Tina Cassani/Bruno Beusch (TNC Network)

electrolobby
(next-level attitude)

The electrolobby *is the festival's in-depth digital culture & lifestyle immersion arena. Prior to their face-2-face encounter with festival attendees, the* electrolobby *residents met with curators Beusch/Cassani for a kick-off chat to flesh out where they're coming from.*

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The meteoric rise of the Internet to the "top level domain of life"[1] over the past several years has afforded its acolytes, these next-generation creatives, first-hand experience far beyond their rarified fields, and deep into the rough and tumble world of the New Economy. Visionary commuters, they step nimbly through their different roles, straddling the subculture and the corporate world, constantly searching for that creative kick. This friction, which deeply affects their sense of self, releases a creative energy at the hot spot where subculture, entertainment, design, gaming, open source, and e- & m-business come together. And this energy manifests itself in oftentimes unintended, but always startlingly fresh, directions.

In a stimulating environment, a unique blend of dayclubbing, informal media conference and networked showcase, the *electrolobby* recreates the intense subdigital climate in which these smart hubs, hacks & killer apps that push the envelope, are spawned and spun off. This year's *electrolobby* will be a gathering place for professional gamers, game designers, renegade programmers, wireless experts and open law advocates. Their fields of activity are diverse, yet they have a common set of influences, values and ideas—a new frame of reference which we like to call "Internet-driven digital culture & lifestyle."[2]

Like those bad boys from the fresh young new-media agency *Kerb*, based in Brighton, UK. Their fuel: a fun-oriented, irreverent approach. Why?

KERB: Because most of the world takes it all far too seriously! Chill out!

TNC: You stress the fact that nobody has ever left *Kerb*. What makes *Kerb* such a cool place to work at?

KERB: We are all young, creative people who enjoy what we do immensely. We build funky games and websites and have a lot of fun doing it. Working in Brighton also has its benefits. We are by the sea in a town mainly populated by young people and it's a good atmosphere. We are also putting off the day when we'll have to go and get a 'proper' job!

TNC: You specialize in youth oriented design and marketing. How do you stay in touch with what's going on?

KERB: We stay in touch because we are all part of the very culture which we are targeting! The Brighton "scene" is quite cutting edge and up to date and this certainly helps. If we like something then it is very possible that other "similar" people will too. One of the key things we have at *Kerb* is honesty with what we do. There is no kidding ourselves about our work even if we have put a lot of time into it, if it isn't going to cut it then we'll throw it away and start something else.

TNC: The success of *Kerb* shows that small, innovative agencies can, in your words, "kick the collective asses of the big corporate agencies." What makes them more exciting?

KERB: Within *Kerb* people are allowed, expected even, to be as creative as possible for every job that we do. And that shows when dealing with clients. If a potential client asks us to pitch for a viral marketing campaign, let's say, then we don't just go back and tell them what they want to hear. We will approach the job individually and really think what might work—even if it is really outrageous! This is what makes agencies like *Kerb* popular—thinking outside the box ...

KERB (www.kerb.co.uk)
The bad boys from this Brighton-based new media agency design tough, online games for viral campaigns on the Internet. With their cleverly conceived system for cross-media use of Flash animation, these classy specialists in funky youth marketing have taken their place among the pioneers in the current convergence of new media and TV culture.
Feat: Jim McNiven, Pete Barr-Watson, Sermad Buni, Dylan Van Loggerenberg.

TNC: You are about to run the first full TV ad using Flash animation. Looks like a major step in your development.

KERB: Definitely, it is. Our traditional market place is crumbling around us, you only have to look at all of the job cuts and company closures to see this. We have naturally moved into TV animations because our house style quite suits this medium. We now have two TV ads currently running and our cartoon series is under development at the moment. We are looking to do much more in this area as time goes on. There has been a lot of talk over the last year about "convergence" and now we are really beginning to see it happen at all levels. TV companies want an 'in' to New Media and vice versa.

TNC: We know that games play an essential part in *Kerb's* daily life.

KERB: Games are very important to the people at *Kerb*. We grew up in the console generation and we have all, almost without exception, owned a whole series of console evolutions from the first Atari to the latest PS2. The games you see on the Web now are better than many of the first and second generation console games and this is an important fact to remember when developing stuff for Internet distribution. Players have high expectations regarding gameplay and our experiences help us to realise this for every game we develop.

TNC: What's your interest in getting involved with the *electrolobby Game Jam?*

KERB: I'm very concerned that the UK is not participating in Europe very much and I'd like to rectify this a little. Plus the other agencies involved are highly regarded by us and I'd love to work with them on this.

TNC: We see the *Game Jam* as an example of "coopetition"—cooperation among competitors. Some of the participating agencies are competitors on a business level—yet they accept this opportunity to share ideas and exchange know-how during these four days.

KERB: This kind of thing definitely couldn't have happened before the advent of our industry. I love to see the clients reaction when they tell us who we are pitching against for a project only to reply, "Hey those guys are cool. We know them quite well!" One of the best things about our industry is the cooperation of agencies and the sharing of knowledge and events like the *Game Jam* can only strengthen this. I think it is unique because our industry is both creative and technical. At the end of the day it comes down to the creative use of that technology and this is unique to the agency itself. That's why people share knowledge.

Raw Gaming Energy

The primary mission of the *electrolobby* is to constantly monitor the scene to detect Internet-related creativity and innovation at their earliest emergence, and then to provide a conducive, engaging and entertaining format for presentation that meets the needs and expectations of the digital generation. This year's *electrolobby* pays special attention to games. They're number one in the current creative rankings. Not just because of their increasing cultural, social and economic relevance, but more because all aspects of a creative, innovative way of dealing with the Internet converge in the production process of online games. And of course, because games are fun! Over the course of four days, visitors to the *electrolobby* will be smack in the middle of it all, as during the *Game Jam.* That's when young designers and programmers from leading agencies around the world will come together for a creativity check. They will collaborate to develop an online game-hall—from the conception of the gameplay, to the character and sound design, all the way to the actual programming. The *electrolobby Game Jam* provides a glimpse into how next-gen-creatives do their thing, and thus makes digital culture understandable from within the context in which it originates. The French *Team cHmAn* will join *TNC Network* in assuming responsibility for the concept of this marathon extravaganza.

CHMAN: During the lead-in to the *Game Jam*, we're designing the interface for a multi-level game. Then teams from the different participating agencies will each set up a respective game and level representing significant gameplay in the history of computer games from 1972's *Pong* to today's networked playgrounds.

TNC: It's hard to even imagine something like the *Game Jam,* with its deep collaboration of international media agencies, happening before the advent of the Internet.

CHMAN: The Internet has been a blast of fresh air, and none of the participating agencies would even exist without it. The fundamentals of the Internet (open system, information exchange) inspire unique events like the *Game Jam:* very creative but without a specific objective. The message, especially now in light of the economic imperative, is that the hunt for profits can't be pursued at the cost of hyper-creative élan and technological innovation. This is the only way to develop interactive content which fully realizes the potential of the technology, while remaining true to the spirit of the Internet community.

GAME JAM

The electrolobby mutates into an international game lab! In a radical four-day challenge, a crack global team of high-profile next-gen-creatives pool their talents to program a massive online game hall. A once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to witness the genesis of online games, from concept and gameplay to character design and programming, in the very pit of creation.

Feat: Team cHmAn, Sulake Labs, Kerb, Moccu, Lippe, Kaliber10000, mach5design and Praystation.

