

CHAPTER ONE

PREVIOUS WORKS AND THE NOOSPHERE

*One of the surprising properties of computing is
that it is a social activity.*

— Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Communities*

I would like to concentrate on three artistic projects to exemplify my previous work, each of which had artistic performance components, *Pixel Pushers* (1994), *Erection Girl on the Culture Clash Network* (2002), and *Artaud's Brain, Portal to the Infinite* (2003). Each informed the development of *Messaging in the Noosphere* in its own way.

PIXEL PUSHERS AND PUSH-CDROM (1994)

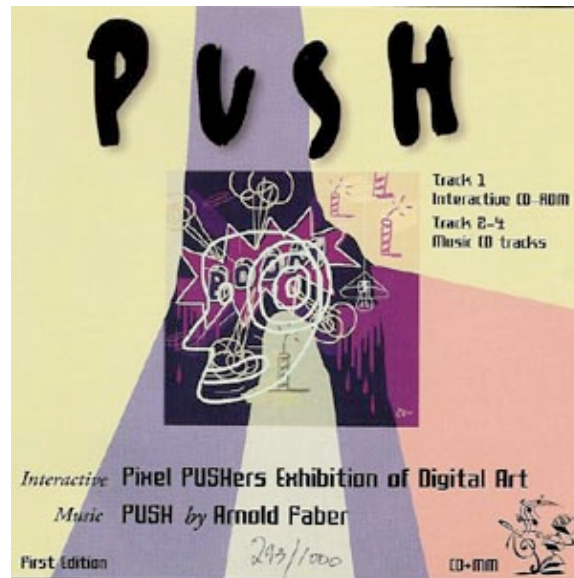


Figure 1 (a). *PUSH* CD-ROM Cover.

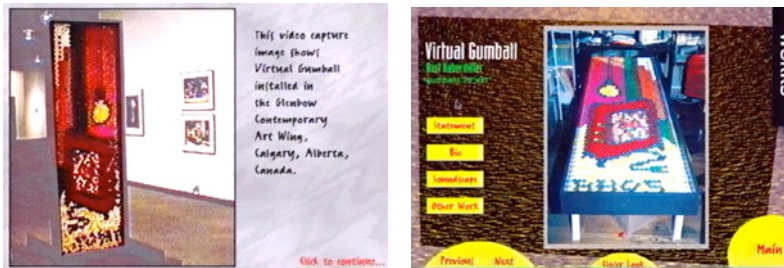


Figure 1 (b). Bart Habermiller’s “Virtual Gumball” installed in the Glenbow Museum, Calgary.

Figure 1 (c). “Virtual Gumball” as represented as an interactive screen in the CD-ROM.



Figure 1 (d). Global “hit” locations to the Pixel Pushers Internet site.

Figure 1 (e). Kent Barrett’s artist screen on the web with the controversial “Fun at the Beach.”

Spanning the years of 1994 and 1995, the “Pixel Pushers” project was the first Integrated Media Series that I produced. Its component pieces were an exhibition of digital art in “real space” (art galleries), an exhibition of digital art in “cyberspace” (Web site), a multi-modal music and multimedia CD-ROM entitled “PUSH,” and performance events which took place in Vancouver, Calgary, and Toronto.

“Pixel Pushers” was birthed when I was art director and associate publisher of *Media West Magazine* in Vancouver, the “Magazine of New Media.” *Media West*, founded by my late husband, Paul Andrews, was Canada’s first fully digitally produced hard-copy and Web magazine — produced from start to finish on computer; now the norm but a complete exception to the rule in the 1980s.

Starting in the early 1990s, contributing artists began sending me final art work for magazine covers that they had created in *their* computers and from this work, I

compiled and curated a collection of, as I saw it, the most original digital artwork by some of the most prestigious digital artists and photographers across North America. On June 15, 1994, the exhibition opened simultaneously in “real space,” at Emily Carr Institute of Art and Design (ECIAD), and in “cyberspace” on a Web site created by Vancouver media artist Kent Barrett. (See appendix Item # 1 for a list of artists and their statements).

