

NET WORKS

Curating New Media

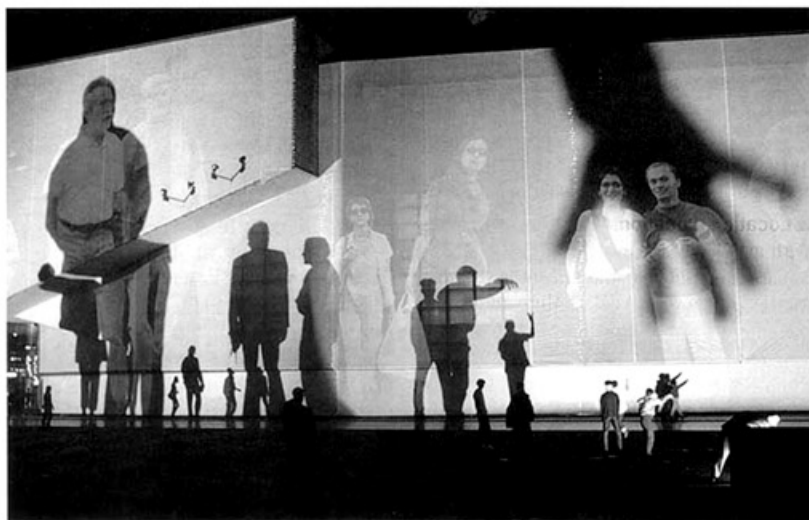
Net and Not Net

Beryl Graham & Sarah Cook

'But if people only dance the novelty hustle, then that's a problem. You've got to see works more than once to understand a context. It takes reflection to figure out what something is.'
Barbara London, MoMA, New York

When it comes to exhibiting new media art, some arts organisations are still cautious wallflowers at the dance, some have thrown themselves into a new-age freak-out, whilst others have learnt some lessons, done some reflection and are busy inventing their own hybrid stylings. Creative Time in New York, for example, seems comfortable that its hybrid groove includes both the physical challenges of showing digital video in the moist brickwork of their venue under a bridge, and the conceptual challenges of 'Massless Media' such as audio, net art or skywriting.

Current reflection on the state of media art acknowledges that we are over the novelty utopian period. Granted, there is still the problem of a lack of agreement on categories within new media, apart from a rough bifurcation into 'Net' and 'Not Net', which is sometimes understood as a split between the purely internet-based (sexy, mobile, consumable) and the 'physical objects' of new media (touchable, located, art/science). The former have been taken relatively quickly into art institutions, despite (or because of) net art's conceptual and activist lineage; after all, museums have dealt with 'the end of objecthood' once already. There is,



Rafael Lozano-Hemmer *Body Movies, Relational Architecture No 6* 2001

however, a whole range of new media artwork and curating that is sited at the boundary between the physical and the online.

■ The Rigour of the Physical

The young artists' group KIT, for example, sells real land on the internet in its *Greylands* projects, but also inhabits portacabins and 'company products'. *Joyriding in the Land that Time Forgot* featured its tents, digitally printed with computer-game landscapes, which nestled cheekily alongside heavy-metal Henry Moore sculptures in Yorkshire Sculpture Park. Creative Time has similarly 'taken it outside' by showing Jim Campbell's ghostly new digital displays in a New York plaza. Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's series of participative public artworks has included *Body Movies, Relational Architecture No.6*, shown as part of the Liverpool Biennial. Using projected digital images and enlarged shadows of passers-by, the public can have a substantial amount of creative input to the artwork. Although interaction

may be a discarded debate, in certain new media situations the artist and the curator are undeniably much less in control of the artwork, and have to trust the audience as much as the location.

The rigour of the physical also extends to the problems of installation in conventional galleries. The tendency of light and sound to leak often leads to a series of grim boxes, and an aesthetic that is 'dark, loud, and electronically overstimulating'. Bill Viola in his 'Going Forth by Day' series has worked around this by designing installations where several soundtracks are actually intended to merge in a space. Those able to design their own spaces for new media stress that flexibility has to be the key. Clive Gillman of FACT, when discussing its new building in Liverpool, gave the example of choosing to use a theatrical lighting system rather than stock gallery lighting. He also pointed out that the time-based nature of some kinds of new media may quickly shrivel when the visitor is sitting on a hard chair in a gallery. The very basic questions are beginning to be addressed in seminars and discussion lists, but tend to be ignored in favour of glamorous media theory at major conferences.