Pleasure Island

An Instruction Booklet for a New and Virtual Life

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Charged with a heavy techno beat and a quirky visual inventiveness, the German film *Run, Lola, Run* tells the story of Lola and her boyfriend Manni, two lovebirds facing the typical problems of the young-and-smitten: they're both insecure about love, Lola's having problems with her dad, and Manni faces imminent death via a mob goon, if he doesn't come up with 100,000 deutschmarks in twenty minutes. The film's title, *Run, Lola Run*, serves as a command. *Run, Lola, Run*'s formal trickery, however, comes not from the plot but from the execution of the plot.

Lola repeats her quest three times. In each iteration, she must run the same streets and encounter the same elements, but as Lola interacts with her world differently each time, the world itself alters with an equal and opposite reaction. For example, in each life, Lola runs by an ambulance. First, she merely passes alongside it. The next time, Lola asks the driver for a ride, and when he rebuffs her, he loses sight of the road and crashes into a pane of glass. The third time, Lola doesn't run alongside the ambulance she runs into it, and discovers that it's carrying a friend who becomes involved in a car accident in every reality. Each time, the physical environment remains the same. If Lola arrives at a point a second too early or a second too late, consequences occur the same way they would in the real world.

Though many reviewers have described *Run, Lola, Run*, with its MTV-texture and blatant preference for form over content, as the film of the future, the most interesting aspects of the film aren't filmic at all. The movie provocatively suggests less about the future of film than about the future of art beyond film. Lola's repetitive journeys establish her less as a traditional 'character' who develops through characterization and narrative continuity, and more as a video game persona, who can revive herself with the press of a start button. *Run, Lola, Run*, therefore, may function more as a metaphor for interactive narrative than as an actual film. Like a character in a video game, an "online drama," or even a dream, Lola continuously travels through a world whose elements are consistent but whose interactions with her are not. If she dies in the course of the plot, her journey merely starts over, the same way an avid gamer can simply restart a computer game if his or her character dies. Though *Run, Lola, Run* works with an almost surreal premise, that of continually reliving one's life, it repeats its props and characters with such thoroughness that the effect is not surrealism, but realism. By constantly reliving the same scenario in different ways,

Lola tests its possibilities. By traveling the same road many times over, she confirms its existence.

Lola's interactions with her world alter it dramatically. In the same way, the 'viewer' of an interactive world becomes more than just a viewer. Interactive art creates new roles for its audience, making them not just passive participants, but "actors," even "authors." For the first time, the audience has the explicit ability to interact with the artwork, to 'act' from within. I will use one interactive online drama as a case study on issues of narrative, aesthetics, form, participation and the author-audience relationship: "Pleasure Island," an online narrative created by Randall Packer, Jan Millsapps, Howard Vu, myself, and students at the University of California at Berkeley and San Francisco State. Because "Pleasure Island," in the end, became less a refined narratological world, and more a collage of different, often conflicting approaches, I will look less at "Pleasure Island's" implementation than its implications. The three main characters are Sam Jose, a Silicon Valley cubicle worker, Violet, a hairdresser whose only connection to technology is her apathy about it, and Ahurwam, a technological millenarian cult leader. Please visit the "Pleasure Island" Home Page at http://www.cinema.sfsu.edu/pleasureisland/map.html.

Much like "Pleasure Island" itself, this essay strives to be an instruction booklet for a new and virtual life, one where the often stable markers of intention and affect, author and audience, medium and genre, and linear and nonlinear art sway, resist, and fall apart.

As these labels become more problematic, so too does that of "Pleasure Island" itself. How do I refer to "Pleasure Island"? Do I underline it the way one underlines a play's title, trap it in the quotation marks of a television episode, leave it italicized, or unornamented like the name of a video game or computer application? Is the 'creator' of "Pleasure Island" an author, artist, writer, playwright, or, even, a God? And what does one call the audience? A reader, viewer, spectator, or, as we have preferred, 'interactor' or 'player'.

