Génro y comunicación

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On the (Art) Net

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Like rapidly moving creeks that swell in the relentless California winter rains -- flooding the valleys, uprooting established vegetation, destroying basement-stored family archives, yet leaving a residue of fresh green meadows, when the rains cease in the spring -- the Internet seems always in destructive/creative flux. Its innovative, uncontrolled growth sometimes alters or destroys the original communities it created, while at the same time, it nurtures new ones on its expanding banks.

On the Well

In 1986, when I first logged onto Art Com Electronic Network (ACEN) on the WELL, this virtual community was a way to get to know other minds, a way to expand outside my usual art circle, as well as a place to make information art. In this then small world, people from many walks of life -- artists, computer scientists, politicians, teachers, lawyers, librarians etc. -- freely exchanged the details of their lives and work.

Although it may have been different in other WELL communities, the WELL, art communities that, in addition to ACEN included the ARTS conference which I started in 1993, were welcoming places for women artists. In these virtual communities, women could explore, create and talk about their work in a "place-medium" (a place that is also a medium) where differences in size and voice are not apparent, and it is the way you express yourself that matters -- not your gender, or the way you look.

Judy Anderson: ("yduJ") "Usenet, while it can be nasty, acerbic, uncaring and unsympathetic, is truly a nondiscriminatory society. It judges you only through your postings, not by what you look like, your marital status, whether you have a disability, or any of the other things that are traditionally used for discriminations" (1).

Since being hit by a car in 1994, I am orthopedically disabled and have been on crutches for the past three years. But in the "place-medium of the net, it hardly seems necessary to mention that.

Thirty Minutes in the Late Afternoon

It seemed to me that logging onto the early text based online systems, experiencing them with the text monitor's black background -- yellow or green words seemingly burnt into it -- was like entering the depths

of one's mind. In these early online environments, the presence of many minds, the "group mind", was more apparent than it is in today's graphically delivered World Wide Web.

Anna Couey: "Being an environment of minds, electronic space can be seen as territory of the imagination. Being public and participatory mental space, it offers the opportunity to investigate possible constructs of collective imagination." (2)

In 1986, on ACEN on the WELL, I produced BAD INFORMATION, (3) a collaboratively written satire on the importance of computer mediated information in our society. In the same year, I began UNCLE ROGER. (4) a hyperfiction about Silicon Valley, California that was initially told "live" in homeric fashion on ACEN.

Judy Malloy: "Literature will change radically as computers mimic the disordered yet linked thought processes of our human memories -- manipulating huge pools of narrative information in nonlinear ways." (5)

In 1990, beginning with the idea that a narrative could be collaboratively written by the online "group mind", I produced THIRTY MINUTES IN THE LATE AFTERNOON, (6) a narrative, with three group written characters.

The backbone of the WELL is a conferencing structure in which users exchange information in "topics". The three separate characters (John, Mary, and Rubber Duck) were written simultaneously by 15 writers in 3 parallel topics. The story was set in the San Francisco Bay area where John and Mary were preparing (separately) for their first date. The third character, a street person known as Rubber Duck for his habit of constantly muttering the words "rubber duck", was sitting on the steps of the Museum of Modern Art. The time frame was the 30 minutes preceding the 1989 earthquake. Mary's route involved a freeway and a bridge which would both break when the earthquake hit.

I asked participants to choose a character, enter the topic and speak/think as that character. Since this was the group mind taking the persona of the characters, the emphasis was on the character's thoughts and their memories.

Jennifer Hall: (about her work NETDRAMA) "Characters are now self-propelled personas. without the aid of designers, writer or producers, the actors keep their characters alive by establishing them on additional networks and inviting more people to participate in the drama." (7)

No one felt it was necessary to write within their gender -- ie some men took the role of Mary; some women took the role of John; some writers took several roles.

As in many of the collaborative works I've worked on, I started with setting a scene, setting out a way of collecting narrative information, and devising a structure in which to display the information.

Along the way other things often developed -- in this case the insight provided as men and women took both sides in a "blind date" situation.

Karen O'Rourke: (About her work CITY PORTRAITS) "CITY PORTRAITS, and networking in general, creates a common space to which correspondents bring their various experiences, skills and enthusiasms. This combination yields something more than the sum of its parts." (8)

In the final work, I put the 3 topics in a data structure (similar to the three column structure that I used in my "narrative data structure" WASTING TIME (9)) in which the thought streams of the 3 characters were simultaneously displayed.

In the excerpt below, grabbed haphazardly from the work, Mary is written by 2 men and 1 women; rubber Duck is written by 3 men; John is written by 2 women, and 2 men.

