton's evaluation of Alberti's extensive use of rhetorical techniques and facility in applying them in other domains is useful today. As we re-examine how pictorial communication interfaces with efforts to communicate using language, be it written or spoken, looking at historical approaches will no doubt prove useful.

The author's deft balancing of perspectives in this biography is at its strongest when he examines Alberti's talent with words and the degree to which this facility was tied to his later success. By 1432, Alberti's literary accomplishments led him to become a secretary in the Papal Chancery. His ongoing employment in the service of the Church insured him the income he needed to pursue his many interests. Grafton's review of these pursuits, including his balanced approach to the theoretical and applied components of Alberti's work, is also well done. Equally noteworthy is Grafton's excellent summary of where his analysis of Alberti fits in relation to earlier scholarship. The author reminds the reader that contemporary discussions continue to see Alberti through the lens of Jacob Burckhardt's "The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy" [1]. Burckhardt established Alberti's reputation as the quintessential renaissance man, claiming that no less a figure than Leonardo da Vinci was merely a second to Alberti when he

wrote, "Leonardo da Vinci was to Alberti as the finisher to the beginner, as the master to the dilettante" (p. 107). Grafton, to his credit, grounds Burckhardt's exuberance without diminishing his (or Alberti's) achievements. Exposing more of Alberti's human struggles, while still recognizing his far-reaching influence, is perhaps Grafton's most significant contribution.

A close second is Grafton's discussion of emendation. Before reading this study, I did not realize the importance of this practice to Alberti's work. Briefly, emendation, a process of circulating texts among other scholars for correction, was a common practice in Alberti's time. While occasionally described by classical Latin writers, it was the humanist writers that worked with Alberti who turned this approach into an art form. Alberti, in particular, was among those who saw emendation as a stage in composing a work as well as a specialized service the learned could offer to others. The author conveys the degree to which Alberti valued the collaborative nature of this practice and how he used emendation in conjunction with his work in rhetoric. More fascinating is seeing how he adapted the technique when moving from rhetoric to art, architecture and engineering. Even his theory of perspective was open to emendation, as becomes clear in Grafton's excellent description of the two versions of "On Painting" that Alberti published. The Italian version was dedicated to Filippo Brunelleschi with a request for emendation and, as Grafton explains, Alberti offered the book to Brunelleschi because he saw him as the most learned of his time. We learn, too, that Alberti made this offer with a flair that served to elevate his own position.

In summary, all who want to enlarge their understanding of Leon Battistia Alberti will welcome this easy to read, thoughtful and comprehensive book. Grafton writes with grace and his survey of Alberti's work as a humanist, inventor and engineer reads like a novel. I particularly appreciated Grafton's sensitivity to the difference between theory and practice in general and how he applied this appreciation to Alberti's work.

Reference 1. Jacob Burckhardt, The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy. 1860/1995, New York, N.Y., Random House/Modern Library Edition.

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< Ars Electronica Cyberarts 2001 >

Edited by Christian Schrenk.
International Compendium Prix Ars Electronica,
Springer Wien-New York, 246 pp., illus. Euro 26.16/ATS 360.00.
Text: German/English. ISBN: 3-211-83628-4.
Available from the Ars Electronica Centre, <http://www.aec.at/shop/>.

Reviewed by Mike Leggett, <legart@ozemail.com.au>.

Prix Ars Electronica was established in 1987 within the Ars Electronica Festival and, since then, has been the only annual international event reflecting digital media production activity at the intersection of art, technology, science and society. The regularity of this event and the scale and professionalism of its delivery is in no small way due to the commitment of the ORTF (Austrian Broadcasting Corporation Regional Studio in Linz), with its considerable technical and organizational resources, the ability to bring on board each year corporate sponsors and the

willingness to give airtime to the various aspects of the event.

For those not familiar with Ars, more than 10,000 artists from more than 60 countries worldwide have participated with around 15,000 projects since 1987 and the annual results are a "current trend barometer of digital media art, illustrating the cultural and social implications of digital media." The past winners of the Prix Ars Electronica are a "who's who" of cyberarts, the winners' works being selected by five international expert juries.

Resources are given to documentation in a way that almost confounds the event - in 2001, as in the previous year, the event produced two hardcover books, a DVD, a VHS tape and a CD of electronic music. One of the books, of commissioned essays and articles (not reviewed here), appears to follow the globalization hyperbole: "TAKEOVER traces the trends in the work of a strongly-committed generation of young artists, who have set up their own platforms and business models, and in so doing, are increasingly moving away from the traditional art world." But to be fair to Ars, the event has always enjoyed the tension between playworld and realworld.

The book "Cyberarts 2001" is in effect the catalog for the annual curated survey, with short essays by artists and images from the exhibits, noting prizes and commendations based on the adopted classifications: Net Vision/Net Excellence, Digital Musics, Interactive Art, Computer Animation/Visual Effects and Cybergeneration - u19 freestyle computing (for those of us under the age of 19). Computer animation and visual effects are showcased on an accompanying DVD (sponsored by Sony). Prizes are awarded in each category for a total value of $US90,000.