I. CANNIBALIZING THE PAST

Descriptions of "Pleasure Island" characterize "online drama" as a precariously addictive form, a combination of mediums rather than a unique medium itself. The Internet's inherent binding of word and image forces this formal blend of several artistic lineages: the painting's imagery of painting, the film's movement, the novel's narrative depth, the song's pure expressionism, the television's individual involvement, the stage's spontaneity and characterization, and the comic book's world-creation. These are somewhat arbitrary markers, and I mean them less to indicate

specific traits of different mediums than to indicate the mediums themselves. The resources of the past, however, aren't limited to fine art. For example, what implications do role playing games (live action or spoken), "Host a Murder Mystery"-style simulations, card games, amusement parks, "Choose-Your-Own-Adventure" books, and cartoons have for an interactive story? Whatever is most useful is whatever should be cannibalized.

McLuhan's claim, that new mediums take on the forms of preceding mediums, applies especially well to computer game development. In the same way that movies are still shown on stages, Internet chat textually apes text-based role playing games. Lambda Moo, for example, closely resembles early Infocom games, like the Zork series, which themselves seemed closer to interactive novels rather than video games. The next stage, which includes the Palace, combines a chat room's participatory community with the visual elan of contemporary computer games. By incorporating graphics with a navigable world, the Palace echoes graphically simple games like Manhole, an early children's game. Modern computer games feature not just fully realized worlds, but realistic characters, video sequences, full three-dimensional perspectives, recorded sound and more. However flashy, these contemporary games innovate only technologically. Their narratives, the quality of expression, and the ways of telling stories have remained essentially unchanged for the past twenty years. Simulations like "Pleasure Island" can supplement this awesome form by imbuing technology with culture. I don't mean this to denigrate video games, many of which are probably superior to "Pleasure Island." Instead, the rift between academic projects, like "Pleasure Island," and commercial games is one that will need to be closed eventually. A project like "Pleasure Island" can bestow video games not just with legitimacy, but with the rich cultural tradition they lack thus far.

Cannibalizing the Present

Contemporary video games have much to offer projects like "Pleasure Island". Like many muds, "Pleasure Island" represents its characters with avatars, icons that signify the players. The flat literalness of the text and the inexpressiveness of the avatars, however, are a far cry from a live actor's nuance and characterization. So, why use avatars at all? Shooting games, like Quake, effectively use first-person perspectives to consciously insert the player into the field of action. Many games have main characters with posable gesturing bodies (sometimes even filmed actors), unlike the happy face avatars of the Palace. Many characters in popular games are designed more for action than for emotion. Rather than being expressive characters, they act like dolls. If an online drama must use avatars, how can they become more expressive? An online director can use filmic techniques, like close-ups and angle changes, to tightly control different characters. Other mediums offer other techniques.

Background music can swell up behind the more limp chat text, like the soundtrack of a movie. Virtual dramas could also veer away from realism for a comic book vocabulary, like an exclamation mark on top of a head to indicate surprise. A set of iconic stock expressions can create a new emotional vocabulary for this new medium (at one point, we thought about using differently colored dialogue balloons to imply varying feelings). The mediums of the past construct our understanding of the mediums of the future. We must study them if only to disregard them.

The TEXTure of Cartoons

The most unnatural property of past mediums, text, seems the most obtrusive part of this new one. Word balloons clearly do not fall out of our mouths in real life. As anyone who has ventured into one of America Online's more immature rooms can attest, chat rooms are probably the most widely practiced forms of performance art. All of human identity is reduced to text, and, aside from text, all other sensory data is cut out. There are no facial expressions, bodily signs, vocal intonation, or physical sensation.

More significantly, chat space removes a communal physical space. In its place, it offers a more deceptive one, a space of a pure Cartesian mind, bereft of body. This space is an illusion. In a 1820 letter to C.W. Dilke, for example, Romantic poet John Keats wrote "It has been said that the Character of a Man/ may be known by his hand writing."[1] Keats implies that writing's physical impressions, rather than its content, reveals our character. The nondescript expression of chat rooms removes even this, the most personal element of writing. So many components of individual identity disappear, that a chat room reduces the talker to an often foreign-sounding screen name and a collection of de-individualized type. All conversation becomes identical in appearance, unlike the particular sounds of one's voice. In simplifying our very personal, specific identity into impersonal lines of text, the interface of a chat room standardizes individual differences. And we are abstracted.

