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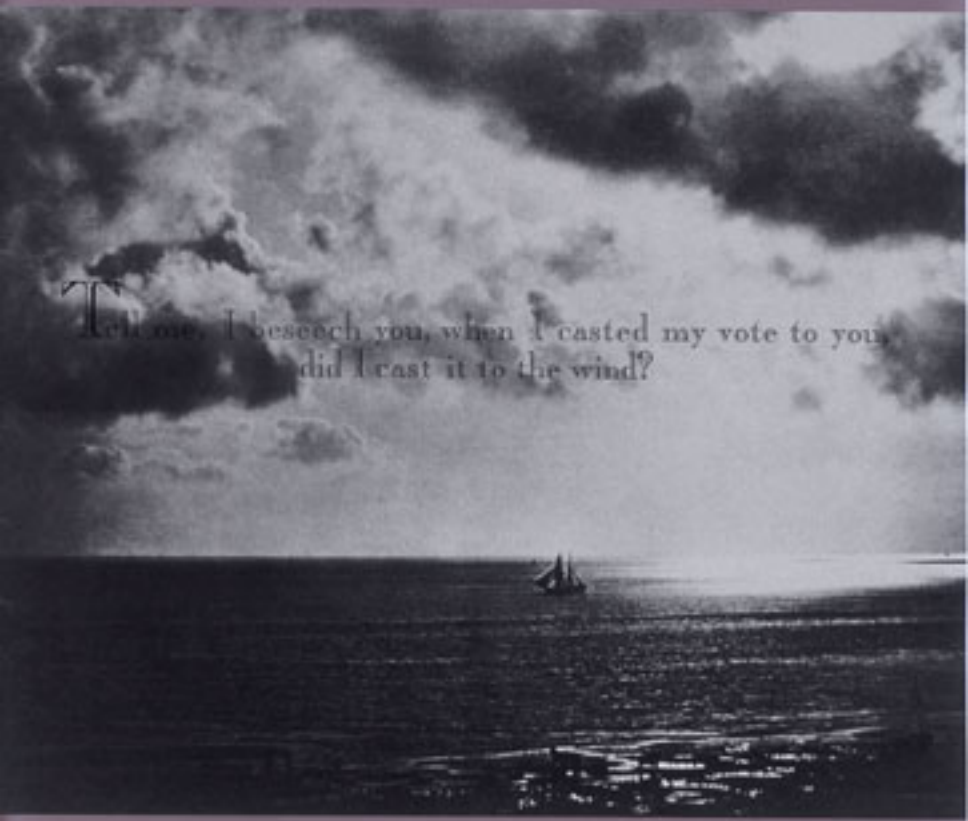
SCHOOL OF THE ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE AT UCLA Volume Four Number Two Spring 2001



ON THE COVER *Inaugural Exhibition of the Critical and Curatorial Studies Program at the Hammer*

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE *The Harry Smith Project at Royce Hall, Victoria Vesna on the Blurring Boundaries between Disciplines, UCLArts in L.A.: Community Outreach*

OP Art

OP ART

COLLABORATION | THIS IS NOT A PIPE

Victoria Vesna, chair of the Department of Design | Media Arts, is the contributing writer for this issue's **OP**inion on **ART**.

When I arrived at the School of the Arts and Architecture a year and a half ago to help build the reinvented Department of Design, faculty members had already discussed renaming the department to better reflect its technological focus.

After numerous lengthy discussions that often waxed philosophical, we finally agreed to expand Design with a | Media Arts. That is a | not /. A slash denotes and/or, which is not what we had in mind. The symbol | , called a pipe, comes from computer science, and is not yet part of the literary vocabulary. Indeed, it is difficult to find it on your keyboard unless you are a programmer. To us it represents communication technologies; it is the line that blurs the boundaries between disciplines and creates new hybrids yet to be defined and named. The pipe symbol also marks the goal of moving beyond the idea of working between disciplines, the traditional interdisciplinary approach that in the end simply reaffirms the existing delineations. Instead, it points to an active collaboration of people who willingly let go of their roots and work together to develop more complex ideas of how culture operates.

