BRENDA LAUREL (FOUNDER AND VICE PRESIDENT DESIGN, PURPLE MOON, USA) PRESENTING HER OPENING KEYNOTE ADDRESS IN THE GRAND AUDITORIUM AT MEXA 7-11 OF FEBRUARY 1998. HER FOCUS ON LOW BUDGET, SIMPLE...
MEDIASPACE ...

Following the convergence of Intelligent Tutoring Media and Digital Creativity, and the reformation of Digital Creativity through the publisher Swets & Zeitlinger, 'MEDIASPACE' would like to take this opportunity to relaunch and present itself to a new audience. This slim-line edition of 'MEDIASPACE' gives a glimpse of the projects history, introduces the 'MEDIASPACE' WWW site, and presents two new projects (Avon Huxor and Donald Rodney) and a pictorial report from MILIA '98.

'MEDIASPACE' is an experimental publishing project that explores the integration of print, WWW and interactive satellite transmissions (incorporating live studio broadcasts, ISDN based video conferencing, and asynchronous email/ISDN tutorials). The convergence of these technologies generates a distributed digital 'space'... [satellite footprint covering western Europe, studio space, screen space, WWW space, location / reception space, and this space - the printed page.]

The intent of 'MEDIASPACE', whether in this 'dead' paper-based form, or the 'live' digital forms of satellite and internet, is to explore the implications of new media forms and emergent fields of digital practice in art and design.

'MEDIASPACE' was created to allow 'artists' to present their ideas in a visual form, not simply as illustrated articles, but through a symbiotic relationship between image and text, an integrated digital montage.

'MEDIASPACE' needs:


'MEDIASPACE' graphic content is constructed through consultation and collaboration with the authors.

'MEDIASPACE' MANIFESTO (version 1.5)

The 'MEDIASPACE' manifesto, derived from the script of the original 'MEDIASPACE' transmission (February, 8th, 1994) and the first 'MEDIASPACE' publication [MEDIASPACE' 1, Intelligent Tutoring Media Vol 6 No 1, 1995] gives a clear idea of the intent.

1: Multimedia: the interactive montage of information, text, sound, image, animation, digital video, possesses many of the seductive qualities of conventional mass media (t.v., cinema, radio, printed page, cartoon.) and promises to revolutionise the way people use and work with computers. Through the likes of 'Tomb Raiders', DVD, video on demand, tele-shopping, and the virtual museum, interactive multimedia seeps into our daily lives and shuffles cautiously around our peripheral vision, just within earshot. Conventional media production, computing and traditional communication forms will wither in the bright light of these emerging technologies, unable to compete with this rich new wave of audio-visual consumption.

2: Hype or Reality: yet the preoccupation is with bandwidths, megabytes and methodologies. We have a gleaming new technical pen, we have the hyperlinked ink, and yet we insist on reproducing our monosyllabic utterances, a cycle with no end. We plan to manipulate and manipulate the computer, not just the data. New graphic user interfaces are being developed, and the virtual museum, interactive multimedia seeps into our daily lives and shuffles cautiously around our peripheral vision, just within earshot. Conventional media production, computing and traditional communication forms will wither in the bright light of these emerging technologies, unable to compete with this rich new wave of audio-visual consumption.

3: Cartesian Divide: multimedia communication technologies do not simply present technical challenges, they create a range of new, conceptual, linguistic and philosophical problems requiring solutions that feed upon the expertise and experience of educators, media practitioners, creative designers, visual thinkers, hardware and software engineers, architects, mathematicians, etc... if anything multimedia has the potential to unite these traditionally separate cultures offering a vehicle for a new renaissance, a bridge across the Cartesian divide.

4: De-babeliser: information technology is becoming concerned with more than just sound and vision, with more than just sounds and vision. Yet in order to harness this growing communications medium designers and producers need to be fluent in or at least be able to interpret and translate each others language, languages previously spoken by him/video makers, animators, typographers, designers, architects, programmers, electronics engineers...

5: MEDIASPACE: is a forum where designers, producers and users of interactive audio-visual computer technology can speculate, present and exchange abstract ideas, designs and experiences. It aims to be a meeting place where disparate thinkers and makers can forge a new media form that inherits the strengths of the old and rises to meet the demands of the imminent.

M. Hill 1/5/98
Interactive multimedia technologies to enhance human learning and experience through empathic design received general applause. However, the "shoot-em-up" games swept the floor at the awards ceremony.
FROM THE AMNESTY SITE - SEE LATER, AND THE "CUT-MIDDLE-CLASS-AMERICAN-CENTRIC" SOLUTION PROVIDED BY PURPLE MOON DID NOT SEEM TO PROVIDE A PROMISING GENERIC MODEL FOR FUTURE EXPLORATIONS IN THIS AREA.
'MEDIASPACE': Interactive Satellite Transmissions

The 'MEDIASPACE' Interactive Satellite Transmissions are another ingredient of the 'MEDIASPACE' project. Since the first transmission in 1994 (8th of February) there have been around ten interactive broadcasts (narrow-casts) from the Hoe TV Centre using the TDS-4b satellite uplink, and numerous related video conferences.