In his McLuhan-influenced comic about comics, *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud says that readers relate to cartoon figures particularly because of their abstraction. Like a mass appeal Hollywood movie, where actors play flat archetypes rather than personalized characters, cartoons have no barriers to entry:

Why would anyone young or old, respond to a cartoon as much or more than a realistic image? ... The more cartoony a face is... the more people it could be said to describe... When two people interact, they usually look directly at one another, seeing their partner's features in vivid detail. Each one also sustains a constant awareness of his or her own face. But this mind-picture is not nearly so vivid; just a sketchy

arrangement... A sense of shape... Something as simple and as basic as a cartoon. Thus, when you look at a photo or realistic drawing of a face, you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of the Cartoon, you see yourself.[2]

McCloud suggests that the more abstract an image, the more one can relate to it. In contrast, the more specific an image, the less one can relate to it. After all, when have you ever seen a photograph of someone else and thought it was you? Chat rooms provide the greatest abstraction of all type. The text distends identities to such lengths that they render chat-users into mere cartoons versions of themselves, made out of type. As McCloud writes: "Meaning retained. Resemblance gone. Words are the ultimate abstraction."[3] And, predictably, chat spaces act as incredibly immersive spaces. They possess a strange, hypnotizing hold that enables people to feel strong connections to strangers they have met only in words. How can a serious, genuine relationship form across lines of chat text? It can't but chat room denizens believe in their own construction of other screen names, now abstracted into words. Because there is no intonation, no personalization, no other evidence of the other's intent, chatters can fill in the motivations of the other party with themselves.

This probably suggests why, at the Palace, for example, simple, happy-faced Avatars sit atop a far more representational landscape. A similar phenomena occurs in European comics and Japanese Manga, where simple cartoonish subjects often interact with complex, photo-realistic objects. Some characters, especially in Manga, often morph from one panel to the next, from incredibly detailed renderings to just a few abstract lines:

[T]his split [between the iconic and the specific] is far more pronounced [in foreign comics]. The Belgian "Clear-Line" style of Herge's **Tin Tin** combines very iconic characters with unusually realistic backgrounds. This combination allows readers to mask themselves in a character and safely enter a sensually stimulating world. One set of lines to see another set of lines to be. [4]

In the Palace chat space, this distinction manifests itself far more explicitly than in comics. The 'reader' *actually becomes* the cartoon character, and the backgrounds usually *are* digital photographs. If online avatars were *only* realistic, like photographs, the avatar's real selves would feel an awkward fragmentation of identity. They would be continually conscious of themselves, always cognizant that the photograph was not them. The abstraction of the avatars occasions a metaphorical participation. Much like a metaphor suggests two similar things, the 'reader' confers identity on the avatar the same way one does a cartoon character. It is the actual interactivity of online communities that makes this participation real.

But, the most defining test medium is life itself. If the online narrative succeeds as a popular art form, it may be like a film rarely expressionistic, completely literal, and conforming to the reality of the physical world. Using everyday life as a comparison point emphasizes the choice between a literal, intuitive experience and a more abstract, experimental one. The closer to 'real life' an interactive story becomes, the more it limits itself to being just a simulation rather than a creation. Yet, the unobtrusiveness of the almost nonexistent interfaces in Myst, Quake, or the Resident's Freak Show bestow an eerie, instantly accessible realism. The absence of an interface suggests a "real life" experience, one without the screen. The experience of 'living' is foremost, so players concentrate on their experiences instead of the way they perceive them. Like someone first encountering Jodi.org, audiences first encountering a new medium cannot help but become conscious of an interface. Interfaces offer a wealth of experimentation, but the newer and more noticeable the interface, the greater damage to the fourth wall, and the lower the suspension of disbelief. The experimental yet highly visible type foundry, Emigre, whose once revolutionary bitmap typefaces are now ubiquitous and unobtrusive, proclaimed that legibility comes with familiarity. Formal conventions, clearly, become cemented over time. That is why theater audiences understand what happens when lights dim for a scene change, and why comic books are read without noticing the panels. But even the most unnoticeable interfaces are noticeable when new, as the Lumiere brothers' movie audience can attest to.

