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New Media Production-Premisses

An Interview with Marlene McCarty, Jon Marcus and Annette Schindler by Edith Krebs

The American Net artist Nathale Bookchin speaks of "Internet, which, like all handy artists' material, is cheap, fast and malleable." Vuc Cosic – considered by some as the father of Net art – uses his online contribution to [plug.in] to analyze the fact that "between the raw larva of an idea and its full realization and global distribution, there is sometimes less than a minute." Much of what is subsumed under new media grants artists their autonomy, once they are equipped with the necessary infrastructure. This autonomy frees them not only from museums and their public displays, but also from the financial burden that conventional art production entails – the cost of materials, transportation, insurance, storage, studio rental and upkeep, etc.

Standing in direct contrast to this is the work effected using new technologies with more complex physical interfaces, sensors, sythsizers, etc. In this field, it is becoming increasingly difficult to keep up with the breakneck speed at which technology is developing, while at the same time providing an artistic content. The production activity that [plug.in] offers is thus more comparable to the collaboration between a film producer and a film director than to the more conventional contractual relationships governing the art market. Media art involves the joint efforts of on the one hand the artist, for the contents and design, and, on the other, the producer, who contributes the know-how, network and resources to ensure the work's execution on a practical level.



Marlene McCarty

Marlene Olive – June 21 1976, 1995–97

Bleistift auf Papier, 96" x 60"

EK: Marlene McCarty, you are currently working on a project that will be realized in collaboration with Killer Films and [plug.in]. Could you please describe your project?

MMCC: For 6 years I have been involved in creating a cycle of drawings, larger than life portraits of young matricidal women. As one art critique has stated, the drawings "demand a monumental engagement from viewers, demand that we absorb into them." This statement will be made literal in MARLENE OLIVE: A confrontational virtual reality project.

Marlene Olive is a drawing within the POLTERGEIST: GIRLS AT HOME cycle. The desire to intensify the already existing tension between the subject/object of the drawing and the viewer is the fundamental impetus for creating Marlene Olive as an interactive virtual reality installation.

The piece is being conceptualized for stereoscopic presentation possibly in a six sided CAVE (a large cube with computer projections on its six interior sides) possibly another projection scenario. To the viewer/participant the subject will not be seen as flat upon a screen, but in three dimensions. A direct link to the POLTERGEIST: GIRLS AT HOME CYCLE is that visual material must be drawn.

Within such an environment the viewer actually experiences Marlene Olive, not just looks at her. The viewer can walk around her, talk with her and be literally absorbed by her. MARLENE will not be a static sculpture but rather a sculptural installation which has theatrical and cinematic implications. The viewer/participant's actions will affect this environment. The generation of space within the installation will be in direct response to the movement of the viewer/participant's body. The viewer/participant cannot be passive in such an installation. If passivity is chosen as an option, the installation will shut down. Simply stated, through use of a virtual reality environment I want to magnify the friction already experienced between the drawings and the viewer. New technology can heighten or accelerate what has been traditionally a passive relationship into a participatory relationship.

Part of my goal is to expand the limitations of conventional Virtual Reality to accommodate some of the simplest of cinematic devices. I will be working towards an Immersive Cinema. Virtual technology promises total immersion, but in actuality one is inevitably disappointed. Either the mundanity of the "game" (find your way through a maze and kill things that are trying to get you) or the actual physical limitations of the technology (this is a huge heavy helmet that I can't even turn my head in) tend to infringe upon the viewer's experience. Typical Virtual Reality subject matter is an onslaught, a tidal wave of stimulation void of subject matter, thus Virtual Reality rarely reaches even the level of "suspension of disbelief" found in the simplest movie.

The viewer will not merely consume but will actually create. MARLENE, the girl, is constructed. Depending on the viewer/participant's choice(s) she transforms into various identities. Her transformation mimics the construction of the self through adolescence and strikes an uncomfortable allegiance to ideas of female mimesis.