A co-production of Vectorlounge (www.vectorlounge.com) and TNC Network (www.tnc.net).

TNC: The *electrolobby Game Jam* also represents the third stage of *Vectorlounge,* a series of Web events with an international cast. What are your chief motivations in participating in these Jams?

CHMAN: We want to share and improve our skills in interactive online design with others who are actively involved in the field of graphics and Internet games. And, for once, to do it without consideration of the constraints that determine our workaday world, rather in total harmony with the inspiration of the

teamchman.com

moment. But *Vectorlounge* also has an activist agenda. All jammers have been influenced by the diverse graphic scenes: graffs, video games, ads, video clips, film. While we're the creative generation engendered by the Internet revolution, we also grew up with classic media as critical consumers (and some of us as active producers.) These Jams give us the opportunity to move about on all these different levels of expression.

TNC: *Banja,* your online game environment, is one of the three nominees for the Golden Nica in the Net Vision category at Prix Ars Electronica 2001.[3] Also nominated was *Sonic Team's* networked console game *Phantasy Star Online* (PSO) for Sega Dreamcast. Where do you see the current lines of development in the online game sector?

CHMAN: The game industry is flourishing, but it's also absolutely hardcore. Sega is a really good example here: they're stopping production of Dreamcast even though this console was absolutely revolutionary in the area of connectivity, which is just what *PSO* goes to show. We believe that video games and the Web are developing in the same direction. Video games use the Internet to bring together core gamers; the Web brings in the dimension of the medium and of community, which appeals to a large audience. And everybody's getting ready for the broadband future.

TEAM CHMAN (www.teamcHmAn.com)
This creative posse of designers from the north of France, with their ground-breaking online game environment *Banja,* have made a name for themselves around the world as pioneers in dealing with up-to-date vector-based animation technology. In the *electrolobby, Team cHmAn* is responsible for the programming of the *Game Jam* interface.
Feat: Sébastien Kochman, Olivier Janin, Damien Giard, Sébastien Jacob, Stéphane Logier, Alexandre Guesnerot, Gaël Cecchin, Denis Bonnetier, Rodolphe Bonvoisin, Gauthier Havet, Gunther Welker.

TNC: *Team cHmAn* produced the most recent French TV commercial for *Fatboy Slim.* A sign of the growing success of Flash style? Or the search for new markets in old media as Web models dry up?

CHMAN: A sign that television is opening up to new sectors of creativity and production. As far as the crisis of the Web is concerned, we see this as just a macroeconomic development to clear up the market situation. This is (just about) the turbulence you would expect while new means of communication go about the process of getting established. We can only hope that the economy doesn't formulize the extraordinary potential too soon.

TNC: Your crew has really grown over the last year, currently with a staff of 30. Which brings you to a decisive point in your development. How do you succeed in remaining true to your spirit as your company grows?

CHMAN: Our maturity grows along with our staff ... We still work in small creative teams, whether it's working on *Banja* or developing new concepts. Within the team itself, the boundaries between the individual areas of responsibility remain fluid, and there is constant dialogue. Each member has a degree of creative latitude on their own turf. And the Game Jam itself is an important outlet to just let things develop in a free association sort of way ...

Gaming your Way to Work

Games can be seen as finely tuned sensors that pick up changes in the way society deals with media and technology. A series of projects successfully perpetrated by the young, Berlin-based Web entertainment agency *Moccu* illustrate how, even in the business world, new cultures of gameplaying are increasingly leaving old school strategies in the dust. How do they implement their fresh visions in the corporate environment?

moccu.com

MOCCU: It may sound like a cliché, but there is no recipe. While staying true to the client's corporate design, we try to bring in as much *Moccu* as possible: to enhance the application with playful elements, special interactive features, and a solid overall concept. We provide content within the right framework.
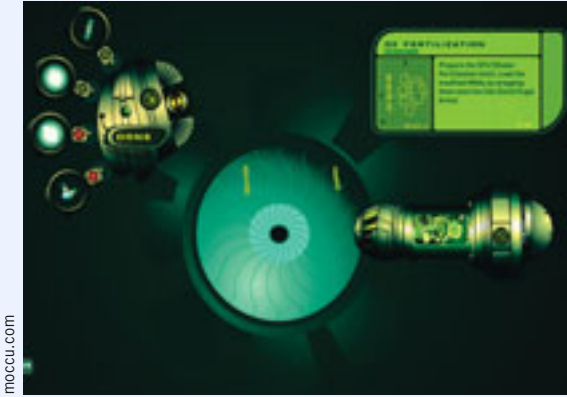
moccu.com

TNC: *Moccu* participated in the development of *Challenge Unlimited,* a recruiting game developed for Siemens, which was the result of collaboration with, among others, psychologists at the Ruhr-University of Bochum.
MOCCU: *Challenge Unlimited* was a matter of designing a novel instrument to enable potential applicants to establish contact with Siemens in a playful way. At the same time, this provided an opportunity for Siemens to initiate a goal-oriented dialogue with players whose profiles best matched the qualifications the company was seeking. To this end, an e-cruiting tool was developed featuring embedded psychometric tests that interested parties could take via the Internet. The response was tremendous, much greater than originally anticipated, so that what emerged from this is the world's largest data-bank-based personnel marketing program.

TNC: Gaming your way to work! How do you see the position of games in society?
MOCCU: We believe that the status of gaming is underestimated. A lack of orientation is quite widespread in today's Information Society; people are forced to deal with new kinds of media, information and the like. As we see it, bringing this content to life in a playful manner, as well as making it easier to access, is a sensible approach. And this project also made clear that an entertaining narrative is the best way to stimulate interest and motivate an audience. The storyline we developed for *Challenge Unlimited* was, in brief: In a city of the future—Nouvopolis—the individual participant—the CyberConsultant—is confronted by a variety of challenges. On the journey to Nouvopolis, for instance, he has to make it through a range of adventures, from a flight through an asteroid belt to a meteor that is threatening the city ...

MOCCU (www.moccu.com)

This young Berlin-based Web entertainment agency, in collaboration with psychologists from the Ruhr-University Bochum, has designed an online recruiting game for Siemens that makes it possible to discover fresh talent and test their potential to fit in with the company's staff. Alternating between large-scale commercial assignments and free-lance projects in the entertainment field, *Moccu* explores the potential of games in developing new interfaces for communications.
Feat: Jens Schmidt, Björn Zaske.

TNC: Your work on corporate assignments is balanced with work on your own personal projects.
MOCCU: *Moccu* works on jobs commissioned by corporate clients, and it develops its own projects, all the while acquiring know-how in new fields. Vital to the functioning of the *Moccu* principle is the absolute synthesis of creativity and competence in a harmony of design and technology, concurrent with the research and development of new concepts. As far as our own concepts in the entertainment field are concerned, we're currently developing, among others, a concept for a multi-installment Internet film featuring user interaction. And we are always checking out new areas, currently refocusing on 3-D.

TNC: *Moccu* is also taking part in the *electrolobby Game Jam.* What's the hook for you?