II. THE AUTHOR AND THE AUDIENCE

All mediums impose a relationship with the audience, but interactive art forms like "Pleasure Island" shift the audience involvement to the foreground. It is actually explicit, rather than metaphorical. Players in an online world operate almost like Christians after the death of God they have lost the monolithic authority of narrative and gained unlimited agency. The players simultaneously write the script and act in it at the same time, making interactive art forms aesthetically paradoxical: There is no audience because the audience is the author, but there is no singular author, no intention in the work, because all of the work is pure, aggregated intention. Because interactive art forms subsume both the audience and its responses, the interactions of the play are quickened by the computer's accelerated grimace. The intention and the affect continually feed into each other, where intention causes affect causes intention, and loop around to the point of indivisibility. Metaphorically, it is with interactive art where the audience gains access to an artistic democracy, not unlike how Lyotard describes a dialogue:

[T]he rhetorician, the orator, the poet, etc., is precisely the one who seeks to produce effects upon the other, effects that the other does not control. But if you wake dialogic

discourse... it is a discourse in which each of the participants is... trying to produce statements such that the effects of these statements can be sent back to their author so that he may say: This is true, this is not true, and so on. In other words, so that they can control, or contribute to the control of, these effects.[5]

As the player morphs from witness to actor, its increased volume and participation metamorphosizes the plot from monologue into dialogue. Clearly, there are different types of interactions with art, some metaphorical, some literal. Perhaps, in reading a linear novel or a unchangeable film, the audience encounters a one dimensional type of interactivity, in the form of an audience-author division. The audience gains spectatorship but not participation; their participation is limited to interpretation. The next dimension, a 'confined interactivity,' offers participation, but not true agency. In most video games, for example, the player usually assumes the role of problem-solver, rather than author. The problems may be a Street Fighter II 'boss' that needs defeating or a Myst puzzle that needs solving. In either case, the player can affect the immediate task but not the long term consequences of the entire world. Most experiments in interactivity from video games to interactive movies, like Lynn Hershman's *Lorna*, where the audience can opt for different choices for the plot to follow - offer involvement but only the illusion of agency. Though the audience can vote on which choice it prefers, it cannot select the actual choices themselves. The audience is still limited by the authorial presence.

A setting like "Pleasure Island" presents both agency and participation, allowing the audience not only to interact with the environment, but to act upon it as well. Though technical limitations limit the interaction, the chat space and the flowing, unfixed narrative bestows the player with greater control of the actual story greater action for greater actors. This is the third dimension of interaction, where the players acts as both author and audiences.

But any attempt at an 'interactive' narrative teeters precariously between two pitfalls: becoming 'too' interactive and collapsing into a "glorified chat space," or becoming too structured, like a passive spectator sport. Creators of interactive narratives must remember that the idea of 'interaction' implies that there is something to actually interact with. Too much power in the hands of the audience makes the story too formless while too much authorial power cuts away at the interaction with the audience.

The Interactive Myth

Mythology, for example, often presents the hero with a quest along a specific path. This is almost impossible in a nonlinear, interactive narrative, for how can a hero

venture onto a hero's quest if the quest itself is indeterminate, out-of-order, and interactive? More broadly, how can an interactive play successfully reconcile both a controlled interactivity, one that bestows agency upon the audience, and an actual plot, one provocative and poignant enough to compete with the plot structures of other mediums? How can "Pleasure Island" prevent itself from becoming a "glorified chat space" on the one hand, and an all-too-fixed linear narrative on the other?

