



July 1993

Volume One, Number Six

# CyberArtist

While having dinner with friends recently, the topic of complexity came up. This was partly inspired by some interesting articles on the subject published recently in this newsletter, and partly perhaps by the valuable tips regarding managing complexity that Craig Anderton passed on at the May CyberArtists meeting.

## HAPPY ACCIDENT SYNDROME

by Tom Vigal

Mostly, I think it had to do with how long it was taking for me to decide on what I wanted from the dinner menu. It was a large, unfamiliar, and seemingly incomprehensible menu and I was afraid of the consequences of making a bad choice.

In response to my dilemma, my friend Steve mentioned some writings by Daniel J. Boorstin, in which the phrase "The Fertile Verges of Plexity" is used to describe the frontier between the comprehensibly and the incomprehensibly complex.

Whether Steve was mumbling, or whether the pinnae of my ear was selectively filtering, I don't know, but the phrase was reconstructed in my head, without conscious effort on my part, as "The Fertile Virgins of Pepsodent".

Without delving into the subtleties of perception, it's fair to say that my mind

was, at some level, doing its best to match the sounds I heard to known patterns of language and in a way that would not conflict with what I could believe possible. It's also probably safe to say it missed the mark.

Two things about this event stand out for me. One is that my suspension of disbelief at that moment was so complete that I actually thought it possible that Steve said what I heard. This fact alone has given me some reason to reflect on my view of the world.

The other is that now, some weeks later, I still have a vivid, ever-evolving, image in my mind of the "Fertile Virgins of Pepsodent"; a compelling blend of sex, religion and dental hygiene that haunts and inspires me to this day; yet have no idea whatsoever what the "Fertile Verges of Plexity" might look like, nor (with apologies to Daniel J. Boorstin) do I care very much.

A strangely similar event happened a few years ago when I was informed by some friends that they were going to join several hundred people on a mountaintop to witness the "Harmonica Virgins". I could easily understand their enthusiasm and would have gone with them, but I was, sadly, scheduled for a business trip that day. Still, I found a moment or two between flights to reflect on the blues-harp wielding innocents that inspired so many. I lost interest entirely when I read in the airline magazine about the "Harmonic Convergence".

*(continued on page 5)*

**Next Meeting:**

July 5th, 7:30 pm at the Art Institute of Seattle, Room 611/612, 2223 Elliot Ave Seattle

Carver  
Symatrix  
Spectral Synthesis  
Mackie  
Rane

## From The Editor

by John Hokenson

A number of changes have occurred since last months' issue of The Northwest CyberArtist. The one having the most impact to our readers revolves around **Einar Ask**. As a result of his last performance, he finds himself increasingly busy with live performances and has asked that someone else take over the layout chores. In a serendipitous turn of events, **Jose Flores** has volunteered to assume these duties and redesign our logo as well! Jose recently graduated from the Art Institute of Seattle, and our president, Steve Turnidge, says his work will blow your socks off. As I am writing this before the newsletter is actually assembled, we will all get to see the "new look" at the same time!

Each time I reread **The Happy Accident Syndrome** I find a new bit of wisdom I missed the time previous. On the surface level, the mangling of phrases by the subconscious is hysterically funny. On a deeper level, Tom Vigal's three statements regarding understanding are profound. Tom's essay really caused me to slow down and really think about the creative process, and how we must sometimes "fool" our conscious brain in order to break through a block. Think about it. As you can see from our second story, "**Dancing With The Virtual Dervish**" Northwest CyberArtists is gaining worldwide notoriety. If Seattle comes on-line with Paris, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Austin, Banff and Delphi as has been proposed this could open the door to revolutionary new virtual reality performance

techniques. The only limitation to this potential virtual artform is the imagination of the artists themselves.

I don't know about you, but I'm waiting with baited breath to see this come together with Northwest CyberArtists playing an active role.

The other major event coming together is **Bob Moses and Steve Macatee's live performance project**. Bob Moses article below gives us a detailed report on the recent strategic planning session (gosh that sounds governmentalish!) held at The Blue Star. Response has been very positive to this upcoming event, and we are getting a diverse spread of talents coming together to make it happen.

In the "oops" department you will notice that Allan Tamm's article in last months' newsletter was accidentally truncated. Unfortunately, none of us caught it until after the mailing. Enclosed as an insert to this issue you will find the complete ten step list as alluded to in the original article. All I can say by way of apology to both Allan and our readers is that accidents happen, and we will try to keep them to a minimum in future issues of the CyberArtist.