October 17, 1989 4:33 PM - 5:03 PM	October 17, 1989 4:33 PM - 5:03 PM	October 17, 1989 4:33 PM - 5:03 PM
MARY	RUBBER DUCK	JOHN
I remember him...he was a little younger... how old? can't remember... 30-something... like the tv show... there was a piano player on the tv show the other day... she was so self-confident...but she was a lousy piano player...wrong hands... I'm gonna be a little late... haven't seen a baseball game in... years...months... no, in that bar... on the big TV in the back, no sound... <3> I hate being late..<7> Where's my Pat Metheny tape...that always relaxes me when I drive. (fumbles through tapes, none of which are in their properly marked cases) Damn, this car is a pit...i should have cleaned my car. well, i'll see what's on the radio. (starts scanning stations) <2>	he was awfullly fond of you..." <3> Rubber Duck <these earthling yoyos don't know the first thing about quantum chromodynamics> Rubber Duck <Jeezis, this Monocropping is gonna be the death of this idiotic planet> Rubber Duck <neutrino storm!> <12> I gotta pee. <10> Rubber Duck! <I Don't know about this autopoesis stuff. I simply can't see the nervous system as an informationally closed system.> <12> 'm gonna pee in the hole in the sculpture again	wants to brush her teeth? <8> I wonder if that broccoli I bought 4 weeks ago is still ok? Maybe I better seal off the kitchen. <14> I don't know if she's gonna be any different then the last ones... maybe I'm getting involved with too many women...am I too horny? is it only sex? no, she was really nice at the park... she smiled at me <3> Ouch! (nicks himself shaving) God, she will think I'm such a jerk (puts piece of toilet paper on face to keep from bleeding) Now, remember to take this off before she gets here. <2>

1 Anna Couey <couey>	9 Tom Mandel <mandel>
2 Abbe Don <abbe>	10 Gil MinaMora <tow>
3 J. Matisse Enzer <matisse>	11 Harold Poskanzer <drzeus>
4 Carole Gould <carolg>	12 Howard Rheingold <hlr>
5 ISAST <isast>	13 The Normals <normals>
6 Eleanor Kent <ekent>	14 Fred Truck <fjt>
7 Carl Loeffler <artcomtv>	15 Kathleen Watkins <dtv>
8 Judy Malloy (Producer) <malloy>	

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Electronic Publishing

On the Internet, it is possible to have a "voice" without going through the old powers. Access issues are still a factor for poor and rural groups and need to be further addressed, but a "permission to publish" from established channels -- old boy, academic power structure, commercial, art establishment, old art forms, giant book store chains -- is seldom needed.

Christine Maxwell and Czeslaw Jan Grycz (in the introduction to THE INTERNET YELLOW PAGES) "Publishing opportunities are suddenly open to everyone with access to a computer and a modem. There is as much opportunity to find information on the Internet as there is to contribute one's own information for others to find." (10)

It is a reflection of an unfortunate information leaching, that is a byproduct of rapid platform changes over the last 10 years, that the files that would remind me of the exact nature of my early involvement with FINEART FORUM (FAF) and LEONARDO ELECTRONIC NEWS are stored in boxes on Apple II floppies.

I see, however, from my resume, that I was Asst. Editor, F.A.S.T., FINEART FORUM, 1988-1989; Coordinating Editor, F.A.S.T., FINEART FORUM, 1988-1990 ASSOCIATE EDITOR, LEONARDO ELECTRONIC NEWS 1991-1993. (10)

WORDS ON WORKS (WOW) (11) is a section that I developed -- originally for FINEART FORUM; later for LEONARDO ELECTRONIC NEWS and LEONARDO. WORDS ON WORKS was based on the excellent LEONARDO idea that artists are the ones who can best write about their own works. In this electronic medium, WOW made information about art works immediately available. The short, informal format was geared to electronic publication. I asked contributors to write about recent works in their own words, in any way that they wanted.

WOW statements ranged from Mary Jean Kenton's environmentally based installation on the grounds of her farm in Pennsylvania, to California media artist Lynn Hershman's THE ELECTRONIC DIARY, to Australian Jill Scott's interactive installation PARADISE TOSSED, to the collaborative audiovisual works of Belgian artists Maria Blondel and Guy De Bievre. Sonya Rapoport wrote about her interactive installations; Abbe Don described the beginnings of WE MAKE MEMORIES. WOW also included words by Sara Roberts, Fred Truck, Pauline Oliveros, Jim Rosenberg, Ben Britton, Reiko Goto, Jeffrey Shaw, Michael Joyce, Carolyn Guyer, Nancy Paterson and many more.

Nancy Paterson: (About her STOCK MARKET HEMLINE and other works) "My main focus, whether the work I've been doing has been interactive or not, is on the issues which I choose to address - incorporating interactivity has proven a most effective way to address issues dealing with women/technology..." (12)

Further Collaborations

While Madeline Gonzalez and I were working on the InfoZone in Telluride Colorado in 1993, a sequel to THIRTY minutes, FORTY MINUTES IN THE LATE AFTERNOON (13) was collectively written on the INFOZONE and ARTS Conferences on the WELL and at SIGGRAPH as part of the MATRIX: WOMEN NETWORKING exhibition that Anna Couey and Lucia Grossberger Morales organized. MATRIX also included Aida Mancillas' PROJECTARTNET and a series of works by Oglala Sioux computer artist Lorri Ann Two Bulls. (14)

At about that time, Carolyn Guyer initiated HIPITCHED VOICES, and I began working on FORWARD ANYWHERE with Cathy Marshall.