In attendance at the opening event, which was held in conjunction with the UBC/ECIAD W.R.I.T.E Conference, were many of the artists including Buffy Sainte-Marie, Stephen Rock, and Andrew Hathaway, as well as eminent new media personality and W.R.I.T.E Conference keynote speaker Howard Rheingold, author of *Virtual Reality* and *Virtual Communities*. Other artists were “streamed” in on giant screens by Picasso videophone, a precursor to digital video technology. The pioneering and faithfully believing Internet audience was provided with live photographs over the fledgling World Wide Web and responded exuberantly with their relay-chat affirmations. Despite slow modems and other constraints, this cheerleading virtual community from all over the world confirmed, in my mind, that there was a kind of collective consciousness within the dimension of technology.

In September 1994, “Pixel Pushers” was installed at the “Canadian Multimedia Show” and, subsequently, The Glenbow Museum in Calgary. “PUSH” CD-ROM was screened at the Glenbow Museum’s opening event as a electronic exhibition catalogue that also contained an original soundscape written specifically for the art pieces by composer Arnold Faber. The exhibition went on from Calgary to Toronto where it was installed as the featured gallery exhibition at the “Canadian Multimedia Conference,” and Kent Barrett, the Web site designer, Arnold Faber, the music composer, Bart Habermiller, one of the artists, and I presented a theatre/music art piece, in conjunction with the International Digital Media Awards, entitled “Composition for Vibraphone and Gumball Machine.” This ten-minute performance piece included a live satellite hook up

between Roy Thompson Hall and Bart Habermiller's studio in Calgary and was entirely planned and choreographed through e-mail correspondence between the performance artists in Vancouver, Calgary, and Toronto.

The live events, including the Vancouver and Calgary exhibition openings and Toronto performance piece, the Web site service, and the CD-ROM product comprised the complete Integrated Media Series. Sponsors included AT&T, Adobe Systems, Apple Computers, Radius Canada, Key Colour Imaging, Sundog Printing, as well as *Media West Magazine*. Over the course of its existence, "Pixel Pushers Exhibition" and "PUSH" CD-ROM received positive coverage from the *Toronto Star*, the *Vancouver Sun*, CBC, CTV, CityTV, MuchMusic, *MacWorld*, *Morph's Outpost*, and *Wired* magazines. The exhibition was harshly dismissed by the *Calgary Herald* arts reviewer but, as a result, caused a wave of controversy in Calgary that resulted in record numbers of attendees at the Glenbow Museum exhibition.

The exhibition and its "original digital media art" was a catalyst for discussion, accolades, fear and loathing, excitement and/or distress wherever it appeared. I didn't encounter a single person who didn't have something to say, didn't have a favourite piece of art, didn't love it or hate it, or feel somehow affected by the phenomena. "Pixel Pusher" artists, musicians, and their curator were interacting with their computers in an artistic expression enabled by computer technology. Being on the leading edge of the digital media revolution was exhilarating.

Many years went by between the time of "Pixel Pushers" and my next set of artistic endeavors. My husband, who was my partner in *Media West*, my partner in "Pixel Pushers," and my partner in life, died. I told our children he had gone to the stars ... and then I buckled down, for their sake, and spent a decade earning a living by producing other peoples' work.

ERECTION GIRL ON THE CULTURE CLASH NETWORK (2002)

Mom! I need tweezers. I've got a splinter in my finger!

— Yoko Kawabata, Erection Girl



Figure 2 (a). Video cover art from *Erection Girl on the Culture Clash Network*.



Figure 2 (b) (c) (d). Still frame captures from the performance event, as adapted in the video.



Figure 2 (e). Screens from the Web site and the integrated DVD product.