The intention is to cultivate cross fertilization and re-versioning of digital 'information' (sounds and visions, rather than bits and bytes). Content generated in the 'MEDIASPACE' Interactive Satellite Transmissions emerges on the printed page and through the 'MEDIASPACE' WWW site. Projects have been explored through multiple versions, with many of the participants listed below appearing on the satellite transmissions and 'publishing' in the printed 'MEDIASPACE'.

Initial funding for the 'MEDIASPACE' interactive satellite transmissions came from the European Space Agency (ESA) and the British National Space Centre (BNSC), for experimental and educational broadcasts. The 'MEDIASPACE' transmissions were funded in this way, as part of the University of Plymouth's STEP-UP activity.

STEP-UP is part of the Satellite Centre and transmits on a regular basis to EUTELSAT and INTELSAT satellites using a TDS-4b satellite uplink. Video transmissions originate in the Hoe TV Centre and are networked by land line to the satellite uplink.

More recently funding for five interactive transmissions came from the WIRE (Why ISDN Resources in Education) project, funded by the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities and the European Union. WIRE is a European wide project involving partners and collaborators drawn from across Europe's academic and industrial communities.

The transmissions incorporate direct ISDN video conferencing into the studio, and rely heavily on simulated 3D chromakey environments. The transmissions use either MPEG digital video or the traditional analogue signals.

Participants include:

• ABAA Team (CameraWork and Obsolete)
• Tony Tucker (MACROMEDIA)
• Rob Pepperall (HEX)
• Roy Ascott (CAiiA)
• Dan Cady (DORLING KINDERSLEY)
• Elaine England (INDEPENDENT MULTIMEDIA)
• Brian Eno (OPAL)
• Culver Epps (ARCHITECT)
• Andy Finney (INDEPENDENT MULTIMEDIA)
• Dew Harrison (CAiiA)
• Gill Hunt (CAiiA)
• Rob Morrison (Silicon Graphics)
• Mike Newton (APPLE UK)
• Rob Pepperall (HEX)
• Tony Tucker (MACROMEDIA)
• Simon Turley (PLAYRIGHT)
and many more...
Donald G Rodney: Born 18th May 1961 Died 4th March 1998

The 4th of March 1998 was marked by the unexpected, and untimely death of Donald G Rodney. Donald was one of the most eminent and dynamic artists of his generation, a feat made all the more remarkable considering the strains and stresses made on his body and mind by the disease Sickle Cell Anaemia. In the end complications brought about by this degenerative disease caused his death.

For years Donald had aggressively fought against his condition with a deliriously wicked sense of humour that redefined pleasure and pain, and a constant outpouring of critically acclaimed works of art. He survived on a diet of badly tuned radio’s, superimposed over badly tuned TV’s, and an endless supply of glossy magazines (like he was looking and listening for some secret message in the white noise and shiny images).

Working from his hospital bed he employed a team of friends (whom he lavishly abused) to help realise his beautifully acerbic visions, which were manifest as works of art that challenged both their audience and their exhibitors. Without him the ‘Art World’ will be a ‘safer’ and more soporific place.

Donald will be badly missed by all who knew him.

Donald Rodney was an Artist who exhibited widely nationally and internationally, most recently at the South London Gallery in a solo exhibition entitled ‘Nine Night in Eldorado’ (in September 1997). He received a Higher Diploma in Fine Art from the Slade School of Fine Art, University College London (1987) and an Arts Council Traineeship in Exhibition Programming at the Ikon Gallery (1990-93). His work has been exhibited widely, for example: ‘The Blk Art Group’, Battersea Art Gallery (1983); ‘State of the Art’, ICA (1986); ‘TSWA Four Cities Project’, (1990); ‘Cataract’, Camerawork (1991); ‘Trophies of Empire’, Arnolfini Gallery (1990); ‘Care and Control’, Homerton Hospital (1995); ‘The Invisible and the Visible’, Welcome Trust (1996); ‘Body Visual’, Barbican Centre (1996). At the time of his death he was undertaking Multimedia training as a result of an Arts Council scheme, ‘Digital Arts & Disabled People’, organised through inIVA (Gary Stewart) and it is highly probable that this opportunity would have been used directly for the Auto-Icon project.

Donald’s ‘PSALMS’ (an autonomous wheelchair exhibited at the South London Gallery in October 1997) featured in the last edition of ‘MEDIASPACE’ (PSALMS, pg19-24, MEDIASPACE, Digital Creativity, Vol 8 Numbers 3&4 1997).

Words and images assembled by Donald Rodney, Geoff Cox [Camerawork, Email: info@camerawork.net] and Mike Phillips (MEDIASPACE @ STAR, Email:mikep@soc.plym.ac.uk).