If you are into doing your own audio engineering and post-production work, don't miss this months' meeting. **Experts from Carver, Mackie, Rane and Symetrix** will be on hand to give you straightforward information on making those live and post-production mixes sound not just good. Make them sound great! Anyone who has need to occasionally work with audio should attend this one.

## Northwest CyberArtists Extravaganza Update

By Bob Moses, Executive Producer The Northwest CyberArtists Extravaganza participants held a meeting June 17 and discussed plans for its upcoming show. About 15 people showed up, and it looks like we'll have a pretty good cross section of music and visual media. The current plan is to hold the show here in Seattle sometime in late September or early October. If all goes well, we'll take the show on the road and perform in San Francisco during CyberArts Interna-

tional over Halloween weekend. The group is currently discussing the format and scope of the Extravaganza. Once it's defined we'll publish more details.

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CyberArtist

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# Notes on 'Dancing with the Virtual Dervish'

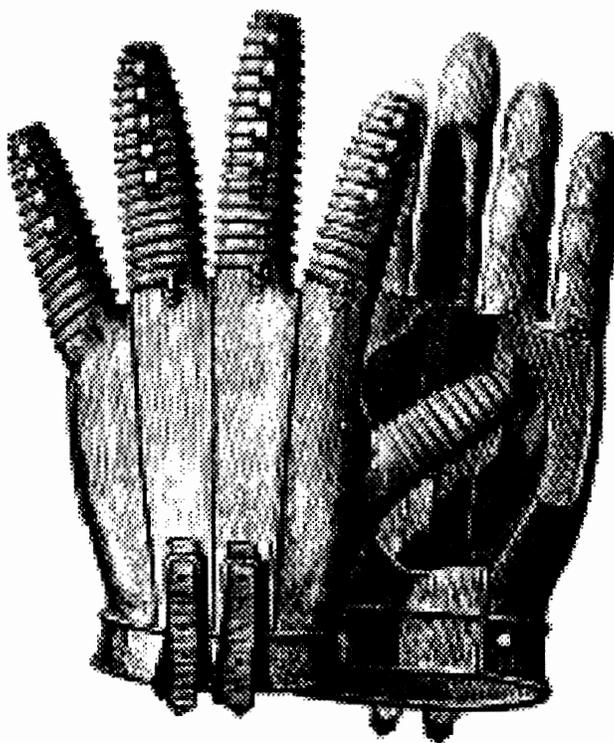
'Dancing with the Virtual Dervish' involves several concurrent interactive performances at remote sites. Five different worlds are intertwined: first, the stage world where a dancer and a performer in VR gear interact with projections of a virtual reality and with the audience; second, the tele world of remote performance spaces (in Paris, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Austin, Banff, Delphi...), where parallel, interconnected events are taking place, affecting each other via satellite and optical data transmissions that alter the course of events in each site; third, the virtual world within the computer, accessible through head-mounted displays and video projections, and consisting of interactive architectural spaces that become increasingly liquid, and occupied by intelligent agents and objects that correspond to the themes of body, book, and architecture; fourth, the cyber world, existing as a kind of nature to the virtual world, much in the same relationship to it as what we consider the outdoors compared to the indoors. Everything in this last world forms a visual and spatial music: ArchiMusic.

The virtual and cyber worlds form a continuum. A series of seven world-chambers, appearing most solid and familiar at the entry to the virtual world, rapidly become less and less material and static, until they dissolve into a cyberspace of interactive spatial music: ArchiMusic. The chambers themselves, and the objects within them, will be algorithmically controlled. Some will be completely autonomous while others will respond to the user's actions. The chambers and objects will be derived from aspects of 'body' become 'architecture', aspects of 'book' become 'passage,' and aspects of 'architecture' become 'liquid' as the piece explores issues of disembodied experience. The space itself will contain warped regions that simulate hyperspheres and other higher-dimensional phenomena, making chambers at once finite and infinite, depending on the manner in which they are approached.

Marcos Novak

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What is the difference between 'virtual reality' and 'cyberspace'? One description is that virtual reality is the enabling technology and cyberspace the 'content.' This description gives an adequate initial sense of the differences, but suffers the same weaknesses that any view that tries to divide the world into form and substance is prone to: in the end it is impossible to maintain the distinction between body and spirit in any kind of rigorous way. There is



something of what we call cyberspace in virtual reality and something of what we call virtual reality in cyberspace. Once this is understood, the distinctions can be seen to be distinctions of emphasis and quality, locations along a continuum that runs along several dimensions. At the one end of the continuum are those worlds that are most similar to the world we are familiar with: examples would include virtual environments such as architectural walkthroughs or

