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INTRODUCTION

< This issue >

Craig Harris

This issue presents profiles of work by Johannes Birringer and by Ron Rocco. Johannes Birringer presents background about several performance works, and a dossier about his performance troupe AlienNation Co. Birringer's web site provides additional information about this group of diverse creators and performers.

Ron Rocco presents a web version of his work "The Horizon is Nothing More than the Limit of Our Sight". The original version was a physical installation, and the web site provides a graceful glance at Rocco's "exploration of a psychic boundary". The Rocco profile also presents a view into his work "Berlin Diaries", a personal story-based web presentation. I try to reflect some of the character and flow of this web piece in the text version of the profile appearing in the text-distributed component of LEA. Web versions of the profiles will appear soon.

Leonardo Digital Reviews contains an insightful perspective about humanity and our sense of body and self in a review by Rudolf Arnheim. I found the perspective on the work of Santiago Calatrava particularly poignant, so much so that I am driven to find out more about this work. Additional reviews by Roger Malina and Sonya Rapoport fill out this month's edition of LDR.

Work on the LEA web site has been progressing. There is a new Publications section, which will grow quickly now that the structure is in place. Also, look in the coming month for a new database section that will greatly facilitate maneuvering throughout the LEA contents.

< **Ron Rocco** - Two Works on the World-Wide-Web >

The Horizon is Nothing More than the Limit of Our Sight

In the spring of 1990, I was asked by the Brooklyn Museum to create a work which would fill one of the museum's contemporary art galleries for the exhibition, "Working in Brooklyn". My ambition was to use the installation at the museum to address the precarious state of our shared relationship with the natural environment. The title for the work, "The Horizon is Nothing More Than the Limit of Our Sight", was extracted from the funeral eulogy of my beloved mother-in-law and naturalist Shirley Wood, of Block Island, Rhode Island. This work which stands as a memorial to her spirit was inspired by her continuous efforts to bring parcels of land into conservancy on that island.

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The installation consists of three elements assembled within the darkened room. At the entrance to the installation a video monitor stands before a labyrinth of steel barricades, tree branches and underbrush. Beyond these obstructions stands the third element: a luminous copper house-like structure imprinted with the pattern of tree branches through which light is transmitted. The technology used in the construction of this element originated in the computer industry. A circuit board - a copper-coated laminate over fiberglass - was photographically processed and then acid-etched to reveal the underlying translucent surface in the pattern of the tree branches. Six panels were then constructed into the house-like structure and illuminated from within to display the organic framework.

The video monitor, which the viewer encounters first upon entering the room, sets the mood and cadence for the approach to the installation. The video screen depicts a dense landscape of underbrush and ponds. The image, a looped 30-second computer sampled segment of video footage, attempts to recreate the strange sense of distortion I encountered in a dream where a flat terrain warped up into view obscuring the horizon. In the video segment selected the perspective drops from a few dozen feet above the ground to the edge of a continuously approaching topography. A complete shot of the landscape is never shown although one expects the camera to rise above the horizon line at any moment.

This view from above while moving rapidly across the wooded terrain is interrupted only by the reflection of blue sky in the ponds below. The images, which have been altered with an image processor, have a color and

texture that is odd and unfamiliar. They have been described by art critic Jeanne Greenberg as, "making the landscape appear self-generating with its Kelly greens, stark whites, and fluorescent blues." This modulation of color and juxtaposition of earth and sky is a recurrent theme of mine, a metaphor for disorder. Here in this installation the video tape hints at a horizon which is implied in the distance. But this horizon is never seen and it is this that generates the viewer's urgency of expectation. As Greenberg points out, "This tape, then, with its relentless movement and saturating view, becomes a primer for the tension between the work and the viewer."

During my study of the archaeology of technology at M.I.T. the word 'horizon' was often used in reference to a unification of peoples sharing common stylistic traits or employing similar technologies. I have chosen to transform this term for my own use and to imply with it a new unification of peoples operating with interests of a larger human-ecological character.

My interest is to use the 'horizon' to exemplify the transformation of our relationship with nature. The installation serves to represent the conceptual limits which create dual worlds of nature and man. The work also alludes to the metamorphosis of our conceptions to a point where all worlds become a coherent whole. The separation is, in fact, just another construction of man.

This quest to find the horizon, to come to some fixed point of tranquillity, is what finally leads one away from the interminable passage through the video landscape. At this moment it is the copper object glowing in the distance that draws one's attention. This house-like icon is framed from this vantage-point by the seven foot square steel barricade which, although it remains a physical obstruction to passage toward the object, contains a cone-shaped surface which recedes from the viewer funneling vision to the icon beyond. The viewer now has two methods of approach. From each side of the barricade, a corridor is defined. On one side I delineate this corridor with the unbroken length of the steel mesh, an imposing man-made barrier. On the other side the steel mesh barricade is broken only to be replaced by a large tangle of brush and fallen branches, a natural obstruction, which is no less an impediment to one's passage. Together they portray an enigma which envelops the copper object.