There are no hard and fast rules for use of this symbol outside of computer systems administration and

By introducing this line of communication technologies, collaboration is assuming a new meaning and even shifting the way art is created and experienced. It happens on many levels and in many ways, and unfortunately for those who would like a clearly organized world, there is no one straight formula. The audience | artist relationship changes, as well as our perception of the individual | group. As projects grow more elaborate, the need to work with others is simply a necessity; and we can consciously plan projects in which the audience becomes an integral part of the production of the piece. With the Internet, we have the option of collaborating with people who we never even meet.

Take for example a collaborative project by a group I am involved with - the UC Digital Arts Research Network (UC DARNet). The multi-campus research group consists of faculty | artists from six campuses in the UC system who are involved in creative research that utilizes technology. Recently we were granted multi- campus research group (MRG) status. Shawn Brixey, from UC Berkeley, initiated our first commission, to create a collaborative artwork for a conference and exhibition at Arizona State University (ASU). Throughout the project's development we experienced the familiar difficulty of scheduling everyone to meet in physical space. At first we were baffled about how an art project could emerge out of such a situation. But, through e-mail and phone conferencing and even an

programming languages. In computer science, the | tells the computer to take the output created by the command to the left of it and use that as the input for the command to the right. For example, we could type: date | program, or Design | Media Arts.

Metaphorically speaking, incorporating the pipe means accepting that things are not what they seem, reminiscent of Surrealist Ren&#65533; Magritte's famous painting "Ceci n'est pas une pipe."

Now that I have introduced the pipe symbol as a metaphor for blurring boundaries, I would like to shift to the main implication of this symbol: it absolutely requires reframing the idea of collaboration.

occasional meeting, we managed to come up with a concept that not only reflected that difficulty but incorporated it directly into the project. Instead of all of us trying to be in the same place at the same time, why not get one person to represent us all? Lynn Hershman, from UC Davis, had worked with film actress Karen Black, who had appeared in two of Lynn's movies as well. Lynn suggested that Karen be our "secret agent." Karen agreed.

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OP Art

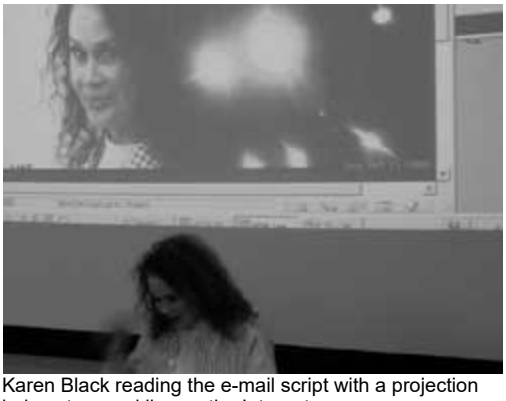
Shawn started developing an earphone piece and a small lipstick camera that Karen would wear. Robert Nideffer, from UC Irvine, compiled and edited our e-mail exchanges to give her as dialogue for her performance on site. She started coming to the Experimental Digital Arts (EDA) space here at the School of the Arts and Architecture, to test the equipment and practice. Fabian Wagmister, from Film and Television at UCLA, was helping test the communication. Louis Hock, from UC San Diego, came to the EDA to help work out some ideas, and Sharon Daniel, from UC Santa Cruz, flew in to work with Karen and Robert. At the ASU conference, the organizers expected nine faculty to show and share their knowledge. Instead, there was only one person present - Karen - speaking for us all. Or rather, we were speaking through her. Sharon, Robert, Fabian, Shawn, and I were in Arizona, hiding in the back room while we monitored the video coming from her head and the conversation that was taking place.

This collaborative project could be interpreted as simply a fun piece, and it was. But it also has tremendous implications for how we may work together in the future, which necessarily has an impact on the student | faculty, and research | development - the very heart of our UC system.

I am not offering any answers on where this will end up, just introducing the pipe, which, for those of you who are interested, on a PC is located on the far right, the last key right above the enter key. Press shift and there you are. The line that blurs is part of your vocabulary.

> *By introducing this line of communication technologies, collaboration is assuming a new meaning and even shifting the way art is created and experienced.*

In the background monitoring the video from the head-mounted camera and listening to the conversations. Left to right: professors Victoria Vesna, Fabian Wagmister (UCLA), Sharon Daniel (UCSC), and Shawn Brixey (UCB)



Karen Black reading the e-mail script with a projection being streamed live on the Internet