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DÉCEMBRE 95



Isabelle Choinière. «Communion». 1995. Spectacle multimédia. Multimedia show

Various sites

17-24 September 1995

This sixth International Symposium of Electronic Arts was remarkable for both the scale and the quality of its conference, exhibition and events. It marks the coming-of-age of electronic art based on a new relation to time, space and the artwork.

As Bruce Sterling pointed out in his presentation of the project *Dead Media Studies*, the obsolescence of the machine strengthens the idea of an art of the present, of immediacy. It calls into question a whole idea of art history and assigns conservation to the realm of archaeology.

This idea of temporality was also discussed by the panel on "emerging architectures" during which Julio Bermudez and Debra Gondeck-Becker presented a new approach to architecture whereby it is rethought from the viewpoint of its "entry" or access code, in terms of a quantum space in which different states of a given world can be saved and made accessible simultaneously in a kind of "inter-reality."

This implies a new relation to the artwork, a desacralized art that is in life, an art that is part of the environment and an environment that is artistic.

Two magnificent works stood out at Isea.

Osmosis, Char Davies' virtual reality installation, comprised five "elements": a tree and its leaves, a clearing, water, the computer code and text (poetry, etc). Movement was achieved using the body: leaning forward, backwards or sideways to move horizontally, breathing in our out to go up or down.

Osmosis is the "reality" of the Other's ideas and thought processes. Because it is not "realistic," this world is even more intensely present in its strangeness. We feel weightless, as if afloat. We are in the work (immersed, unable to withdraw, to move outside it) and the work is in us: we breathe it. The essential movements of the body (breathing and balance) are the tools we use to apprehend the work. Our involvement as an actor is heightened by the fact that others can watch our movements through a translucent screen—like a puppet in a shadow play.

If Char Davies' work is gentle and dreamlike, Graham Harwood's *Rehearsal of Memory* (1) is tough and violent. To make this interactive installation, Harwood worked with severely disturbed patients in a psychiatric hospital/prison who had committed serious crimes. He synthesized their stories in the form of a composite character whose body serves as the interface whereby we explore the important

events of their lives. Our "free" body is locked in the mirror of the Other's, shown on the screen in fragments, caught by the framing. Our only access to these stories is through the tattoos and words on the body. When activated they open up texts, press cuttings, interviews and so on. The marked body reflects a psyche. These legible bodily traces are like so many mental scars. *Rehearsal of Memory* throws us back on our "normality" and also on our voyeurism. Our progress is a series of intrusions into the life of another, into their being: clicking on their skin is like giving a jab. But this is also one of the conditions for understanding, an intrusion under our own skin, our own ego, a journey on which we lose any remaining innocence. There is no exit, the "out" button doesn't work: just like the inmates of the hospital, we cannot leave: "*Rehearsal of Memory* defies our assumptions about normality, confronting us with a machine which is both clean and comfortable and full of trash, of prohibitions and madness, a machine whose sanitary mechanics are contaminated by the flux of human exclusion."

Also worth a mention are *Turbulence*, Jon McCormack's artificial life installation, *Flora Floor*, Bruce Evans' holographic Zen garden, and *Fine Art, Fine Chess, Fine Data* by Georg Mühleck and

Michael Schlosser, involving mathematical chess combinations based on cellular automats, as well as *Communion* by Isabelle Choinière, in which the body of a dancer is confronted with the computer mage of the body, like a ghost or spirit of the physical body, in a new electronic ritual.

In 1996, ISEA will be held in

Rotterdam. The themes will be education, network art and Web design.

Annick Bureaud

Translation, C. Penwarden

(1) The CD-ROM of *Rehearsal of Memory* will be published by Bookworks in early 1996 (Bookworks, 19 Holywell Row, London EC2 4JB, England. Fax: 44 171 247 25 40.

(2) Translated from a text by Graham Harwood accompanying the exhibition.