One response "Pleasure Island" has, is to absorb this conflict itself. By subsuming this dichotomy into its own structure, "Pleasure Island" allegorizes the conflict between order and chaos, modern and postmodern. Ahurwam's manifesto implicitly demands a strict conformity and a monolithic unity of views because of its ambitious, almost modernist vision. Correspondingly, Sam's tour demands that the player passively follow him rather than interact with the world itself. Sam not only indoctrinates the player with Ahurwam's ideology; he uses the tour's form itself to indoctrinate the player with a monolithic plot structure that demands linear progression. Sam's tour is like a pro-Ahurwam version of a hero's quest, a classic myth where Sam acts like a guide, much like Virgil to the Dante of the player. Mythological quests base themselves on dichotomous paradigms between hero and villain, good and evil. Straying from the hero's quest metaphorically forces the hero outside of his paradigm from "good" to "evil":

Refusal of the summons converts the adventure into its negative. Walled in boredom, hard work, or 'culture,' the subject loses the power of significant affirmative action and becomes a victim to be saved. His flowering world becomes a wasteland of dry stones and his life feels meaningless...All he can do is create new problems for himself and await the gradual approach of his disintegration.[6]

But, "Pleasure Island" is a setting where alternating mediums abrasively slide into each other. And in a world that is already disintegrated, there is no such 'outside' of the paradigm. There is difference, not opposition. Campbell's metaphors gain a literal, descriptive quality when describing "Pleasure Island." The hero's "flowering world" may actually be a real setting, and, once a member on Sam's tour, the hero actually "loses the power of significant affirmative action" and becomes less an interacting player than a reader. As in all hero's quests, when one strays from the path in "Pleasure Island," there are extreme consequences, the "negative." These consequences, however, are ones that only seem extreme to Sam because Sam's tour is not the only quest here.

The Downtown fills "Pleasure Island" with characters noticeably apathetic to Ahurwam's grand designs. Their main goal is to live, to enjoy themselves, with or without 'meaning.' Constantly offering the hero a different way of proceeding, this other group provides something that is not so much a negative path, but an alternate

competing myth. This alternate quest of the anti-Ahurwam dissent group juts out of the "Pleasure Island" philosophical landscape as a competing meta- narrative. Leaving Ahurwam's tour may bring consequences, but to Ahurwam's enemies, these Downtown denizens noticeably dismissive of theories and manifestos, these consequences may be preferable. A player following the alternate story-line of the "Pleasure Island" rebels may occasionally stray from that path, and return back to Ahurwam. But, paradoxically, the path of the anti-Ahurwam faction isn't really a path; they are not just anti-Ahurwam, but anti-linear plot structure, almost anti- narrative. If Ahurwam represents a modernist authority and a non-interactive medium, like a novel, then his enemies represent a postmodern multiplicity of ideas and the opposite of a structured novel something probably much closer to 'glorified chat space.' Throughout "Pleasure Island," the player chooses between these two alternate paths, with one path's wasteland being the other's sanctuary, one path's worst decision becoming the other's best. Much like listening to a well- crafted debate where one changes opinions as often as there are speakers, the experience should be one of constantly switching allegiances, paths and, consequently, ideologies. Ironically, even if characters support the 'real' lives of the luddite Downtowners, they have already supported Ahurwam's manifesto by forsaking their 'real' identities for those of virtual avatars. And, though this corresponds with the rhetoric of Ahurwam's manifesto, these virtual selves also resonate with postmodern ideas of simulation in "Pleasure Island," all the characters are simulations of themselves.

At the end of "Pleasure Island" ? or at least, at the end of the version premiered at the Interactive Frictions conference in June 1999 at USC ? the player's monitor displays two locations, displayed on a chat interface on a computer within the "Pleasure Island" world (within the player's own computer). Sam urges the player to choose. This is the choice of the world itself made explicit ? the player can choose the postmodern liveliness of the Downtown or the modernist 'meaning' of Ahurwam's Compound. The end result ? which differs depending on which incarnation of "Pleasure Island" you're stuck in ? is that neither answer is the right one. Neither of these two choices can present a realistic, entertaining, interactive world, and strict conformity to either of these ideologies or plot structures would yield only fixed stagnation on one end, and energetic, purposeless chatter on the other.

Narrative Anarchy

During every rehearsal and performance before the USC presentation, the 'story' dissolved into narrative anarchy as the line blurred between the actors and the authors. By taking on the "Hamlet" role, a character assumes the power of the author to influence the story, but without critical distance or a single unifying vision. And so, the line blurs between reader and author, ringer and player, actor and interactor.

