



## Fluid Architectures running Wild: How wild are they really?

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Current  
Issue

Archives

Editorial  
Info

Search

Interact

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My response speaks from a position of questioning. I perform questioning not as an "expert" or as a "scholar" - but I perform questioning for that is often the mode of existence for voices that cannot claim Author-ity. Having said that, a disclaimer - I have Author-ity - why else am I being included as a respondent? I am not for one moment claiming the space of a silenced "Other." Nor am I performing the voice of the Other (whatever that is). I am located within the same spaces that deny access and Author-ity to many around the world. So I want to state up-front that even my performance of questions in this sense is problematic. Impossible subject positions cannot be spoken through the possible. But some of us believe that not invoking (im)possibilities just continues to route around them, leaving structures of power unaccountable.

These are both very interesting sites, and are cleverly done. They seem to be exploring possibilities of interactive internet spaces and are sometimes profound. My initial response was of great excitement. I accessed the sites from my home computer - sufficiently upgraded (thanks to a certain geeky 19 year old). Then I tried it in my office on my six year old Mac; then I tried to print to read; and then I started to "talk" about the sites - by email, msn chat, and with students in my graduate seminar. I am still excited at the possibilities. I am still impressed with all the work that went into the projects. At least there are people who are willing to try, and I know these creative and inspired people will try harder when they continue to engage the questions that they have started with in these projects. The **idea** of performance and technology - the **idea** of reaching audiences through the Internet - fascinates me.

*But wait - when we speak of audiences - the webs confuse me. Who*

*are the audiences? What are the assumptions of audience in the very framing of "Technology" of "Performance" - where are these notions implicitly located according to the producers? [Perhaps I ought to respond appropriately...]*

So who is the audience for each of these sites? ACJ readers? The "world"? My response essay will engage a few themes that emerged out of my interaction with the sites and my interaction and conversations with other people around the viewing of these sites.<sup>1</sup> I reiterate the importance of not only asking how questions of location, audience, form and content, ontology and epistemology, aesthetics and politics, intertextuality, non-linearity and interdisciplinarity<sup>2</sup> implicitly and explicitly shape the way these sites were produced, but I also wonder how we will formulate theoretical and critical lenses through which to analyze such sites with these issues in mind. For instance, what multiple meanings emerge and for which kind of reader/audience are such multiple meanings and negotiations possible within producers' articulation/explanation of the meaning? Where and how are these sites **contained**? What are they **containing**? What are they refusing to **contain**?

*"poetically integrating history and progress each new number in the series is generated by the sum of the two numbers that precede it"*

*rheomode*

*what is your plurality - what singularity or Universal is it feeding into?*

I have struggled with these - with viewing them. I have "too many" voices in my head, **that's** for sure - and of course when I look at something on the Internet with its continual claims at globality and universality, I bring to my viewing experiences a lot of expectations based in the celebratory promise of the **medium**. Here, I speak of the technospatial imaginary based in narratives of Progress and Science.

Is it that my viewing subjectivity is shaped in interaction with the discourse and hype surrounding **anything** per-formed on the Internet, that I expect that the sites floating around in the ether would need to address the "world"? What does it mean to address "the world"? Why do I have such an expectation as I view some online performances and not Others? Which are the sites that take the trouble to locate themselves and not assume that their per-formances and concerns are Universal? What socio-cultural, geographical, political and economic realities instill this humility? By location I do not mean explicit location either. I do see sites that **locate** themselves - have to - by the very fact of the language choices or image

choices and domain name (not always) choices. You know they have not the luxury of assuming Universality of their voices. So what does it mean when a site claims that it is "a mosaic in which one voice is never dominant," a work that is defined by relationship?

A main combining theme for both these sites as I see them is "Theo[t]re"- a lot of Western [3](#), Academic based "Theo[t]re" [4](#) in fact. But ironically, not enough Theory that takes location to task. So how might future "Theo[t]re proceed" if we were to consider issues of location, audience and processes of globalization implicit in both the Technological and Academic locations of the projects?