flight simulators. Buildings and vehicles are subject to constraints we are familiar with, and they represent situations that can, and perhaps may, be realized. Their scale is already familiar to us, and we can draw on our associations directly, in order to comprehend them. Somewhere near the middle of the continuum are those environments that are still within the laws of our physics but that are inaccessible to us for one reason or another. Microscopic or macroscopic environments, the interior of the body, the surface of Mars, the Chernobyl nuclear plant, are examples of virtual environments that are still of this world, but which are inaccessible to our full sensorium without virtual reality technologies. Farther toward the cyberspace end of the continuum are those environments that are at the juncture of theory and fact: the Big Bang, black holes, wormholes, the worlds of quantum mechanics or of higher dimensions. These worlds are at the cusp between the actual and the imaginary, and their constraint is an allegiance to the world as we know it; they are subject to empirical validation using other technologies that extend our senses: scanning-tunneling microscopes, particle accelerators, carbon dating, satellites and space probes. At the far end of the continuum are the worlds of cyberspace. These are the 'possible worlds,' the worlds of our invention. They are no less rigorous than any of the previously mentioned worlds, but like the most abstract mathematics, or the most expansive view of the study of artificial life, they ask what it is that makes a world in the first place, what kinds of worlds can there be, where does this world fit in the scheme of possible worlds, how would this world appear from the viewpoint of another world? Here the physics are invented, the singular can be replaced by the multiple, the solid by the fragmented, the insular by the permeable, the closed by the open. Time, space, energy, and consciousness may not be the fundamental or only organizational principles for all possible (whether conceivable and

inconceivable) worlds. Cyberspace is thus always the 'exterior' of virtual reality, because it always reserves the additional space of possibility, in contrast to actuality. Possibility is the fundamental characteristic of everything that is 'other,' since possibility always contains the unknown.

The sound of the five worlds will be a music composition conceived as a landscape: the actual sound heard will depend on the trajectory taken through an invisible musical terrain, realizing my concept of navigable music. All interactive music posits a 'space' of possible sequences of sounds, only a few of which are realized by manifestation.

Navigable music takes this idea to its limit and attempts to reconsider musical composition as the making of a world into which

the audience can be invited to enter. Coupled with virtual reality and cyberspace, as described above, this world becomes one that can be literally inhabited and shared in numerous ways. Every traversal by every visitor through the parallel landscapes explicit and implicit in the piece is another sequence of sonic and visual events, and the music created by these traversals can be heard concurrently, for example, as the music of a virtual city, or in sequence, by reenactment of actions of someone else.

Visually,sonically,and behaviorally, 'Dancing With The Virtual Dervish' will be textured to create reminiscences of the body, of skin, of materiality, growth, and decay. Central to it are two related ideas, immersion and interactivity, that reverse the core assumptions of several art forms. Architecture becomes liquid, music be-

comes navigable, cinema becomes habitable, dance becomes disembodied. As distant as these new options seem from their origins and from each other, they are related to one another by what can only be called worldmaking. Worldmaking is, in my estimation, the key metaphor of the new arts.

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# ANNOUNCING A VIRTUAL WORLDS ART EXHIBITION

THE CENTER ON  
CONTEMPORARY ART (COCA)  
SEATTLE, WASHINGTON  
SUMMER 1994

The Center on Contemporary Art will hold an exhibition of art which utilizes the technologies of virtual worlds, telepresence, multimedia, and binaural sound, as well as desktop and garage technologies.

The 10,000 square foot gallery will house multiple discrete environments and an auditorium for a

performance/lecture series lasting six weeks. A

large, multiple-user, immersive environment is also planned. Although

the exhibition will have participants from places

like San Francisco, Boston, Germany, Austin, and various

universities around the US, we

would like to feature artists and technicians from our area.

Are you a technician and/or artist skilled in

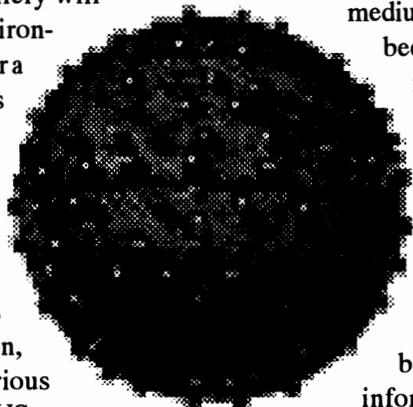
video projection systems, local area networks, hacking and phreaking, virtual worlds, 3D sound systems, multimedia, or HMDs/trackers/gloves, etc.? Come help create the first large scale exhibition of high-tech art in Seattle!