This house-like icon is the viewer's 'golden temple'. It enshrines the aggregate of concepts each of us brings with us germane to home, community, and civilization. On both physical and metaphorical levels the house and its brilliant surface unites the spheres of man and nature. In resolving to navigate the maze of barriers, with the goal of reaching the lit house, the spectator symbolically confronts our labyrinthine impressions of nature, which up until now have isolated us from it. With a view fixed upon the copper surface of the solitary icon one finds direction. In conclusion, it is during the exploration of this psychic boundary that one can approach a meaningful ecology. And as Greenberg concludes, "Upon completing the voyage, one finds spiritual completion within the house and the energy it emits."

RON ROCCO 1992<P>

(Jeanne Greenberg quoted from the catalog for the exhibition "Working in Brooklyn-Installations", The Brooklyn Museum, 1990)

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There is now a version of this work for the World Wide Web, and the following textual characterizations provide a glimpse of how the work is portrayed. The design of the web pages captures the sense of approaching the same vantage point from two directions:

The distortion of the man-made ----- In passing to the left, around the installation, the viewer is confronted by a 7 foot steel barrier. The cold, hard and sharply defined metal offers no opening.

The glowing image of a house entices the viewer and we are drawn closer the wall recedes from us, opening onto a window with a view of the single illuminated object.

The enigma of the natural world ----- In passing to the right, around the installation, the viewer encounters a tangle of brush and branches which create an impenetrable barrier.

The glowing image of a house entices the viewer and we are drawn closer the wall recedes from us, opening onto a window with a view of the single illuminated object.

Transformation spaces ----- The fusion of all possibilities in a single illuminated object.

THE BERLIN DIARIES by RON ROCCO

[Editor's Note: Personal stories have become a prevalent aspect of artists' exploration of new media, especially on the World Wide Web. There is a natural affinity between the multi-layered and interconnected way that our human sensibilities operate, and the way that the web reflects the multidimensional nature of information. One of the challenges that we face is to find ways to integrate the nature of the content with the technological representation. The following textual excerpts from Ron Rocco's Berlin Diaries provide a sense of both content and flow within the web implementation. The '[' brackets indicate links on the various web pages, and as readers will note there are layers of links that weave through the content, providing a familiarity through layers of repetition that reflect "Berlin's many layers".]

[Explore more] Tonight's sky was full with clouds in enormous formations, like a map of Anatolia. Huge thunder clouds moved in from the northwest. They rolled in from the sea over central Europe to Berlin. The sky was a patchwork of light, the clear Prussian blue of evening was accented with monoliths of white. Earlier, the clouds passed across the setting sun and glowed like immense Chinese lanterns. Thunder and darkened billows still tower over the western sky where the sun dropped from sight. These clouds could be seen ringing out massive gray curtains of rain. Suddenly they were upon Berlin and I left the roof as the report of thunder filled the Hof. When the rain came it fell square to the ground, direct and uninterrupted. There were no wind blown torrents. It was like the watering of a garden and the plants were animated by the falling sheets of rain. Above the trees, outside my bedroom window, I looked down upon a rolling canopy of leaves shivering with the flood. In twenty minutes it was all over. [Silence once again returned to the Hof.] [Berlin 1]

[Berlin 1] BERLIN 21/6/91 The S-Bahn Station at Alexanderplatz, the East's beloved Alex, had an other-worldly feel at night. Walking there was like passing into a caldron of time. Alexanderplatz was caught in a [social vortex] which accelerated one into a strange present, pulled from an even more inexplicable past. In my mind, I imagined I could reconstruct Berlin's past by observing the rails which passed through Alex. There was, not far from here, a station known as the Palace of Tears, near the once named Marx-Engels Platz, where DDR 'burgers' shunned by their comrades passed into exile, through the subway of the west. Further on, passing into the western half of the city, were the ruined tracks of the Anhalter Bahnhof, choked with a fifty year growth of [white birch trees]. [Explore More]

[social vortex] This is a city of phantoms. During the DDR days it was the phantom maps, with their grayed-out city core representing the forbidden west, that left no clues for the easterner of what to expect on the other side of the wall. Today it is the wall itself that has become the phantom, along with the procession of S-Bahn place names which have been banished as non-places: Dimitroff Strasse, Marx-Engels Platz, Leninallee, Karl-Marx Strasse, Bruno- Leuschner Strasse, Otto-Winzer Strasse. These are the fallen victims of cultural re-alignment. In Berlin the emotional landscape is hidden, like terrain under a new coat of snow. So much so that people can speak of a 'Mauer im Kopf', an intangible presence shouldered by 3.5 million inhabitants. The outlines of the recent past are similarly blanketed over. On the surface there remains a metallic calm which denies the turbulent past. The edges are still there but they are just below the surface, just under what one can see. Like the neon signs newly placed along the Karl-Liebknecht Strasse, which barely cover the faded signage of their predecessor, most buildings bear a palimpsest of the city's earlier tracings. Only someone who knew the nature of the city's [scars] could perceive the tenderness that was present in those places. Never tranquil, yet dormant, till the end of the world that is Berlin! Immer Unruhig!