AUTOICON is a collaborative project between Donald Rodney, Mike Phillips and Camerawork.

A WWW version of the initial stages of this project is available @: http://www.camerawork.net/AUTOICON and forms part of a funding proposal to the Arts Council of England.
Whilst many of the elements for the project are in place, the synthesis of Donald’s working process and methodology raise key questions over digital creativity and ethics. The Auto-Icon will be fashioned from this body of information in three stages of creative development: defines another body, that this project aims to give form, a body that exists in data-space.

Donald Rodney AUTOICON is inspired by the Bentham dream of integrating the dead with the living. The Bentham AUTOICON anticipates the advent of and fascination for Web Avatars and other digital representations of the body. AUTOICON is a multifaceted record of his body, a body of medical data, and a body that will remain active in cyberspace. More importantly the AUTOICON attempts to encapsulate the creative mind of Rodney.

Donald Rodney had sickle cell anaemia, a slow degenerative disease resulting in his incarceration in hospitals and subjection to various technological apparatus. Rodney’s body had, for many years, existed in a close symbiotic relationship with the medical technology that kept him alive, and furthermore, provided a data trail of information: photographs, x-ray’s, scans, measurements, scars, and imprints. It is rare to find such a perfect, detailed, document of a body’s biological deterioration. This document defines another body, that this project aims to give form, a body that exists in data-space.

The Auto-Icon will be fashioned from this body of information in three stages of creative development:

1. Digital Body: Rodney’s digital body would be remodelled from the various medical pathological data available using VRML, photorealistic, interactive and simple animations, text, video and assemblage. The body will be navigable and interactive, on-line for access through the use of fly-throughs, animations, and interactive 3D models.

2. Web Crawler/Montage machine: The web crawler would allow the body to maintain continual creative output. The crawler would collect relevant images and text from across the web and feed these into a ‘montage machine’ which would generate a continuous output of images and a continuous dialogue with the ‘open’ public. The ‘Auto-Icon’ would collect relevant images and text from the internet and create a repository of visual data.

3. Artificial Intelligence: Furthermore, the use of a Java-based ‘Artificial Intelligence’ will allow users to interact with the digital body through text-based and audio conversations and user-interaction. A neural network would be incorporated to allow the body to learn about specific users’ requests and conversation styles and follow up on previous dialogue. The inclusion of an artificial intelligence will allow visitors to discuss the development of new ideas and projects that can evolve and be maintained in the organic Rodney body, and this will allow the digital body to learn and adapt to new interactions with the real world.

Whilst many of the elements for the project are in place, the synthesis of Donald’s working process and personality will now be drawn from the memories of the close group of friends (Donald Rodney PLC).
An Augmented Architecture for Collaborative Working
Avon Huxor

The design sketch documented here is a 'work-in-progress', part of a larger project investigating the design of a collaborative virtual space for BT Laboratories at Martlesham Heath, not far from Ipswich. As a telecommunications company, they are interested in exploring the potential for new forms of working over networks.

The design runs counter to many of the accepted views of the Internet, in which its global character, and apparent disregard for geography is prioritised. But this conventional view of the Internet is one that all too often forgets the importance of place and culture in our lives, and I am attempting to re-ground the virtual in our physical, lived experiences. Internet shared-worlds are not just playgrounds. For most of us the phone is primarily a tool to improve our lives, and the chat-lines just a niche market, so the future for shared world technologies lies as a place of work, education and civics.
The approach I have taken is to make the nature of the shared space explicit by grounding the virtual onto the geography of the physical world. The grounding is made visible through the use of webcams around the virtual sites. For example, through the use of webcams around physical sites generate real-time video feeds onto the Internet. The virtual world thus 'inhabits' qualities from the real we can read in the nature of the virtual by calling upon our knowledge of the physical.

But I believe, this is only part of the problem, and a large part of what lies in the abstract nature of place: They often appear to have no culture, no real sense of place. To give the worlds 'nature' (in the widest interpretation of the word) takes more effort in their construction than seems reasonable.

The specific need for grounding arises from my own and others experiences of existing shared worlds, such as Cyberspace and AlphaWorld. All to frequently the conversations of these sink into insults and harassment both sexual and racial. Much of this can be attributed to certain disruptive individuals who exploit the anonymous nature of the current technology, and the fact that it is very difficult for them to be called into account. One's antagonists could be anywhere.
The pyramidal structure of the virtual BT reflects the working arrangements of the labs, which have become expressed in spatial form. Indeed, the eventual aim is that the spatial structure can grow automatically as new users and digital material arise. The spatial elements acts as a ‘theatre of memory’ for collaborative groups, holding shared documents. Their relationships assists in the chance encounters between the avatars representing online users, bringing people together.

Although virtual there is the potential for the shared spaces to gain a sense of the real. I now experience a strange thought as I drive to the Labs. As the road approaches, I see in my minds-eye the pyramid rising above it, extending and augmenting the architecture, expressing the communicative forms of its occupants.