MOCCU: The most interesting thing about this for us is definitely the process of exchange with others: you meet people from the same milieu, receive some insight into the market situation in the countries they come from, get new ideas, form friendships, and develop contacts that could turn into collaborative relationships. And beyond this, the PR effect that goes along with an event of this kind plays a major role. Everybody profits somehow from their involvement, whether it's for the fun of it, exchanging ideas, establishing new "business contacts and starting points for relationships," or by meeting potential clients.
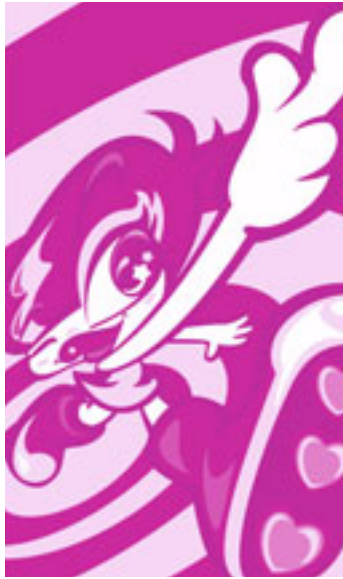
barbara lippe/game jam

Cu-u-ute!

Every afternoon the *electrolobby* pulls the shades on its bucolic view of the Danube for a little hard core action, as it transforms itself into the Screening Zone, replete with well-stocked booths jacked-up with console kool-aid and electric 3-D straws. The theme is games, and the program consists of four reels of intro sequences, trailers, exclusive previews and unreleased material from the past four years, documenting the spectacular developments in game animation. Games are being designed with increasingly sophisticated and involved intro sequences, easily on par with Hollywood's finest, further blurring the line between passive and interactive storytelling. And what's the hook for next-generation creatives in games? The young Austrian designer Barbara Lippe spent a couple of months working for the Japanese design company *FuriFuri* and was afforded a rare insight into the inner workings of a Japanese game firm.

LIPPE: Based on my experience, a job as creative at a Japanese game design company is hard work, and doesn't really have much to do with personal liberty. Nevertheless, artists can achieve fulfillment within the framework of the entertainment machinery. They have a deep pride in their creations being accessible to the masses. Whether we're talking about designers, authors or musical geniuses, this industry is capable of mobilizing all the forces necessary to turn out an ambitious multimedial Gesamtkunstwerk of fantastic quality. Tei san, founder of the *FuriFuri* Company, was an artist himself who worked in the computer games industry before setting off on the career path of an independent designer. I met many, many people who, at some point in their career, had worked for Sega, Nintendo, Namco or Square.

TNC: Games have a totally different status in Japan than they do in Europe.

LIPPE: An unbelievably high status right alongside the Japanese concept of the firm as "the ultimate mother figure." I'm almost certain that a "shrine" consisting of video game hardware adorns every Japanese living room, just as countless game centers line the streets. Game expos attract immense interest, and every age group and social class comes into contact with electronic entertainment, whether in the form of computer games, robot companions or karaoke equipment. Computer games are not regarded in the least as childish or an adolescent waste of time.

LENS FLARE SCREENINGS

The four compilation reels featured in the *electrolobby* Screening Zone consist of game animations—intro sequences, unreleased raw footage as well as exclusive previews and trailers—designed in the last four years. The program, highlighting the *electrolobby's* focus on games, illustrates the spectacular developments in the field of computer graphics, and crystallizes gaming's assault on Hollywood's domination of the entertainment industry. With examples from *Wipe Out* (featuring graphics by *Designers Republic),* *Tekken, Final Fantasy, Tomb Raider* and many more. Compiled by Onedotzero, London.

TNC: You're also taking part in the *Game Jam.* What's the draw?

LIPPE: I just really love working together with fascinating people from all over the world creating something that's both fun for me to do and gives pleasure to others. That's the really beautiful thing about it, creating something entertaining. And that's why, for me, the label "entertaining" doesn't contain even a whiff of contempt for something inferior. It's a fundamental motivation for me.

TNC: What do you see as your role in the *Game Jam* team?

LIPPE: I'm the one who'll be nurturing, motivating, oozing charm, and flirting, as well as filling the game with a cast of wild and crazy characters. It's gonna be a a great scene, real party, and we're gonna have a real good time together!

TNC: You're responsible for character design at the *Game Jam*, which was the area you worked in at *FuriFuri.*

LIPPE: *FuriFuri* is a young, small, but extremely ambitious and idealistic company that specializes in character design, (drawn figures have enormous importance in Japan) but is also involved in designing websites, videos, games, books, posters, T-shirts, toys, entire marketing concepts. At *FuriFuri,* I created websites and character animations for, among others, Japanese fashion brands and for a computer game promotional video that was broadcast on MTV Japan. Plus, I totally blew them away at their monthly *FuriFuri* parties with genuine, double rum shot, Austrian tiramisu!

TNC: What was your impression of the Japanese designer scene in comparison to Europe?

LIPPE: At first, it was really hard for me to understand how a group of young creatives could have such a fervent, conservative, love-it-or-leave-it relationship to a firm, and the firm having such absolute priority in their lives. It's also interesting to see the extent to which Japanese designers' understanding of color and typography goes so far beyond our narrow, constricted standards. Although, in many ways, the Japanese seem to take things a bit too seriously for me, at the same time it seems vital to them, in design as well as in music, to appeal to people on an emo-

barbara lippe/game jam

tional level. The components of "cuteness" seem to be unbelievably essential to the Japanese. It's no coincidence that the ecstatic exclamation *kawaii*!!!! (cute!!!) is such a common expression for the young modern Japanese.

TNC: For someone like you with a great love for virtual characters, Japan must be total paradise.

LIPPE: The Japanese love to surround themselves with virtual creatures, infiltrating their real lives with drawn figures. Fictional creatures are solidly rooted in Japanese culture, and heartfelt relationships can be found among all age groups to unreal creatures, like *Pikachu,* that are dismissed as little kid stuff over here. The Japanese always have their electronically animated escorts with them, either on their cell phones or handheld devices. I think it's really a shame that European design places such a high value on dry rationality or unfathomable intellectuality rather than appealing to the senses and emotions. I think this is precisely why many Japanese very quickly lose their interest in European design.

TNC: What do you think of the notion being put forth at this year's Ars Electronica of young creatives preferring to work in fields like media, entertainment and advertising rather than in the arts?

LIPPE: They have, perhaps, grown weary of the artificial, desiccated superstructure that calls itself art today. An ad spot, for example, is a little piece of art, a display of creative and aesthetic fireworks that can sometimes have more of a concept and, above all, much more emotional impact than some works of contemporary art. Furthermore, media, entertainment, and advertising are all strands in a global network that makes it possible for these young creatives to get involved on an immediate and substantial level with like-minded individuals around the world. I am eternally grateful for the existence of the Internet.

Mobile Stickiness

The *electrolobby*—an archipelago of net cultures—has been conceived of as a biome for Internet-driven lifestyles, where curiosity and the desire for information, mix freely with social pleasure and activities, both organized and spontaneous, according to the whims of both residents and visitors. Its layout is straightforward enough to allow for direct contact, as well as offering diverse avenues for alternative link-ups. In addition to viewing reels of game animations, imbibing jellybeans at the *electrolobby* bars, watching the *game jammers* develop an online game in front of you, or sweating out a death match between expert pro-gamers, you can take the opportunity to schmooze with the highly approachable residents and visitors in the bustling halls and shadowy booths of the *electrolobby*. Where else can you spend a week where you are free, even expected, to distract, interrupt and prevent 40 hot designers, coders and entrepreneurs from going about their work? And if that is not enough, you can attend one of the hosted Instant Panels *(Digital Instinct, Games Unlimited, Kännykka Quick Lunch)* and get the latest scoop on digital trends, everything from networked gaming to the evolution of the Internet from the desktop into ubiquity. Andrea Hoffmann is a wireless expert living in Japan. She uses the Japanese *i-mode* service as her point of departure in a discussion of m-toys and the prospect of the mobile Internet. Which brings us to the obvious question: how many cell phones does she carry around?