The Joker... The Clown ... the Fool... the Trickster. If this trope is being used to problematize conventional modes of articulation - is the form of the site helping this in any way? What does it mean to try to build or invoke theories of "invisible theaters" in online spaces?

**Form:** So why does the joker site rely so heavily on written text? In blocks - constraining multivalence? Yet some would characterize even this presentation as "non-linear" - I suppose there is a "non-linearity" in relation to the form that print readers are used to. However there are degrees of linearity, degrees of multiplicity. As a webspace, I found the seeming linearity of both pieces restrictive. As a print space (which these were emulating much to my frustration) not linear enough to offer clarity. As someone who likes to experiment with the supposed potential for non-linearity and circularity of webspace, I found the block nature of presentation of text in both installations a bit frustrating since - while it was clear they both wanted to move away from traditional print ways of doing things - they were unable to - were they thinking traditional print audiences? But I also know that programs such as Macromedia Dreamweaver, Flash and Director are easiest to use as "Block spaces" when text has to be inserted . . .

*But of course it is the very use of such programs that makes it impossible for us to "Decode" and "Recode" into more readable formats.... less user-end options - for manipulation of content, re-negotiation of meaning, reading in-between, outside and against...*

Did not both sites suggest that this was **not** the intention of the producers?  
Hmmm...

So we audiences can't view like traditional print audiences - even in "linearity" - the font for instance, should be bigger - so there is also a seeming confusion about audiences here - since the way that the installations were being built does not seem to allow for downloading as word or .pdf files which we could then re-adjust and/or

print for the print type linear reading . . .

*Once again - in asking questions of "how" it is not my intention to debunk the producers/authors and their attempts or intentions. I share these concerns as a content producer who experiments with web content and design myself (and I have not found solutions yet either).*

*So just what is possible online if we are talking about Technology and Performance?*

However - why do we assume non-linearity is non-control or that it is liberating? That is an assumption implicit in narratives regarding hypertext - I can give you any number of references. Reading of "non-linearity" and hypertext is itself a learned activity, just like reading from a book or watching various genres of television shows and film, is it not? So, as a couple of my students pointed out **nonlinear** is a fashion statement too. It is elitist - even in its re-claiming and appropriating of older styles of narration as it erases the histories and contexts within which these nonlinear story-tellers told their stories. *Like ethnographies, non-linear webspaces also frame.* Could it also be, as another of my students commented, that the "avoidance of being 'linear' is used to excuse lack of clear meaning or attention to detail"?

What is clarity in the context of non-linearity - how will we reach our audiences?

[Another beginning... unfinished...](#)

*As a respondent, I too shall adopt an aesthetic - one that mimics Gomez Pena's .... as a cyber-per-former myself - I shall interrogate the possibilities for interrupting and engaging your performance - in the spirit of co-productive strategies advocated by Boal . . .*

Gomez Pena attempts (not without problems and not necessarily always problematizing his own location either) a process of implicating audiences in his techno-mediated performances. His goal is to put spectators in a position to recognize their own complicity in the production of stereotypes.<sup>5</sup>

### **Author Note**

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## Endnotes

1. Research is a social activity (so much for the lone intellectual myth!) and when I am asked to respond, read, write - it always leads to interesting conversations and insights. I thank students from my Spring 2003 graduate seminar on Computer-mediated communities and various family members who visit me virtually during my morning coffee and Internet session for their insights and discussions.

2. "However the interdisciplinary process and structural framework of cosine proved to be at least as substantial as the product, and it is with the intention of articulating that construction that we document this work" write the authors of cosine, and I appreciate the hard work and thought that went into this.

3. It has become so **expected** and **cliched** for "international" and so-called "non-western" based intellectuals (people calling themselves "postcolonials" etc) to use the term "Western" - I hesitate to do so - but I am performing too. What I mean to say is the discourse is inaccessible to much of the world - western or not - so **what communities are these productions speaking to?**

4. But I really like the idea of Theo[t]re...

5. I thank my colleague Lisa Wolford for sharing her work and thoughts on this subject.

[Back to Top](#)

[Home](#) | [Current Issue](#) | [Archives](#) | [Editorial Information](#) | [Search](#) | [Interact](#)