“Er(l)ection Girl” was performance artist Yoko Kawabata’s Theatre Studies MFA thesis performance in the Department of Drama at the University of Calgary. I saw it first as a workshop production in a Creative Process class in 2002 in which we were both participants and I was instantly struck with its possibilities as a humorous digital video film. I initiated a collaboration to produce *Erection Girl on the Culture Clash Network* — an enhanced script that took Yoko’s original theatre art performance piece about a Japanese immigrant who commits gesture and language crimes and placed it within a parody about a TV news station — station identification, commercials, and all.

The result of the collaboration was a rewarding experience for us both and extended the life of this story from a transitory piece of theatre art across genres of archived interactive media art. A VHS-version videotape was produced and, as well, a Web site and DVD that included bonus features such as Yoko’s storyboards, deleted scenes, and scripts. Yoko’s audience was multiplied enormously and according to personnel at the Faculty of Fine Arts Integrated Arts Media Lab, *Erection Girl on the Culture Clash Network* is one of the most-frequently downloaded files from the University of Calgary Fine Arts faculty Web site. The video was also screened at the “Experience of Displacement” event, curated by Kay Burns, at EMMEDIA Gallery and Production Society, October 2003 in Calgary, Alberta.

ARTAUD'S BRAIN: PORTAL TO THE INFINITE (2003)

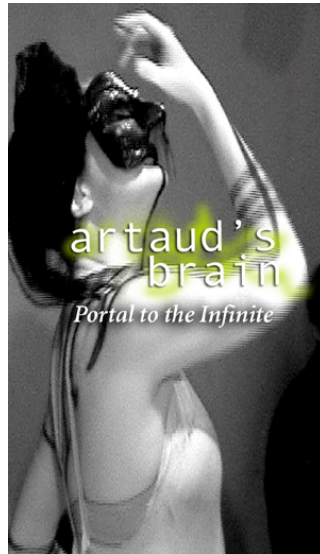


Figure 3 (a). "Artaud's Brain: Portal to the Infinite" video box cover.

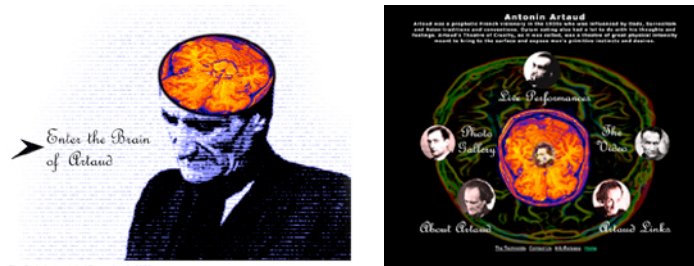


Figure 3 (b) Splash Page of Artaud's Brain Web site. Figure 3 (c) Index/Homepage of the site.



Figure 3 (d). Video Clips screen with a Quicktime Movie window open.

Another fellow graduate student, Sharon Adams recognized my abilities with cameras and computers and invited my collaborative participation as a media artist in *Artaud's Brain*. Like *Erection Girl on the Culture Clash Network*, my media-art version of *Artaud's Brain*, which became *Artaud's Brain: Portal to the Infinite* contributed both a Web site service and a video “documentary” product to Sharon’s theatre art which was performed in January 2003 at High Performance Rodeo’s “Mutton Busting” and again in April 2003 as her pre-thesis directing project.

The Web site that I built functioned firstly as a feedback mechanism for artists, musicians, and writers to contribute to the theatre art and, secondly, to chronicle the final performance, with video footage being its central feature. Sharon’s theatre art event was well attended and generally successful but the Web site was not well subscribed and was, in general, a disappointment. Where was *Pixel Pushers’* cheerleading virtual community? What happened to the collective consciousness within the dimension of technology? Things had changed, the Web audience was clearly more selective, and it seemed to me that I needed to exert a new strategy of creation in order to satisfy my vision as an artist.