Interaktivität

Wurde der Begriff *Interaktion* bis anhin hauptsächlich für die sozialwissenschaftlich definierte «Interaktion» zwischen zwei Menschen verwendet, so verschiebt sich seine Bedeutung im alltäglichen Sprachgebrauch immer mehr hin zur Benützung von computergestützten Anwendungen, bei welchen BenutzerInnen aktiv in eine Arbeit eingreifen können. Das Eingreifen kann entweder rein reaktiv oder passiv sein, indem sich die BenutzerInnen durch Klicken und Scrollen durch ein Dokument bewegen, ohne verändernd einzugreifen. Es kann aber auch partizipativ oder kollaborativ sein (G. Schiesser), wenn die BenutzerInnen zu Veränderungen am Kunstwerk beitragen. Je enger und intuitiv nachvollziehbarer die Beziehung zwischen der Tätigkeit der BenutzerInnen und den davon ausgelösten Prozessen ist, desto befriedigender ist die *Interaktion*. Es kommt zu einem *feedback loop*.

EK: Why were you interested in a collaboration with Killer Films and [plug.in]?

MMCC: The collaboration with Killer and [plug.in] happened very organically. It was not that I decided to do this project then thought ...Oh Killer and [plug.in] could help me do it. Actually I had started to work with Killer Films on the idea of doing a short digital film. They were trying to increase their digital work and I happened to have this great narrative about Marlene Olive. We started talking and then the idea of digital started to expand. The big question for me was "if we are using a digital format then why are we just imitating old fashion movie making?". At this point the idea started to veer into a concept which would be more virtually based and less movie making based. Perhaps it's better to say that given the possibilities of the digital realm the idea of movie making expanded into an immersive realm. Around this time I was talking to Annette who had recently become director of [plug.in] and she expressed interest in the project. The collaboration between Killer and [plug.in] seemed to be a good fit. Killer has immense movie making experience and [plug.in] could offer lots of new technology direction.

EK: Jon, what kind of know-how will Killer Films contribute to this collaboration?

JM/KF: Commercial film production, which is our primary business, is very goal-oriented. We constantly produce movies and

are known for the quality of our product as well as the uncompromising ability to get things done. We have created a business out of realizing artists' very exacting and particular visions within a commercial context. We specialize in figuring out where financing comes from, what audience is going to receive a piece, and closely supervising each and every minute detail to help a vision emerge fully articulated out of an artists' head and into the world.

EK: Annette, could you describe the role of [plug.in] in the production process?

AS: [plug.in]'s role will be to bring in know-how on different technologies, which are currently used in media art, so that we can commonly consider which one is most suited for our project. We can draw from know-how here in Basel and in Switzerland. We have also built up new connections with Universities and research institutions, who work on the technologies we are interested in. [plug.in] will premier the installation once it's completed, and will consequently use its European new media and art network for promoting its presentation to larger audiences.

EK: Killer Films is a film production company which apparently increases its production of new media projects. Is Killer films shifting its interest towards the visual arts?

JM/KF: I wouldn't necessarily describe it a shift; Killer Films has a long history of interest in the visual arts. The films we make have always been driven primarily by a strong artist's creative vision. Killer Films took its name from photographer Cindy Sherman's feature film directorial debut, OFFICE KILLER. We have produced media pieces in conjunction with and had our films shown in museums many times and very much look at filmmaking as a vi-

Interface

Als *interface* bezeichnet man die Benutzerschnittstelle für die Interaktion zwischen Mensch und Maschine. Bis Ende der Siebzigerjahre waren Benutzerschnittstellen meist Kommandozeilen-orientiert (z.B. UNIX, DOS), also rein textabhängig. Seit Anfang der Achtzigerjahre trafen grafische Interfaces (z.B. Mac OS, Windows) an die Stelle der Kommandozeile und verhalfen damit dem Personal Computer (PC) zu seinem Siegeszug. In Kunst und Wissenschaft werden *grafische Interfaces* (*GUI: graphical user interface*) mehr und mehr durch *Tüls* (*Tangible User Interfaces*) also haptische Interfaces, ersetzt wie zum Beispiel ARTToolKit, Körper- und Raumsensoren, Touchscreens (siehe neue Technologien).

sual art. We have had a relationship with Marlene McCarty for many years as a designer of film titles, which is gaining recognition as an art form all its own. Working with Marlene on a new media project was a very natural outgrowth of what we have always done rather than a calculated shift in focus.

