

IDEA/ International Directory of Electronic Arts  
Foreword to the Third Edition, 1995-1996

## **Cyborg is a Verb**

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This edition of IDEA is published at a time which can be seen as a turning point in the place of "electronic art" in our culture. This term has been used to differentiate it from those traditional practices which for centuries had occupied centre stage in Western art. There is no more a centre stage, we are online and decentralised, and there is no longer a primary role in the world for Western culture, notwithstanding its continuing influence. Art, entertainment, education are all now progressively and irreversibly computer-mediated. Our bodies are bionically enhanced, our minds digitally expanded. In our cyberspatial awareness, we zigzag across the globe, interacting with the aspirations, sensibilities and visions of artists of all cultures. In these navigations, even the terms of North, South, East and West ("oriental", "southern", once exemplifying the exotic, peripheral, primitive or parochial) are now simply relative to where we are and which way we're interfacing at any given time. In electronic space you are everywhere and nowhere, so that the old colonialist, top/down, centre/periphery world view has no longer any meaning or value. We are all foreigners at home in the overthere. Such is the social constructivism inherent in the electronic media which we employ. Generative geography has its algorithms in our telematic practices.

The electronic arts are the defining arts of our time, and the emergent culture, which is sweeping us into the 21st century, is the product of the fertile interactions of the thousands of creative individuals, identified by name or by institution, who have their place in this comprehensive directory. The art centres, festivals and cooperatives listed here are nodes in that multiplicity of human and electronic networks whose exponential growth is bringing about a planetary transformation.

This bottom-up process of cultural emergence is also bringing about a transformation of what we think it is to be a human being. And *where* we are is as fuzzy as *who* we are. Certainly the boundaries of the self are as permeable as the boundaries of countries. We are beginning to see not just a reinvention of the self, but a reinvention of territory. Place and identity are unstable concepts. The current explosion of neo-nationalism and bloody racism may signal the terminal convulsions of the old order. As life online - extended multimedia in the service of learning, of social memory, of caring and communication - becomes "naturalised", so the concept of "alien" will increasingly diminish. Similarly in the Net, gender loses its discriminatory

edge. Monolithic conceptions of identity are radically subverted by the new digital media. It was not entirely in just that we insisted on claiming for electronic messaging the destruction of the Berlin Wall.

There is an optimism amongst us that the fuzzy systems in our artificial environment will elicit a gentler, less rigidly oppositional quality in our natural behaviour. It is the artist who brings the spiritual, poetic and visionary dimensions to our cyborg condition. We are mapping a world in electronic space, redefining community and redrafting reality according to the laws of interdependence, connectivity and collaborative reconstruction. We can see that the countries, continents and oceans of the old world order occupy but one layer of dimensionality, a layer fast losing its primacy in our planetary perspectives. Just as art in its embrace of electronic media has become more inclusive (who can say exactly where the lines between the arts entertainment, information and education now lie?), so art's virtual communities embrace a multi-cultural diversity. It is from this rich complexity that new human values may emerge - and, for the optimist, a more caring humanity.

But the sources of this diversity and uniqueness of human imagination must be clearly registered and recorded. We need to know *who is involved* and *how each* one may be connected. This is why it is essential that a comprehensive listing of those responsible for the advancement of the electronic arts must be maintained and made publicly accessible. This is why IDEA is such a good idea ! It maps the constellation of movers and makers who are building our vibrant new planetary culture.

The individuals and institutions listed here, are more than just names and addresses, more than sources of creation and construction, they are also important agents of perception, the eyes and ears of this new world, which mutually inform and effect each other in a rich reciprocity, from point to point throughout the many networks of communication which they variously inhabit. Cyberspace is an intricately woven field of connectivity, it is also the space of new forms of perception and new kinds of cognitive activity, of what I call cyberception. IDEA identifies the functioning *agents* of this global *sensorium*. This is a directory of those who, collectively through their art, are not simply redescribing and redefining the world but who are actively engaged in the construction of new realities. In naming its many parts, IDEA provides the taxonomy of our digital culture.

In sorting such complexity, IDEA categorises, lists, cross-references, and indexes thousands of organisations, artists, researchers, critics, writers, curators, periodicals, media channels, fields of practice, into a user friendly and accessible whole. The integrity of the guide however comes from the fact that, back of its huge achievement in classification, there is the understanding, best expressed by the early architect of technoculture,

Buckminster Fuller (and which was never more true than when applied to those involved with the electronic arts), that

*"I live on Earth at present,*

*and I don't know what I am.*

*I know that I am not a category.*

*I am not a thing - a noun.*

*I seem to be a verb,*

*an evolutionary process -*

*an integral function of the universe".*