HOFFMANN: At the moment, I have only only two: *i-mode* and *ezweb* (WAP). I mostly use the *i-mode* cell phone for 1) email, 2) i-mode content and 3) phone calls, in that order.

TNC: You live in Japan. What do you miss while in Europe?

© machiko kusahara

HOFFMANN: When I'm in Europe, I miss everything about my *i-mode* cell phone. The truth is that I usually carry it with me (amputee syndrome), even though it doesn't work. Like a smoker who's trying to kick the habit, every 20 minutes or so I try in vain to check my mail on my *i-mode* cell phone or to take a quick peek at the latest headlines.

TNC: In *Keitai Zone*, you describe the culture that has emerged in Japan surrounding mobile phones, cell phone tuning and the mobile Internet.

HOFFMANN: *I-mode* cell phones are a fashion statement and a highly personal tool for Japanese teenagers. Colorful phone straps with figures hang on almost every cell phone, stickers make each cell phone unique, and new ring melodies and background images are being downloaded by the thousands every day via *i-mode*. Mobile emails are used for private conversations, even if a computer or a phone is close at hand and would even be more convenient. Employees use *i-mode* cell phones to send and receive private mails from their workplace. Since *i-mode* phones are always "online," emails are always delivered immediately to the addressee, which enables communication to become even more direct. It becomes something much more like a chat.

KEITAI ZONE

After the cyberspace landrush of the '90s, real space, particularly urban space, has again become a source of interest to new media creatives due, in large part, to the mobile Internet. The *electrolobby m-toy show* provides a glimpse into the pervasive wireless culture that has emerged around the *i-mode* standard in Japan.

Feat: Andrea Hoffmann

TNC: *I-mode* is a tremendous commercial success in Japan, and is often characterized, at least here in Europe, as a revolution.

HOFFMANN: *I-mode* is not a revolution, neither technologically nor commercially. What might be revolutionary about it is an intelligent business model that made no pretensions at all of being a revolution, but rather was based on previously existing, widespread technologies (HTML, HTTP, GIF) and which, from the very start, obtained its content from other, primarily large, established providers in Japan. The novel aspect is that this content and the use of it are custom-tailored to the mobile medium. It offers users exactly what they're looking for, exactly when they need it. *This* idea works all over the world; maybe it won't develop as quickly as it has in Japan (i.e. Tokyo), but it will work.

TNC: What are the chief differences between Japan and Europe with respect to mobile communications?

HOFFMANN: Oh, that's a big topic. As far as the mobile Internet is concerned, Japan is far ahead of Europe—technologically, especially the handsets, as well as with respect to the diversity of the content and the number of users. What happened was that Europe developed a new technological standard, WAP, that didn't catch on, whereas Japan, with *i-mode,* developed a new mobile service that ultimately interested consumers far more than the pure technology behind it.

TNC: The term "mobile Internet" itself has sparked some controversy.

HOFFMANN: It's interesting that frequent users and even the inventor of *i-mode* don't refer to it as the Internet. And rightly so, because, after all, it isn't, or at least not the Web as we know it. They call it *i-mode,* or *j-sky* or *ezweb* etc. The mobile Internet will not replace the desktop Internet. These are two different tools with dissimilar aims and characteristics. You don't browse in the mobile Internet like you do in the fixed Web; you log on, and you want to get what you're looking for right away. In general, you don't use it for more than two minutes at a time.

TNC: What are the latest trends, beyond 3G services?

HOFFMANN: The latest thing in Japan is a shift towards multi-channel access for all segments of the population: desktop Web access in general, mobile access for young people, access via multimedia towers for shoppers in convenience stores, and, soon, access via fax machine and home telephone *(L-mode)* for the older generation.

TNC: After the cyberspace landrush of the '90s, real space, particularly urban space, has again become a source of interest to new media creatives due, in large part, to the mobile Internet. In a world where stable referential boundaries are increasingly dissolving, is localness becoming infused with a new value?

HOFFMANN: Yes of course. Local conditions are crucial to the mobile Internet. There are two different aspects of the mobile Internet's local referential framework: A) I can access mobile content and services anywhere, *independent* of where I am at the moment. I can communicate with others via email wherever I am and wherever the people I'm mailing are. B) I can access particular mobile content and services *depending* on where I am at the moment. For example, I can call up movie listings to find out exactly which films are playing where I happen to be, or train schedules that show me how to get from where I am (e.g. Shibuya in Tokyo) to where I want to go (e.g. Shinjuku in Tokyo). With the cell phone, you're never somewhere else—you are only reachable or unreachable.

Softlinking Digital Culture

Everything. It makes your blood rush harder and your heart beat faster (bpm > 200). It's the stuff that the Internet was dreamed up for. The real deal. We've been designing the *electrolobby* to softlink a highly diverse group of digital culture protagonists—experimental entertainers, info-brokers, food jockeys, professional gamers, and even a bio-informatics guru using Napster technology to disseminate human genome data[4]—but a 23-year-old databank aficionado has set about achieving no less a goal than linking the entire body of 21st century knowledge. Relentless and global, thousands of people are collaborating on an informal, real-time encyclopedia being staged in the style of the Digital Generation: fast, irreverent, dynamic.

EVERYTHING: That's really a good description of the intention behind *Everything*.

TNC: *Everything* is a truly exciting project. Respect! What makes it such a fascinating place?
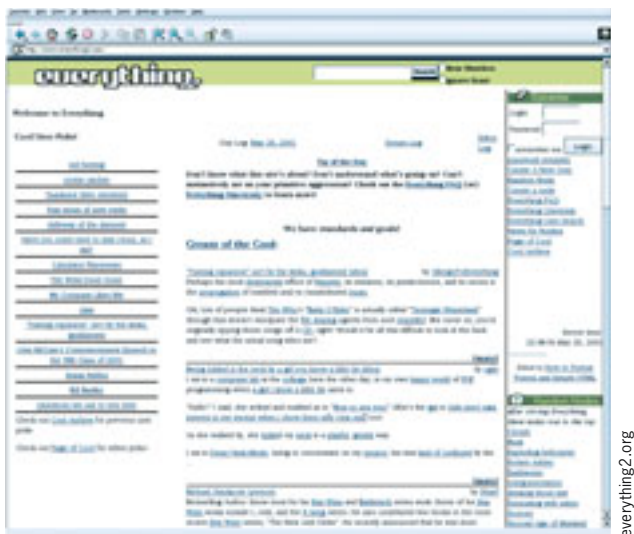
everything2.org

EVERYTHING: Well, you have a few hundred people on the site trying to be entertaining —so occasionally a few hit the mark. I think it's the sense of humor that people integrate into their writeups—it's a fine line between being informative and dry, or humorous and obnoxious, and I think we have some people who are very skilled at walking around both lines.

TNC: You have managed to generate a huge community where the members have developed a strong emotional bond with the project.

EVERYTHING: We have 34,400 users (as of May 25, 2001) and we get around 100 new accounts every day.

TNC: It seems to us that the main reason for the popularity of *Everything* is that it doesn't have one central focus.