Now is the Time and COCA is the Place! COCA is well known as a lively, fun, alternative art venue. It has just been remodeled, and comes with plenty of power. It is located on 1st Avenue, across from the Seattle Art Museum, next to the Lusty Lady. It is a non-profit organization. Check it out. Virtual reality is a media buzz word. People are curious. A new artistic medium is evolving, in fact, a new medium for thinking and living. Now is the time to push accessible technologies to their limits,

and investigate new technologies. How is/will VR affect the way we live? How does our community respond to this new medium? What have local people been doing with it? What are new contexts for VR technology?

These are questions that are up for grabs. This exhibition is a place to bring them to life and play with them.

A formal call to artists will be issued at a later date, but informal proposals are more than welcome at this time.



If you would like to help or to make an art proposal, please contact me:

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## New Record Label

Hello all! My name is **Zach Leary** and I'm here representing Max-Bilt a new label dedicated at taking electronic music into the 21st century! Our focus is on electronic music that utilizes technology beyond the current boundaries. The label was founded by Tangerine Dream founder, Peter Baumann. He choose myself and label manager Mary Anne Campagna to guide the label in the right direction.. As of now we have our first release out in the sphere of the retail world. It is called **MONALISA OVERDRIVE**. Yes, in respect to William Gibson. The music truly represents the tone of the book and much more. Look for the ad in Mondo, for more info E-mail me at 73352,475 or call us here at Max-Bilt, 310-777-0204. The single is "Stuck", keep your aural libidos open!

[4]

So here we have what are fundamentally a couple of minor mistakes leading to moments of intense misunderstanding. These misunderstandings led, in turn, to images of striking (though in this case, virginal) splendor. Unless you're a control freak, the potential value of such unexpected fortune is obvious. It means more ideas for the picking!

In order for such events to occur, it helps if several conditions are present:

1. A situation that is beyond instant complete understanding.

2. A "garbling agent" that renders the understandable obscure.

3. A belief that strange things can happen.

Those of us that have spent hours with new studio gear (check item 1) reading electronic equipment manuals in Japenglish (check item 2) that grew up on a healthy diet of Dr. Seuss and science fiction movies (check item 3), will not find this unfamiliar territory. Even if none of these apply, you'll still probably recognize the situation. Why? because as "CyberArtists", we're often dealing with generous quantities of the unknown when practicing our arts. And why point this out? Because I see this as

the "up" side of overwhelming complexity -- the spontaneous generation of the new. Mistakes are often a setback, but they sometimes point out paths to creativity we wouldn't have stumbled down otherwise. As technically-oriented artists, we're given more than the usual number of opportunities to experience the result of errors, and in

Darwinian terms,

we're mutating faster than the rest of the artistic gene pool.

Going beyond learning from our mistakes, and actually using them runs counter to the instincts of most of the technically-oriented among us, who expect a certain output for a given input. But the reality of the situation is

that modern electronic music, computer, and video gear have grown so sophisticated that even their designers

don't know all of their capabilities. Furthermore,

the designers themselves often make mistakes in their products. In the

past, such

mistakes

would be called "defects",

but now they're

considered so common that they've been

given a cute, innocuous name like "bugs".

In the software world, we call

a bug with useful side-effects a

"feature". In the music world, a

comparable item might be called "an

inspired modulation to an unexpected key".

This isn't an endorsement of sloppy art, although books could be written about the

damage caused by the quest for perfection, but rather an appeal to go easy on ourselves

during the creative process. Rather than pounding our collective heads against the

wall when something doesn't work the way we expect it, we might consider going ahead