Thanks to this new economy of power relations, an audience member could potentially become a rival author, competing with the artist or programmer to maneuver the plot. This authorial democracy effectively bulldozes the fourth wall ? an audience member aspiring for control of the story steps outside of the role of the unsuspecting spectator and fashions the identity of an extra self, almost a double consciousness. They are less like audience members assuming the role of the "author," and more like little authors masquerading as unknowing characters. Regardless of what the static, virtual images may belie, the world of "Pleasure Island" is a shifting one, a tense friction between author and audience, postmodern and modern, interactivity and spectatorship, and intention and affect. This world of virtual make-believe forces a perpetual instability of identity ? the actor is at once the 'real' person, the character, and the actor as character. When a character has three selves, what are his or her motivations?

Dubois's famous condition, 'double consciousness,' characterized Reconstruction-era African-Americans as possessing a black cultural identity masquerading under a docile caricaturized version of it, the acceptable white stereotype of a black cultural identity (think of Richard Wright, who needs to conceal his literacy in *Black Boy*, or blues giant Robert Johnson's songs about the dangers of walking down a country road). This twin mentality ? simultaneously black and white, outsider and American, yet neither at the same time ? occurs in a more metaphorical way in "Pleasure Island." The actors unconsciously forget their roles as actors, and the audience consciously forgets its role as the audience. Everyone follows the leader ? but there is no leader.

Interactive dramas start with a disadvantage. How can an untrained audience improvise a scene and produce a finished work comparable to traditional drama? It can't. But the lack of structure, the lack of professionalism, is compensated by the intense audience investment:

One player says, 'You are what you pretend to be...you are what you play.' But people don't just become who they play, they play who they are or who they want to be or who they don't want to be. Players sometimes talk about their real selves as a composite of their characters and sometimes talk about their screen personae as means for working on their RL [real life] lives.[7]

When real selves are exchanged for virtual ones, males can play females, and one actor can play an entire cast. Turkle suggests that online representations of the self fracture identity in such a way as to raise fundamental questions about the nature of identity itself. Are screen name personae real people? Are feelings and sensations felt in a virtual world as 'real' as those in real life? Feelings elicited from online interaction no doubt have some legitimacy; otherwise projects like "Pleasure Island" would be irrelevant. The interactivity of chat forms allows a certain artistic sincerity. Rather

than being an actor pretending to be another person, the player assumes the identity of the avatar itself, becoming the character.

But in the same way that the audience is elevated to artist, the artists are 'degraded' to the role of audience. This abridgement of the fourth wall instantly derails any attempt at 'straight' narrative ? and almost any narrative at all. One reason is that online dramas like "Pleasure Island" place dramatic elements, like a narrative and players, on an essentially non-dramatic space ? chat space. Often times, we judge art based on how a piece compares to the inherent limits and advantages of its medium. And rather than making chat rooms more dramatic, the synthesis makes the drama more mundane. If the authors (author-actors) have the same share of the narrative as audience members (audience-actors), then they can easily become audience members as well. Conversation, by nature, possesses viral qualities. Especially in a chat room, where physical dimensions are not important, one person can talk to many. Consequently, a communal interactive project, like "Pleasure Island," can shift genres, wavering from drama to chat room if one character ignores the narrative's (virtual) reality and, instead of going along with the story, says something not just out of character, but 'out of narrative.' They succumb to what I would call "Chat Disease."

McLuhan's portrayal of the audience's participatory mirroring is not unlike McCloud's theory of the involving powers of the cartoon, where the audience invests itself into itself. Using the Greek myth of Echo and Narcissus, McLuhan writes:

The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system.[8]

Interactive arts such as "Pleasure Island" bring to an end the idea of the hermetically self-contained artwork, the singular author, and the passive audience. The world within the work, however, acts as a "closed system," one extending out of the application, into the consciousness of the player. The viewer's nervous system extends, metaphorically, from his or her fingers, into the keyboard, across miles of phone wire, back into the computer screen, and into the minds of other viewers. The audience begins a cyclical relationship with itself, like a tangled skein of its "own reflections," a series of "extended or repeated images." Narcissus looks into a pool of water and unknowingly see his own reflection. Computer users look into their monitor and perceive not just a virtual "Desktop" but their own representations:

I could see in the physical intensity of their postures how *rapt* these kids were. It was like one of those closed systems out of a Pynchon novel: you had this feedback loop,

with photons coming off the screen into the kids' eyes, the neurons moving through their bodies, electrons moving through the computer. And these kids clearly *believed* in the space these games projected.