EVERYTHING: Definitely—you can find other people interested in the most obscure topics on *Everything,* and pretty much anything you're interested in has at least some aspect of it already there. I think it's also due to the fact that there's always more to be done—there's a certain type of person that wants to read about 80s Punk Groups, and when they find that the "X-Ray Specs" node sucks, they want to write a better one based on their (supposedly) superior knowledge.

TNC: *Everything* has its very own jargon. What is a node, what is a writeup?

EVERYTHING: A node is essentially a group of writeups—nodes are the "entry" in the database, and they're connected to each other with links. When a user goes to a node, they get a chance to submit a writeup for it—that's their essay which will recieve reputation points. Nodes aren't really owned by anyone—they are simply a new point in the big database graph. Writeups—the actual content of the nodes, are controlled by their author.

TNC: What are experience points?

EVERYTHING: When you write a writeup, it starts at reputation 0—but other users can spend votes on it to raise the reputation. Every vote that's cast carries a chance to give the author an experience point (XP). Once a user writes enough entries and has enough XP they can advance to level 2, where you start getting votes every day—spending these votes will also give you XP. At level 4, a new power is introduced: "cool"—you start out with one "cool" a day, and whatever node you drop it on will get a link on the front page (temporarily) and the author will get 10 XP. As you increase levels you get more votes and more "cools."

EVERYTHING (www.everything2.org)

Everything **is a collaborative real-time encyclopedia for the Digital Generation: fast, irreverent, dynamic—a legitimate alternative to old-school collections of knowledge. It took shape two years ago in the** *Slashdot* **milieu, efficiently utilizes the Internet as a knowledge backbone, and currently contains over a million entries—from string theory to cheats to X-Men. You can find it all here.**

Feat: Nathan Oostendorp & the Everything-Noders.

TNC: It's fascinating to see how diverse influences have merged in *Everything,* such as the influence of games with the level/experience system.

EVERYTHING: I love games where you accrue a sort of virtual currency, and more points = more power—especially when you have other people in the game that you can measure yourself up against. The level/experience system is pretty much a take off on the traditional RPG-style, except we don't have weapons or monsters, just essays—the greater volume and the greater popularity defines how much power you get in the system. *Everything* started without the XP/voting system, but it's probably the most popular feature.

TNC: *Everything* has achieved a compelling balance between a centralized and a decentralized form of organization, based on your rating/voting system and the different user categories.

EVERYTHING: We have a number of different "clans" in *Everything*—formalized by giving them functions in the software: 1) Gods—are your basic Game-Master class. They can do anything in the system including nuke writeups, resurrect writeups, ban trolls or bots, and (if they know Perl) add new features. Gods are hand picked by our Editor-in-Chief Ryan "dem bones" Postma. 2) Content Editors—these users can mark writeups for deletion. Part of their job is not only separating the wheat from the chaff, but helping new users who don't understand the weird *Everything* culture. 3) Edev—a group which has read access to the code behind *Everything*. For the most part, they exist as a sounding board for new feature ideas and interface refinements—but they also can submit patches for existing bugs. Anyone can join Edev by telling me that they're interested in the code.

TNC: Your concept of softlinking is very intriguing.

EVERYTHING: Softlinks appear at the bottom of every node, and represent the traffic patterns of the users coming to/from it. The more frequently a link is traversed, the higher up on the list of softlinks it is. However, softlinks are also bi-directional, so you get an idea of what nodes are linking to the current node, as well as the links going from it.

TNC: The *Everything* core team has a close relationship to the core *Slashdot* team. What other influences were central in the elaboration of *Everything?*

EVERYTHING: Open Source was essential to the development of *Everything*—because it provided zero-cost tools for creating web databases, but also the idea of collaboration that's behind it. BBSes were a huge influence for me, personally, because they were the first multi-user environments that I had ever experienced. The structure of the site comes right out of Computer Science graph theory. I was taking a class on that subject at the same time I was writing the first version. I also think *Everything* owes a great debt to Usenet, online message boards like *Slashdot, Everquest* and *IRC/Instant Messaging.*

TNC: Where do you see the future of self-organizing content bases over the next years?

EVERYTHING: I think we still have a great deal to learn about getting people to communicate

electronically, and the way that people form organizations and communities online. I think that higher code literacy would greatly speed up this process, since it would increase the rate at which these organizations can be formed. Already, setting up a *Blogger* or a *Slash* site is within the grasp of many more people than it was two years ago—I think that phenomenon will continue.

Target Audience

How would members of a generation for whom video games and mobile technology have become indispensable accessories of their cultural accoutrement conceive of a multi-user environment today? The answer is provided by *Habbo Hotel*, a virtual five-star hotel for teenagers. *Habbo* room service includes an integrated console for mobile communication enabling guests to contact each other via SMS to their young hearts' desire.

habbo.com

HABBO: The Console in *Habbo Hotel* is basically an instant messenger device. When you meet people in *Habbo,* you can ask them to become your friend and if they agree, they are added into your friend list. If you make good friends in *Habbo* and want to keep in touch with them, it makes sense to be able to communicate when ever you feel like it. So we thought that it would make sense if you could send SMS and email to your *Habbo* friends from the Console. All the communication happens with your *Habbo* identity, so it's safe and anonymous in that sense.

TNC: *Habbo* was built as a fun hang out for kids. It was based on your experiences with *Mobiles Disco*.

HABBO: *Mobiles Disco* started as a hobby project in autumn 1999. A friend of mine asked me to make a web site for Finnish rap band *Mobiles,* and that's how the project started. The band died quite soon, but the site—a retrogaming-style disco on the net—started to live its own life.

TNC: And then came *Hotelli Kultakala,* the original Finnish version of what became *Habbo Hotel.* How did it evolve into the English version?

HABBO: *Hotelli Kultakala* was a real success and we quickly saw that this concept has to be taken abroad. Then we started looking for investment of setting up a company in the UK to launch *Habbo Hotel,* which happened in January 2001.

A social entertainment arena in the form of a virtual five-star hotel conceived by members of a generation for whom games and mobile technology have long since become a necessary accessory to their cultural finery. Habbo room service includes a communications tool that enables the hotel's teenage guests to keep in touch via WAP and SMS, and to communicate with each other at a keystroke's notice.
Feat: Sampo Karjalainen, Aapo Kyrölä & the Habbo-Guests

TNC: The biggest innovation introduced in *Habbo* was a target audience.

HABBO: *Mobiles Disco* was solely a culture project. We made it just for fun and paid the hosting fees together. *Habbo Hotel* tries to be fun, but it tries to become a profitable service as well. And based on the experiences from the Finnish version of *Habbo Hotel* we found out that the most natural target audience is young people (14-18 years). They have time and they keep on coming back. For example they might not yet have their own apartment in real life, so they can get a virtual one. Or they might find it easier to start meeting the opposite sex first in a virtual environment.

TNC: How many guests reside in *Habbo Hotel?*

HABBO: In the beginning of June 2001 we have over 190'000 *Habbos* registered in the hotel. Average visit length is currently 27 minutes.

TNC: Prior to *Habbo Hotel,* you developed a multiplayer game with the advertising agency Taivas for Finnish mobile phone operator Radiolinja. How did that experience impact your future work?

HABBO: It was a good environment to get started. But it turned out that our projects are quite different from theirs. The good thing was that they gave us a chance to focus on the development itself: we got premises, computers, financial backing, lawyers etc. And it was an inspiring environment with other creative designers going around.