[Silence once again returned to the Hof.][I fulfill a dream] BERLIN 20/8/91 KOTTBUSSE TOR What a strange metamorphosis! This energy which drives me to reject all that I have known, all that I am comfortable with, is insanity. I jump into this new world and find it entirely intact waiting for me to fill my place. How uncanny and almost haunting! Things really are bigger than the sum total of their parts. I feel I could have been here for years and yet? The world shifts and political empires rise and fall. The landscape changes and people move from place to place. What is it that guides the change, something which passes beyond consciousness? What a strange world of rich and diverse bounty. I came to the brink in New York, to the edge of the abyss. I hauled a friend in from over the edge and then by some virtue I won myself freedom. The [10,000 things] all went flushing down the toilet. Cars, beaches, summer houses, theaters, drinks, dinners the whole world of it went out in a whirlwind of events. [Explore (white birch trees)]

[white birch trees] BERLIN 20/11/91 SACKGASSE! Walking I spent this night walking through Kreuzberg, from Sylvia's house along the Paul-Lincke Ufer eastward. The drizzle was just enough to moisten my forehead. As my mind wandered I began a long line of reflection. It had been clear to me from the start that there was much at stake in returning to Berlin: The state of my marriage was unclear. My life in New York was shattered and in some moments I even called my soundness of mind into question. But returning to Berlin was necessary. It

was my re-awakening. There is passion here, the tempo of which brings on a fever in me. I have too much energy. I feel I can not extract myself from the force of experiences. I am caught in a stream of emotion and events. I can not sleep and as I walk off my insomnia my mind moves rapidly through the night.

For a moment I stand at the Hobrecht Brucke. I watch the white swans glide through the evening water. Their phantom-like images are distorted by a winter breeze. The shadow of the bridge encases their reflection in a frame of darkness. The streets have been fairly empty and very quiet. This evening holds a looming potential. Above the streets the ardor of lovers charge the night air with sound. This drifts down from an open window as I pass. There is no end to my loneliness. It gnaws at me. I am losing everything I value. [I fulfill a dream] and yet the dream promises nothing. Emptiness. Soon another apparition will fill the void.

[10,000 things] BERLIN 29/8/91 SCHINKESTRASSE I hear the fireworks outside and I scramble to get out and up high enough to get a view. I have to be fast. I rush for the ladder to the roof and being unfamiliar with it and its shakiness, I back off. I run into the street. I can still hear the fireworks around me, up high, but just out of view. I race to the corner where I surely could see them. As I arrive at the spot, I see the afterglow of the last shot. They are gone. [The time's up.] Your out!

[The time's up.][scars] BERLIN 10/7/91 There were also the tracks that paralleled the Kiefholz Strasse, near Treptower Park. These crossed a tressel bridge to reach the western bank of the Landwehrkanal and at various, more congenial times, transported coal between the two Berlins. The landscape there was desolate and barren. From the bridge one could still observe a row of steel lamp-posts which once illuminated the now phantom wall. Here one was a short distance from the vast dusty lot which marked the site of the Gorkitzer Bahnhof. The place was haunted by the remains of a tiled pedestrian corridor, once interior to the now vanished structure of the rail station. The residents of Schlesisches Tor, my friend Ulla's grandmother included, would run to this spot and huddle along the narrow passageway, during the frequent Allied bombing of the city at the end of the war. Now the decapitated tunnel lies like an open wound across the face of this open stretch of land. Soon it too will be covered by one of Berlin's many layers.

Biography ----- Education: Center for Advanced Visual Study at The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge, Ma. Master of Science in Visual Studies. Candidate. State University of New York, College at Purchase, N.Y. Bachelor of Fine Arts Degree. Fordham University, Bronx, N.Y. Bachelor of Science Candidate.

Selected Exhibitions and Performances: Kunsterhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany: "The Berlin Project" Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, N.Y., N.Y. A Performance: "Zaroff's Tale" ISEA95 International Exhibition of Electronic Art, Montreal, Canada: "Andro-media 2" The Banff Center, Alberta, Canada: Installation for the "Visualization of Sound" The Brooklyn Museum of Art, Brooklyn, N.Y. Installation: " The Horizon is Nothing More than the Limit of Our Sight"