It is indeed gratifying and important that ORTF and the Festival Centre take the recording of the event so seriously. It is a policy that extends the festival's useful life beyond the luscious banks of the Danube in the northern autumn and both the books functional form of presentation, though not retaining the informal intermingling of the event itself, retain a sturdy, even weighty, residue of what transpired and, perhaps more importantly, conveys to those who were unable to attend the range of research and experimentation occurring internationally, with may be something of an acceptable genuflection to the host country.

The politics of the event are never far beneath the surface and are faithfully reflected in these publications - the Pixar Corporation has had a long and overbearing relationship with the event, as is evidenced in the work on the DVD. While one can chuckle at the wit and gasp and the technology of their annual submission, possible contenders are clearly restrained into an aesthetic tradition that has barely moved away from the polite and worthy offerings of the 1960s (albeit produced on computer instead of cel and clay) and are destined for the quieter corners of daytime television. But, let us be clear - we live, and the Austrians live, in changed times, where retro-aesthetics are de rigeur.

Besides the glimpses gained of the work exhibited during the festival, the book provides fascinating insight into the work of the juries. In many ways these individuals take the publication into realms beyond mere catalog documents, recording their responses to the winners, providing overview summaries of the submitted works and, in the case of the Internet component,

devising new ways of describing and hence judging the flux of activity out there. Sub-categories are introduced to recognize that "...the Internet has become an established part of our everyday lives (Net Excellence), while on the other hand it continues to flourish as a powerful motor for innovation (Net Vision)." Nominated experts join the jury (on-line, we assume) to sift the 700 submissions into further classifications: Arts and Culture, Politics, Society, Business and Economy, Entertainment, Media, Sciences, Technology... is this the beginning of a branching or directory structure to challenge Linneas? And one assumes too that the winners in this category had the foresight to archive a snapshot of the site in some place far from the terrors of 404.

The interactive art jury (art here means installations) outlines the problems of poorly documented or described proposals and then goes on to thoughtfully examine the semantics of what the category title could mean, how interaction can finally subsume interface and basically, how can we move on to new issues and new problems that surely lie at the heart of "the process of creating interactive art [, which is] still the process of understanding the world." Attending the exhibition clearly would enable one to more fully understand the concept. Reading the notes from the jury and composers of the digital music category made a tempting appetite-whetter for acquiring the CD of the prize-winners, an artefact surely for reference rather than an item designed to be the complete aural statement.

But for newcomers to the field and the committed competitors and fund-seekers, the range of enterprise represented in these Ars publications is indeed wide, having caused aided debate in the past as to whether the festival and the Prix are maybe at odds with one another. Artists working in unheated premises with salvaged and borrowed resources compete for attention (and pitch for the prize money) with well-endowed university departments and commercial companies operating in the lucrative entertainment industry. That the festival makes these distinctions visible is in itself valuable.

ISAST NEWS

< Leonardo Pioneers and Pathbreakers >

The Leonardo Pioneers and Pathbreakers project is pleased to announce a new web site documenting the work of Abraham Palatnik: <http://www.olats.org/pionniers/pp/palatnik/palatnik.shtml>

We also bring to your attention a current exhibition of the work of Palatnik: "Pioneer Palatnik: Painting Machines and Decelerating Machines," at the Itau Cultural Institute in S‹o Paulo (until 7 July, 2002) This exhibition, dedicated to the artist Abraham Palatnik and curated by the art critic Marcio Doctors, gathers a unique selection of 26 kinetic and kinechromatic works, several sketches and documents that form an outstanding homage to a creator considered as one of the greatest pioneers of kinetic and technological arts in Brazil.

The artworks come from the Gilberto Chateaubriand collection

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(which is now with the Museum of Modern Art [MAM] in Rio de Janeiro), the Museum of Contemporary Art (MAC) in S‹o Paulo, the Museum of Modern Art in S‹o Paulo, other private collectors, the Nara Roesler Gallery and from the artist's collection.

For information, contact
<jocelyne.rotily@wanadoo.fr>.

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Leonardo/ISAST is pleased to announce that it is collaborating with Art and Science Collaborations Inc of NY, USA on the ArtSci 2002 Symposium to be hold Dec 6-8 2002.

Subject: ArtSci2002 Symposium cfp
6-8 December
New York City

Art & Science Collaborations, Inc. (ASCI) in partnership with the American Museum of Natural History and Continuing Education & Public Programs at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York will be hosting an international symposium 'ArtSci2002: New Dimensions in Collaboration' in December.

In this 4th international art-sci symposium organized by ASCI, they will continue to highlight exemplary models of art-sci collaboration while providing an open forum for dialogue about current artscience practice and interdisciplinary collaboration in general. They anticipate there will be projects about art-in-space or even particle physics, as well as those that explore the body's inner workings via MRI, scanning electron microscopy, and other imaging devices. They also hope to showcase new models of interdisciplinary art-sci curriculums.

ArtSci2002 will be an open forum for people from many disciplines: artists, scientists, technologists, humanists, educators, philosophers, theorists, and anyone interested in the creative possibilities when barriers are removed. In addition to the Keynote address and art-sci presentations, extended breakout sessions and workshops will provide symposium participants with the opportunity to learn about and share their ideas about best practices, practical solutions, new tools for collaboration, and new initiatives.

Deadline: 1 July

http://www.asci.org

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