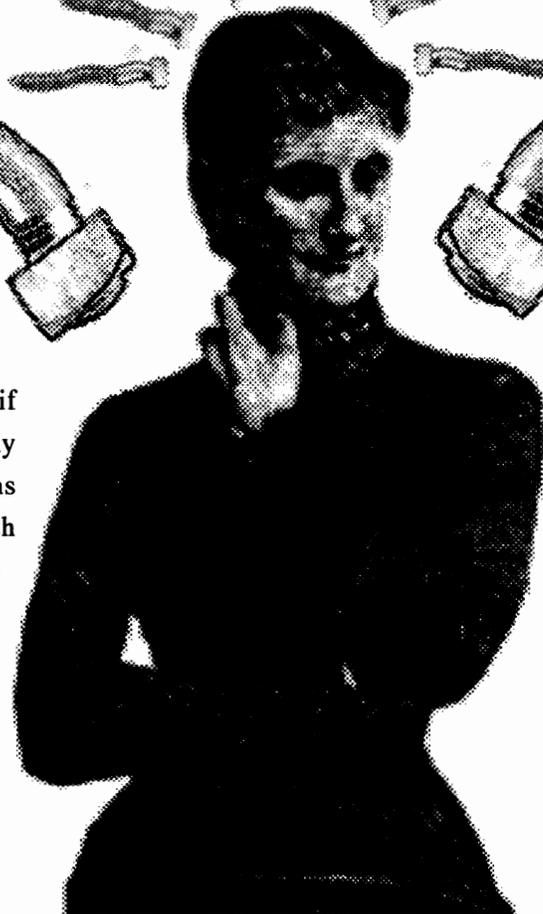
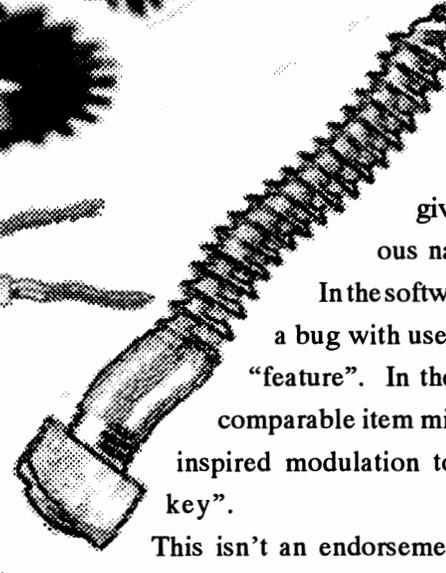
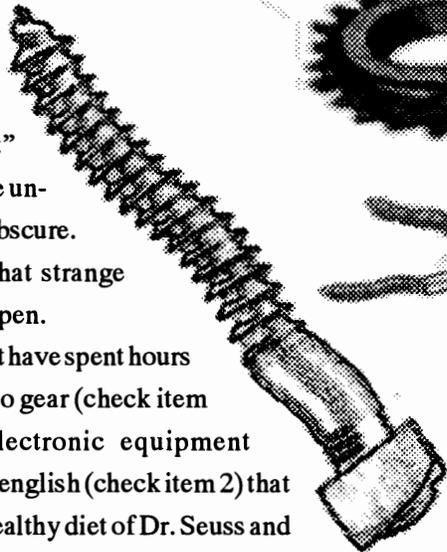
anyway and finding

a way to use the

error to our ad-

vantage.

(over)



Later, after the creative juices are less turbulent, is the time to go back and try to figure out what the problem was.

By then, it's possible that events on the Fertile Verges of Plexity will have made us forget that there was a problem in the first place.

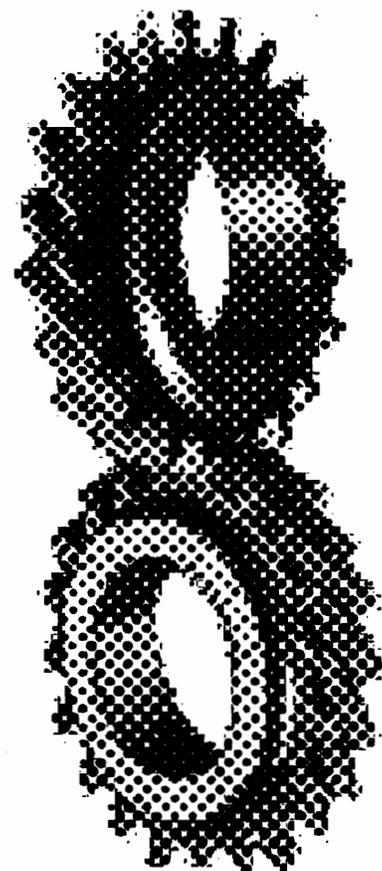
[ Hi there! my name is Jose Flores

(campesino atomico) and I'm responsible for this month's newsletter layout, illustration and new logo, I'm a Graphic artist, right now I'm freelancing, making new friends, and trying to make contacts with people in the music, high tech industry and fine arts to show my work, exchange ideas and hopefully get some money, basically de-

signing CD covers, posters, logos, packages etc. I attended to the Cyberartists meeting for the first time last month, I'll be helping out with the image and presentation of the group aiming to the Cyberarts Extravaganza and future projects. We need some feedback from the readers about the "new look" and logo, any comments, complaints or lusty inquiries will be appreciated, you can send them to John Hokenson or Steve Turnidge via CompuServe or Internet.

I work on a Mac/Centris 610 (system 7), Logitek scanner, Aldus SuperPaint, Aldus Freehand, Aldus DarkRoom, PageMaker, Adobe Illustrator. I know how to use Photoshop and CorelDraw.

] see ya!



[6]

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