**TNC:** Is Finland a particularly inspiring place?

HABBO: Right now it feels like there's quite a lot of fresh activities going on in Finland concerning culture, music, design and technology. Finland is a small country and it's quite easy to get to know people and build social networks. Running a business is relatively inexpensive, at least compared to London. Finland is also a good test environment, especially when talking of mobile services, because almost everybody has a mobile phone and people really use text messages and other services.

TNC: You are participating in the *electrolobby Game Jam.* The gaming influence is very apparent in your company, Sulake Labs.

HABBO: For *Mobiles Disco* the biggest infuences were Playmobil toys or old Commodore 64 and Spectrum games. Actually half of the people here in Sulake are somehow retro gaming-oriented. Short time objectives in games let you forget all the big, confusing questions in life for some time. Gaming makes life meaningful!

Bedroom Gods

The integration of Flash- and Real-Player in PlayStation2 announced earlier this year at *E3* (Electronic Entertainment Expo) in Los Angeles is just one of many examples of how the Internet and the game industry are converging. Aspects of networked play and community have an increasingly important role, particularly in the console field. But the roots of this convergence run deep. In *From Bedroom Programmers To Media Gods,* game designer Simon Carless tells the story of the demo scene subculture, which served as a talent factory for many of today's hot-shot designers in the game sector.
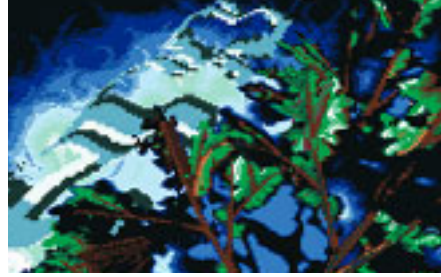
michael kargas aka optimus/dirty minds

CARLESS: Demos are perhaps the first brand-new artform of the digital age. Here's a definition that I originally wrote for the alt.sys.amiga.demos FAQ file back in around 1995: "Demos, (short for 'demonstrations'), are executable programs created purely for art's sake, featuring impressive or spectacular audiovisuals. People make demos because they want to make something that will be spread worldwide, seen by a lot of people, and appreciated by them for being skilfully designed. Perhaps you can think of a demo as a music video on a computer, but with equal emphasis on the visuals, the music, and the code. It's something to watch, enjoy, and marvel at the creativity of. Demos can be beautiful :)"

TNC: When was the peak of the demo scene?

CARLESS: Demos started out, perhaps, on the C64 and other early computers in the mid/late 80s as 'crack-intros', when people removed copy-protection from games they added a little message to promote themselves. But it grew into a stand-alone artform, and at its peak, arguably on the Amiga scene in the early 90s, it was the most impressive real-time effects you could do on any computer, and made by teenagers in their bedrooms, disseminated worldwide by snail-mail and BBSes (this was pre-Internet, of course.)

TNC: The demo-scene was a true underground phenomenon. What's the link with today's game industry?

CARLESS: Musicians, graphics artists, and especially coders have migrated very freely from the demo-scene to games, and in most top companies, even in America, where the demo-scene didn't hit too big, you'll find kickass employees (often Scandinavian, generally European!) who are now a very important part of the games industry. This started happening in the mid-90s, and is probably one of the main reasons the demo-scene has declined so sharply, and it's come about simply because the bedroom coders of the demo-scene knew how to wring every last drop out of their programming.

TNC: What are the key skills for these people?
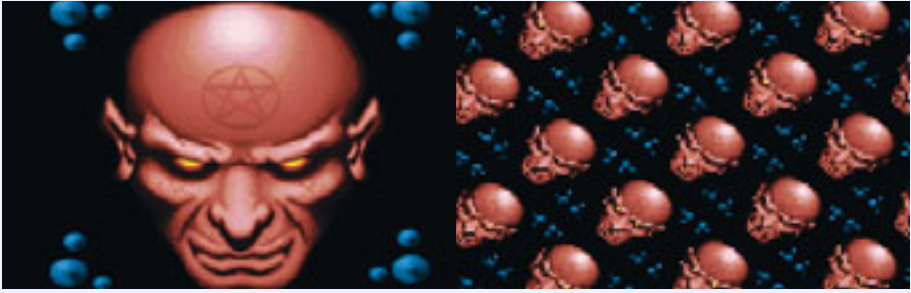
CARLESS: Many of them can program assembly language, which used to be the way to access hardware very directly and get the fastest performance, and is still used nowadays to code the fastest 3D engines on consoles such as the PlayStation. Even if universities did teach games programming (and only a few are starting to), you need people with a lot of experience who know how to write efficient code in games and work to constraints—having a kickass engine can make all the difference.

FROM BEDROOM PROGRAMMERS TO MEDIA GODS
(mono211.com/ars-electronica-2k1/)
In a series of micro-lectures, a game designer and veteran of the demo scene shows how the computer demo subculture became the talent factory for the game industry, and reveals the connections to current blockbuster games like *Black & White.*
Feat: Simon Carless, aka hollywood

TNC: Any high-profile examples?

CARLESS: Demo coders can do that, hence, for example, the fact that prominent ex-sceners work for companies such as Core Design (creators of *Tomb Raider),* Shiny (the people who did *Earthworm Jim* and are now working on the videogame version of *The Matrix),* also Lionhead (Peter Molyneux's new company, makers of *Black & White* etc.), and so on.

TNC: The *Lens Flare* screenings show that the relationship between the Hollywood film industry, and the gaming industry is evolving. Looking at film-to-game and game-to-film examples, like *The Matrix,* where do you see it going?

CARLESS: Games with much stronger storylines often look like movies nowadays, which they certainly didn't 10 years ago. So things are moving along quickly. I think that it's possible to get a lot of neat cross-pollination between the two genres. The mediums are very different, though, so it's still good to look at crossovers with some scepticism. It's good that not all films that become games are awful nowadays, and some try to take a creative approach to adaptation, but it's really just themes that are being translated right now, not anything more (in the sense that *Tomb Raider* is a movie about the characters created in the video-game.) Things like the interactive web puzzles created for the movie *A.I.,* much like the game *Majestic,* actually add plot, suspense, and other aspects to the movie before you even see it, which is neat, to say the least.

TNC: At this year's *Milia* in Cannes, Philippe Ulrich from Game-Company Cryo Interactive said that, due to increased production costs, investment money is going primarily to mainstream vehicles. A far cry from the times when he himself started in the eighties …

CARLESS: I think that in some ways that's right, and in other ways … perhaps not. It's always tempting to think about a 'golden age' where you could do just about any-

thing you wanted, but that was when you could code an entire game yourself in a short time and using small amounts of money (easier to start over!), and the audience was a lot more hardcore and willing to accept repetitive, simplistic game-play (which still has a place nowadays, I hasten to add, it's just that people expect and enjoy more, too.) There's still room for individualistic games, definitely. But the games industry is mainstream now, so we need to accept things such as multi-million dollar budgets and complex schedules and use them to create a more sump-tuous and playable experience. If you have more time or resources to make games, then they become deeper and more enjoyable, often. This is good.

TNC: What's the role of independent game producers like Eric Zimmerman's group, Game-Lab, creator of *Sissy Fight,* and one of last year's *electrolobby* residents[5] ?

CARLESS: I think small, independent studios are very important. For games that can be played directly on the web (such as *Sissy Fight),* you can work with a very small group of people, because the games are still relatively simple—at the 'bedroom coder' level often, if you'd like. And there will always be work for a very small amount of people working together as a company—WAP and cellphones is probably the next area we'll see small teams making games succeeding, as well as Gameboy Advance.