EK: In your experience, Jon, how does the production of a media art differ from the work of a film?

JM/KF: The production of any film or media project is to a great extent dictated by the intended audience and the way the project fits into the world of commerce. We have a certain amount of freedom in our development process to play with a pure artistic idea and get the artist to articulate it as clearly as possible. Differences clearly arise in the production phase: with a film there is a very well-established industry and distribution network and we can make an informed calculation of where a given film will find an audience within that framework. With a new media piece right now, we have to figure out not only who will see it, but how they will see it and who stands to benefit from both the creation of the piece as well as it reaching an audience. And we must forge a financial relationship with those beneficiaries.

EK: Annette, you are acquainted both with traditional art and new media. Could you describe the differences between the two in terms of production?

AS: Most art projects are produced by the artists alone, they buy the materials, come up with a concept or go straight to work. Once the work is finished, it goes to the gallery or waits in the studio for the curators to come and discover it. It's a rather new development, that museums or galleries commission art works from artists for specific exhibitions or spaces. In this case, most frequently, the institution simply covers the costs of production, and is hardly involved in the production. One big difficulty that many new media artists encounter, is the pace with which technology develops and becomes obsolete. As soon as they are acquainted with a tool, there are new versions on the market. So it makes sense for the artists to develop

content and collaborate with a producer which tries to stay abreast of the technological development. Also, the producer can provide contacts to programmers, scripters, interface designers, animators, etc, whose special knowledge is needed for the production. Finally, we need to come up with new strategies for the distribution of these art works – as they don't fit into the "group-show" pattern and other art mediation formats very well either.

EK: Marlene, how much do your production-partners influence your artistic ideas? And if so, how did they change?

MMCC: There exists a big general idea of what this project should be. There exists a goal of what this project should do. (The goal is to immerse the viewer into a relationship with Marlene Olive. That experience must be at a heightened level of tension. The viewer's personal tension of interaction should be more immediate than either a movie or a piece of static art.) I would say this idea has never changed, only the ideas of how we get to this goal have changed. For example, originally the idea was to digitally film an actor (actors) and then "process" this footage so it could become a virtual environment. This would entail making filmed digital footage into interactive stereoscopic information that could function in virtual-reality-realtime. Through the research of all three parties we have learned although technology promises a lot there is a lot that cannot be done. AND specifically this can not be done ... yet. Of course there has had to be major regrouping and research to figure out what technology can actually do that would get us to our goal. So, today we are at a place that indicates we might use an animated figure or stereoscopically filmed footage but the onus is upon us to create a situation that acts like realtime but is not realtime.

EK: How much does technology influence your artistic decisions?

MMCC: My artistic vision remains unwavering. The path, which I follow to get to that vision, is completely determined by techno-

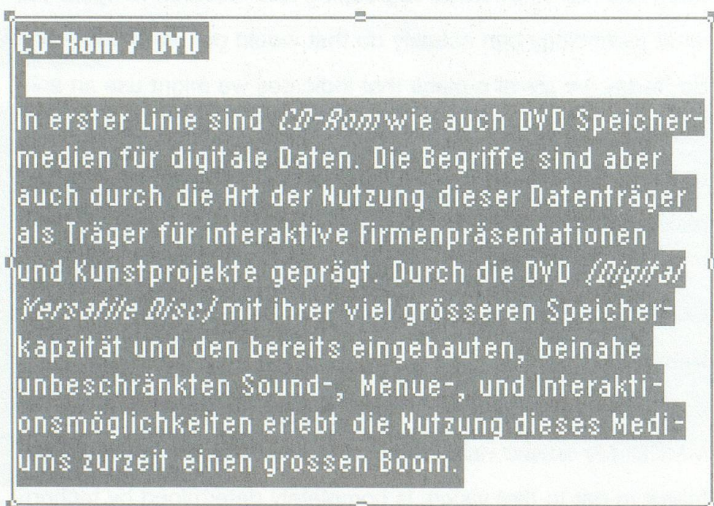
logical capabilities. You could say technology influences how the story will be told but the story doesn't change.