As my journal documents, I wanted to “rip myself off the small screen and back into the realm of corporeal creation.” I was ready to re-exert myself as a theatre artist in real space, not just “cyberspaces” and my disappointment in the failure of my computer-mediated artwork in the *Artaud's Brain* Web site brought about the very first sparks of inspiration for *Messaging in the Noosphere*. In April 2003, I imagined building a fully immersive, three-dimensional human-computer interaction space that would have, as its input devices, hanging crystal objects instead of the ordinary computer mouse that screams ergonomic distress. I imagined theatre art performers reaching and pulling and spinning and moving wildly within this magic space at the intersection of humans and computers — implementing their desires in a live, three-dimensional way rather than on a tiny screen. This was the kind of a computer that I would like to build in my own home or studio: a “Noosphere.”

WHAT IS A NOOSPHERE?

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's Noosphere symbolized, for him, the unity of all things. Teilhard de Chardin was a French paleontologist and Jesuit priest who developed a vision that combined both his religion and his science. In the 1920s he wrote about "spheres" of our planet; the "Terrestrial" sphere — Matter; the "Biosphere" — Life; and the "Noosphere" — Mind and Cosmic Life. Reverend Phillip J. Cunningham, in an essay published in *Spirituality Online*, notes that a Noosphere "employs the Greek word 'noos' for 'mind.'" In this same online journal article, Cunningham points out a scintillating passage from Teilhard de Chardin's 1925 work entitled "Hominization" which extends the idea of Cosmic Life into a collection of harmonious minds with intellectual and spiritual affinities. Cunningham asserts that

This amounts to imagining, in one way or another, above the animal biosphere a human sphere, a sphere of reflection, of conscious invention, of conscious souls — the Noosphere if you will ... one can't but think of today's Internet, yet this was written forty-six years ago." (Cunningham 1997)

Marshall McLuhan originally brought the Noosphere to my attention. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*, McLuhan calls the Noosphere a cosmic membrane that has been snapped around the globe due to the electric dilation of our various senses ... or a technological brain for the world. (McLuhan 1964, 44)

Before there were any characters, plot lines, narrative elements, or even a title for the project, here are some things I instinctively knew about my Noosphere (taken from journal entries in August 2003):

- The Noosphere is a place of profound involvement and unification.

- It is a place of acoustic space, boundless, directionless, horizonless, in the dark of the mind, in the world of emotion, by primordial intuition and feeling.
- It is not a place of bureaucracy.
- Is not a place that speaks only to the eyes.
- The Noosphere has a rhythm, a pulse, a throb.
- It has an All-At-Once-Ness. Flowing. Unified. Fused. Oriental.
- It's a tribal place, not a literary place.
- It's a state of active interplay within electronic interdependence.
- The Noosphere is not a passive wrapping.
- It's a constant environment of active processes — an active medium that supplies a stable delivery platform for dynamic and predictable cosmic delivery.
- A place of layers where the medium equals the message.
- A human-to-computer interface.
- The Noosphere is the stars. There are Messages that come and go in the Noosphere.

As this vision of my Noosphere took shape in my imagination, a set of goals emerged:

- A goal is to create something for my audience who, through electronic technology and theatrical convention, experiences a unified involvement.
- A goal is to somehow convey an immersive, zero-distance of experience.
- A goal is to communicate the array as being symbolic on two levels. “Practically” — a human-computer interface, and “Cosmically” — a central nervous system communicating into the Noosphere.

My marginalia on the yellowed, tattered page of my 1960s-vintage copy of Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* reads ... "I will build my own private Noosphere. No Luddites allowed. Messaging in the Global Village."

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In my mind, I had created a physical embodiment of an apparatus that would transport its population of performers and audience into a zone of corporeal interaction with an electrified micro-cosmos. The primary differences between this new Noospheric experience and the achievements of my previous work is that there would be full-body real-time movement through an immersive physical space, free from mundane mouse-to-screen computer interactions — and I could tell a story of my own creation.