Low-Tech Mindset

micromusic.net

The counterpoint to the state-of-the-art game animations featured in the *Lens Flare* screenings will be provided by *Micromusic,* presenting their game-sounds direct from retroland. These trackmasters, who move fluently between pop, game culture and digital lifestyle, have created an 8-bit ambience to embellish the kick back, hang out atmosphere at the *electrolobby*. But is *Micromusic* an Internet label, a retro-gaming community, a self-promotion platform or an experimental entertain-ment interface?

MICROMUSIC: Basically all of the above ;) At first, *Micromusic.net* was a purely virtual project. It wasn't until last year that we also started to look for and develop activ-ities outside of cyberspace. With the release of the *micro superstarz2000* CD com-pilation, we actually put out a real product on the real market for the first time!

TNC: How large is the active community at the moment?

MICROMUSIC: Of the 4,000 people who make up the community, 5% can be charac-terized as active. At the moment, we're collaborating with about 200 musicians, graphics experts, artists and creative people. The other 95% consists of those who are primarily interested in the music we present, and/or would like to share their interests with like-minded people: Web designers, journalists, game freaks and kids. We offer people a variety of communication options. The possibility of direct communication together, combined with the audiovisual and editorial con-tent that we provide, creates a certain club ambience within the community.

TNC: Your community has attracted some well-known individuals from the electronic music scene.

MICROMUSIC: In the beginning, only relatively unknown artists came to us to release their music via download. Since then, they've been joined by increasingly well-known folks. *Micromusic* has made a lot of friends, especially in the *Rephlex* scene in London. *Lektrogirl, Ed DMX (DMX Krew), Global Goon, Bodenständig 2000* as well as *Cylob* have joined our Community, and are making unreleased material available for download.

MICROMUSIC.NET (www.micromusic.net)
A digital lifestyle platform for screen kids, joystick lovers and audio geeks, revolving around computer game sounds and the motto "low-tech music for hi-tech people." The label playfully establishes bridges between the current Internet music communities and the pioneering scenes and formats.
Feat: Paco Manzanares (aka wanga), Mike Burkhardt (aka superB), Gino Esposto (aka carl).

TNC: In the *electrolobby* 2000, we invited *Monotonik (Mono211),* a tracker label[6]. You've got wide-ranging links with these scenes. Do you also have connections in Japan?

MICROMUSIC: We're very interested in what's being produced in Japan because we know that's where most of the low-tech devices are coming from. Nendo Ani and dtj moodibbo are the first Japanese microartists we're working with, and we hope this will enable us to get our foot in the door of the Japanese scene. We're proceeding under the assumption that this will be just a matter of time and, optimists that we are, we're already developing a *Micromusic* logo featuring Japanese characters.

TNC: The high costs of hardware and software were among the reasons for the emergence of the low-budget tracker scene. Today, that's not as much a factor with costs down. Why the continued interest?

MICROMUSIC: The people who are working with low-budget tools nowadays usually do so because they realize that it's not the tool that makes a good track, but rather the inherent spirit, the mindset, that's reflected in the track. The aim of a low-tech producer is to generate maximum flavor with minimal equipment. A playful aspect takes an important role in this: sheer humor and the intense pleasure of reduction. Anyone who can program a track on a Gameboy is well received by the community,
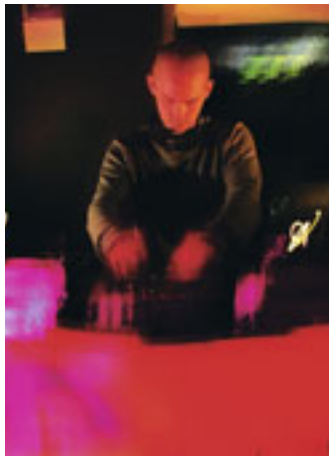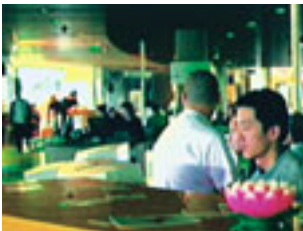
© pierre-emmanuel rastoin

his credibility is enhanced, which in turn boosts the ego and cranks up the creativity. And of course it's a tremendous challenge to tease cool tracks out of electro-junk.

TNC: You have strict criteria for accepting tracks featured on *Micromusic.*

MICROMUSIC: In contrast to the huge MP3 portals like mp3.com or Vitaminic.com, where anybody can make their music available to be downloaded, we work with a filter system. About 100 tracks are sent to us every month. From these tracks, we attempt to filter out the most interesting contributions. To accomplish this, we've programmed a voting tool which can be used by the *Micromusic* crew and our immediate circle. We take this selection procedure very seriously: we listen to the tracks several times, evaluate and test them in a variety of situations before they are finally activated. With approximately 1,000 titles a year, this is a difficult, time-consuming job, but we do it and this is why our members love us.

Law of Creativity

Of all the industries rocked by the Internet in recent years, perhaps none have been so fundamentally challenged as has the music industry, with the film industry not far behind. Their response, legal salvos imposing technical blockades on user's access to digital music and movie files, has raised concerns by some that consumer rights are being rail-roaded in a brazen land-grab by corporate interests under the cover of intellectual property and artist's rights. One of the aims of the lawyers who initiated the *Openlaw* Project is to assert the interests of the public against the entertainment industry, and to protect consumers fair access to open forms of digital distribution. Why is this more important today than ever before?

OPENLAW: Intellectual property law is not only meant to ensure that someone can make money from inventive or creative work, but also to enable the public to see and build upon that work.

TNC: What's gone wrong?

OPENLAW: We seem to have lost that balance of late, with too little thought to how the public benefits from extending intellectual property monopolies. Copyright law has traditionally been made by those who have a seat at the bargaining table—the corporations who send lobbyists to the Capitol, as Jessica Litman points out in her new book, *Digital Copyright.* Yet as the Internet allows anyone to become a publisher and could enable new uses of copyrighted works, the public feels the restrictive effect of those laws more directly. *Openlaw* aims to give voice to those public concerns.

TNC: How great is the impact of these laws on creativity within digital media?

OPENLAW: Intellectual property law is supposed to foster innovation and creativity. In the U.S., at least, the Constitution authorizes Congress to pass laws specifically "To promote the progress of science and useful arts, by securing for limited times to authors and inventors the exclusive right to their respective writings and discoveries." By protecting authors' rights, the law is supposed to encourage their art.

TNC: But it doesn't always work that way ...

OPENLAW: Law can also get in the way of creation, for example by making it too difficult for one artist to build upon another's work, or by preventing critics from using excerpts in their discussions of works. Law can also unduly restrict the dissemination of art, as overprotection can prevent it from reaching its audience. Some people have reacted to the possibilities of digital media—broader, cheaper dis-

tribution—with fear, and have persuaded governments to step in with laws that lock down the media, restricting its uses and distribution as if the audience were the enemy. We've lost the sense of proportion, forgetting that protections of intellectual property are ultimately aimed to protect the public's interest in creativity. So just at the time when art could be made more widely available, which I suspect is many artists' goal, new laws (the WIPO Treaties, EU Copyright Directive, and U.S. Digital Millennium Copyright Act) encourage technological restrictions.

OPENLAW PROJECT (www.openlaw.org)
In light of controversial legislation dealing with copyrights and the use of information, *Openlaw* is developing innovative strategies to protect the interests of the public versus those of the entertainment industry. Lawyers and laypersons work out shared lines of argumentation in accordance with the open source model—highlighting, among others, the DeCSS trial dealing with the decoding of the DVD copy protection.
Feat: Wendy Seltzer.