EK: How much technological knowledge you have?

MMCC: I possess minimal technological know-how. As part of my commercial work I create opening title sequences for movies. I have been doing this for 12 years. This means I have had to follow all the technological advances of that industry to keep up. BUT very quickly I learned it was more efficient for me to know how to find the experts in each development rather than to try to be the expert myself. I'm too slow. Therefore I have had a lot of experience in working with other people on technology that I personally can't operate but I know enough about to be able to direct my vision.

EK: Would you, Marlene, consider yourself the author of the work? Or does the entire team sign as author?

MMCC: Yes I consider myself author of this work and as in any filmmaking venture there is a lot of talk and negotiating around the division of credit in the project. On a project of this size there is a lot of creative input from many directions and I wish to see all those people properly credited. I guess I'm saying there will be a lot more credits than just the author. The other members of the team will have their own highly visible and appropriate credits.



EK: There are museums who order media art projects. Do you as an artist like that idea? Or do you prefer to work independently and/or choosing your partners yourself?

MMCC: I've never been very good at order-up art. I have done masses of design work over the last 20 years and although design is also order-up I find it very easy. It is a specific problem to solve, I find order-up art from museums or other art institutions can be a bag of mixed messages...here is some money... make an idea and be free... but be sure it addresses some of the things we (the institution) want it to address...oh and be sure to tell us what you have in mind so we can be sure the board is OK with it... I personally find this a recipe for at least failure if not disaster. Needless to say I have to work independently, some people don't and I envy them, but I have to. I also need to have as much time as it takes to find the proper solution. I can't just be settling on a solution for some opening that's been on the museum calendar for the last 2 years.

EK: Disregarding the concrete project: How would you, Annette, describe a perfect production base/infrastructure?

AS: At the moment, the weakest link in the chain are the funding possibilities. Media-projects often fall through the cracks of the well functioning art funding (in Switzerland). Sometimes the committee members lack criteria to judge the projects, sometimes the foundations only support shipping and insurance – so we don't qualify for support. The IT industry unfortunately has never really showed substantial engagement in the arts, even when they were doing well.

My opinion is that the production should work like a hub, being able to connect the artists with the technology providers according to each individual and their needs. In this sense the initiators of [plug.in] made a very wise decision to go in this direction rather than to build up an equipment park which is never up to date and is always limited in what it can offer. At the moment [plug.in] can enter only very few of these production collaborations – we simply don't have enough human resources. We research the technology from scratch for each individual

project. We would like to expand our staff and our network to be able to have more know-how readily available and offer our services to more artists – as well as other institutions, which ask for our services more and more.

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3D

Ein *3D-Film* oder eine *3D-Animation* vermittelt uns die Illusion eines dreidimensionalen Bildes auf zweidimensionalen Medien. Dies wird in den unterschiedlichen Medien «Computer-Animation» und «Film/Projektion», auf unterschiedliche Art erzielt: In der «Computer-Animation» wird der Effekt durch die Simulation und Animation dreidimensionaler Körper bewerkstelligt. Filme und Projektionstechnologien hingegen erzeugen dreidimensionale Erscheinungen mittels Brillen (rot/grün; polarisierende Brillen oder «Shutter-Brillen»), welche den BetrachterInnen ein intensives Erlebnis des Eintauchens in einen vollständig computergenerierten, dreidimensional erfahrbaren Raum vermitteln.

Animation

Animation (ursp. «Belebung») wird im herkömmlichen Sinn vor allem in Zusammenhang mit bewegten Bildern von Zeichentrickfilmen verstanden. Die neuen Medien ermöglichen eine rechnergestützte Generierung von einer unerschöpflichen Vielfalt von Bildsequenzen und den Veränderungen von Formen, Farben, Orientierung oder Oberflächenstruktur eines Objekts.