Carolyn Guyer (about her HIPITCHED VICES project) "What began as an idea to provide, with the HiPitched Voices project, a resource for women interested in writing collaborative hypertexts, has turned into a much larger concept with a far greater potential for strengthening the presence of women in computer

technology. While the original proposal to gather a range of hypertexts into a deeply multiple web can and may still be developed, the diversity of ideas which have been suggested since the Voices email list was established just two months ago extends our platform to what might now be called a collective of women using technology to work collaboratively within hypertextual concepts." (15)

Xerox PARC Researcher Cathy Marshall and I wrote FORWARD ANYWHERE (16) as participants in PARC's Artist-In-Residence Program, a program that brings together artists and research scientists to build bridges between the two communities. Cathy is an innovative pioneer in the field of hypertext as well as an excellent writer and observer of life.

Our project was a multi-year experiment: to exchange the remembered and day-to-day substance of our lives. Our lives and our shared passion for hypertext and the net were entwined in the creation of this truly collaborative work.

Judy Malloy: "Eventually, we called our work Forward Anywhere because of the "buttons" on the interface that allow the reader to either navigate sequentially "forward" in our collected, exchanged screens, or to enter "anywhere" at a randomly selected screen. The words "forward anywhere" also connote our sequential additive process and its unexpected "anywhere" turns.

In October 1993, forinstance, Cathy described a Valentines Day pink frosted French cruller preserved for many years in its box on her hearth.

("The doughnut looks none the worse for wear after all these years, although I am afraid to turn it over.")

On the day that I received that screen, her words evoked a vivid train of doughnut shop memories that I turned over in my mind while I walked down Shattuck Avenue in Berkeley. I remembered the plain doughnut that lay on a paper napkin beside my computer every morning during the years that I worked at the University.

Subsequently, I remembered a usual lunch during the same period of my life: wonton soup at the nameless corner deli across from Radston's Stationary. Although I had not been there for over three years, in a few minutes, led by a virtual exchange of word-expressed memories, I was sitting in that Deli, eating hot won ton soup, explaining to the proprietor where I had been. I pulled out my notebook and wrote a response that began "When I worked at the University, every morning a plain doughnut lay for half an hour or so on a paper napkin beside my computer." (7)

There was something of the expectant anticipatory pleasures of reading fiction in our process -- where we were each both reader and writer. Once I had emailed my response, I could anticipate that unfolding of small details that cumulatively builds a work of literature. In her response to my doughnut/wonton soup screen, forinstance, Cathy related a conversation at an Asian market with a man about whom I knew very little. The incidental details in her response aroused my curiosity, but I had no idea when or where he would surface again. " (17)

Arts Wire, an Online Communications System for the Arts

Arts Wire, an online communications systems for the arts that is sponsored by the New York Foundation for the Arts was founded in 1992 by Anne Focke. Anna Couey was the initial Network Coordinator. I came on board in 1993 as FrontDesk Coordinator in which capacity I worked to help art organizations get online. I became Editor of ARTS WIRE CURRENT (18) Content Coordinator in 1997 and am currently the Network Coordinator with responsibility for our web site. Beth Kanter, who was the network coordinator from 1994-1997 was instrumental in the development of our current website and is host of our web making conference, SpiderSchool. Anna Couey and I co-host the Interactive Art Conference.

Arts Wire (from the original mission statement) "The mission of Arts Wire is to provide the arts community a communications network that has, at its core, the strong voices of artists and community-based cultural

groups. With this foundation, Arts Wire intends to develop a broad and inclusive on-line community that allows distinct communities to establish their own standards and patterns of use within a system that reinforces democratic values and encourages interaction among its users. (19)

The Future

For those of us who "live online", it is difficult to stand back and look dispassionately at the changing communities in this nonplace place. As Sarah, the narrator of THE ROAR OF DESTINY EMANATED FROM THE REFRIGERATOR writes:

"You don't understand. It is not just another job. The CyberCreek is like my home. The daily in and out flow of a billion bytes, records of tailings ponds the debris of unconcerned miners the exchanged writings of scientists concerning the leaching of poisons into the soil. The information on this screen, the overseeing of these things is central to my existence, and I cannot leave." (20)

I am hopeful that the continually expanding Internet will continue to host a vital inclusive online community, and that it will nurture new kinds of community without displacing the rich cultures that have sprung up on its banks.

I look forward to spending much of the rest of my life, making art and working on the net. I want to participate in shaping its continuing existence as a "place-medium" where all voices are welcome.

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