Everyone who works with computers seems to develop an intuitive faith that there's some kind of *actual* space behind the screen.[9]

***Neuromancer* author William** Gibson's description of children playing arcade games, shows that virtual spaces are psychological spaces. It is *inside* the chat room that the group convenes, not outside of it, like the traditional space where "Pleasure Island" was first presented. Identity is peeled away and conversation becomes uninhibited. McCloud describes cartoons as icons whose abstractness allows one to relate to it, just as chat rooms allow everyone to relate to one another. With so little remaining identity, they almost become each other. The democracy of conversation links together all the participants in such a way that the result is an inter-threading of nervous systems, a Collective Consciousness. When an attempted narrative incorporates chat rooms, the 'chat' corrupts the narrative. Every comment that breaks the fourth wall, that refers to a real life outside of the virtual one, causes echoes from every surrounding character. One character suddenly mentioning his 'new car' in real life, necessarily occasions someone else to ask what kind it is. There can be no suspension of disbelief. And once this network of nerves becomes 'contaminated,' when characters drop their stage masks in lieu of their real ones, the players individually denigrate the fictional world with the reality of the chat room. The narrative democracy of the entire network switches to anarchy.

III. THE FUTURE OF THE PAST

In March 1999, SF MOMA director David Ross and Peter Weibel of ZKM, the German media museum, both agreed that the Internet was less of a medium, but a new system of mediums: There is no such thing as Internet art. After all, what intrinsic similarities occur in the hypertext feverishness of Jodi.org, the networked murder of a Quake-style shooting game, an unchanged scan of a painting, a regurgitated corporate web page courtesy of Mark Napier's Shredder, and the sometimes thousands of years old literature at Project Gutenberg? Very little. Rather than being a single medium, new media allows for a number of different possibilities, but the greatest impact may be its effects on the past. Photography contributed to the obsolescence of painting and the celebration of celebrity, and new media may not undergo an artistic revolution, but cause the other, older mediums to undergo an artistic evolution. "Pleasure Island" offers what could be a model for the future of narrative, with maximum involvement, minimal technical resources, and already existing critical issues. Though "Pleasure Island" does not contain the best attributes of all the different mediums, the traditional

mediums have yet to react against new media. We are slowly beginning to see post-Web graphic design: smaller type, more marginalia, shorter stories, textures of ones and zeroes. But these are only superficial changes. In the same way that an artist alters the pre-existing tradition, as T.S. Eliot wrote, each medium alters the qualities of the medium before it:

[W]hat happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the **whole** existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature, will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.[10]

Notes

1. Rodriguez, Andres, *The Book of the Heart*, New York: Lindisfarne Press, 1993: p. 21.

2. McCloud, Scott, *Understanding Comics*, Massachusetts: Tundra Press, 1993: p. 30-36.

3. Ibid., p. 47.

4. Ibid., p. 42-43.

5. Lyotard, Jean-Francois, and Thebaud, Jean-Loup, *Just Gaming*, Minnesota: University of Minnesota, 1989: p. 4

6. Campbell, Joseph, *A Hero with A Thousand Faces*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973: p. 59.

7. Turkle, Sherry, *Life on the Screen*, New York: Touchstone, 1995: p. 192.

8. McLuhan, Marshall, *Understanding Media*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997: p. 41.

9. Turkle, Sherry, *Life on the Screen*, New York: Touchstone, 1995: p. 265.

10. From Eliot's popular essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," which can be found in *The Sacred Wood* or at Project Bartleby, at http://www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/eliot/sw4.html .

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