TNC: These issues are key to one of the high-profile cases supported by *Openlaw:* the DeCSS case.

OPENLAW: A Norwegian teenager and some still-anonymous colleagues developed DeCSS, a program that decrypts movies on DVD and allows them to play on un-licensed players, such as computers running GNU/Linux. *2600 Magazine* published the DeCSS code on its website and was promptly sued by the eight major U.S. movie studios. The studios sued under a provision in the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA) that prohibits dissemination of tools to "circumvent" access control measures on copyrighted works—a provision enacted following similar language in the international WIPO Treaties. *2600* has argued that the DMCA cannot impose controls on the use of copyrighted works and bar "fair use," such as preventing people from playing DVDs on any machine or making excerpts for criticism.

TNC: *Openlaw* is truly a revolutionary approach to crafting legal arguments by opening the process up to a collaborative environment.

OPENLAW: *Openlaw* uses the methods of Free Software and Open Source to develop legal arguments in the public interest. We invite people to join us in the legal process of defending the public domain—developing arguments, collecting evidence, writing court briefs, and informing the public at-large. The project aims to open the law to a wider audience, and to benefit from that broad collaboration. It is said in open source programming that "many eyes make all bugs shallow"—a larger group of people will find more of a task's problems and their solutions. *Openlaw* exchanges the secrecy of closed discussion for a breadth of contribution, using the distributed resources of participants across the Internet to attack legal problems.

TNC: What are your experiences so far, in general, as well as with respect to the DeCSS case?

OPENLAW: I would say the experiment is a success. We have clearly contributed to the cases on which we have worked, and we have published arguments that I hope help to rally others to our side. Yet the cases we are working on are difficult ones, and the battle for the public domain won't be won or lost in this round.

TNC: Beyond the *Openlaw* project, what else do you do?

OPENLAW: I'm a lawyer, doing intellectual property litigation as an associate with Kramer Levin Naftalis & Frankel in New York. This fall, I will also be teaching an Internet law course at St. John's University School of Law. I don't get much sleep.

Gourmet Mushrooms

The *electrolobby*—the marketplace of opinions, projects, branded cultural commodities and their pirated bootlegs—is the transfer node of choice for hyperactive link-mongers and info-dealers. The infamous crew of *Kaliber10000,* aka *The Designer's Lunchbox,* will also be prowling the premises. This funky, down-to-earth e-zine is making an essential contribution to the ongoing development of the medium by working on a daily basis to motivate creatives worldwide to pursue mutual exchange and, with its no-bullshit attitude, mercilessly driving up quality standards. *K10k* describes itself as follows: "Our mission is to put the focus on design, on the whole creative experience, and show people out there that not everything has to be streamlined, menu-to-the-left, make-it-look-like-Amazon."

K10K: I know it sounds a bit back-to-nature-ish, but, trust us, we are not too fond of hugging trees.

TNC: Good to know ;) Toke, you work for *Wallpaper*,* Michael, you used to work as creative director for ELK UK. It takes a good deal of creativity, one might say, to be creative within the confines of a corporate environment.

K10K: If you speak to traditional artists some will probably claim that creativity can't be nurtured in a corporate or commercial environment. Others will try to cultivate the myth of the starving artist, a slave to his/her emotions, unable to influence his/her artistic output. If you speak to digital designers some of them will probably claim the same thing. I don't think any of them are right.

TNC: And your view?

K10K: Creativity is a fickle thing, yes, but it also takes many forms, and can be provoked to rear its beautiful head by a myriad of different outside influences, including a good corporate atmosphere. I have seen work by companies that was far superior to the personal work of the people involved, because the company excelled at motivating the employees, and drove them harder (creatively-speaking) than the people could do themselves. A good corporate environment nurtures the creativity of its designers, makes them work together and thereby achieve in unison what one person cannot. A crap corporate environment puts people in a tiny cubicle and makes them spend 10 hours a day designing bank solutions.

TNC: There are a number of quality design zines on the Web. *K10k* is well regarded for its very distinct style, but also for its high quality approach.

K10K: When Toke & I started fooling around with HTML, webdesign and the like (which was way back in the glory days of 1995/96), we felt there was a big gaping hole on the web where design should have been. Zeldman was on the scene, so was *Hotwired,* but the "real" design sites were few and far between. We waited a bit, got to know the medium better, and saw how some of the other design playas like *SHIFT, DigitalThread* and *Born Magazine* started sprouting like lovely gourmet mushrooms. All these sites, however, were only updated monthly or bi-monthly, which was a bit too long for us to wait for our creative fix, so we decided to actually put our money where our mouth was, and create our own site, a forum and a playground, a creative hub of inspiration and funk, based around the concept of a weekly issue and a constant design-related newsfeed. A site that would allow all of us to continue working in this evil, soul-sucking business without completely burning out and going postal.

TNC: In your "weekly issues" you've featured quite a collection of high-profile designers from around the world.

K10K: Ever since we launched *Kaliber10000* we've been fortunate enough to work with a wide spectrum of super-talented, dedicated people, who have filled our lives with much design-related happiness. The list of issues authors is a mile long, we're currently showcasing issue Nr. 112 at the site, so we don't think it would be fair to single out anyone in particular. In our little bald heads they're all very special.

KALIBER10000 (www.k10k.net)
This sharp e-zine, aka *The Designer's Lunchbox,* has become one of today's most notorious hangouts for the international design community. With their no-bullshit attitude, its hyperactive link-dealers motivate creatives worldwide to pursue mutual exchange- and mercilessly drive up quality standards.
Feat: Michael Schmidt, Toke Nygaard, Per Jørgensen

TNC: You also provide the digital tribe with such critical life-utilities as *Moodstats™*.

K10K: *Moodstats™* is an application which helps you track and monitor lots of personal stuff, such as moods, stress, fitness, bad habits, sex, popularity, kung fu skills, etc. It also makes it possible to compare your stats to those of your online friends … There seems to be something very fascinating about watching your stress levels go through the roof, while your origami skills go down the drain. It might even help sorting yourself out; I for one, saw that (surprisingly) there was a close connection between drinking heavily and feeling tired the day after.

TNC: *Kaliber10000* has a certain Clint-Eastwoodesque flavor …

K10K: Even though the *Kaliber* part can be traced back to Clint Eastwood-endorsed caliber .44 handgun, we just want to say that we are not into guns, we are peaceful people, we just liked the name for its grandeur and using the K instead of C gets us back to our Danish roots. It doesn't really mean anything. When we were developing the idea of that which would later become *Kaliber10000,* some of the names that surfaced included Duck Driver, Urban Donkey, Tanker and Two Guys Named Joe (which we rejected on the fact that, well, neither of us are called Joe) …

TNC: :))

K10K: … but in the end we stuck with *Kaliber10000,* because it was dark, slightly mysterious, and it looked nice when we abbreviated it to *K10k.* We are very personal in our approach, we invite the people we love to help us out, and we don't compromise anything. I think this is what many of our visitors like, the no bullshit approach.

Gaming goes Pro

We're all familiar with the cliché of computers and games as a "training field" for the Information Society. But some have taken this literally and started making sport with computers, and doing so professionally. A development the *electrolobby* could not ignore, and thus: for the first time pro-gamers are honored with a platform at an international media festival! E-Sport, digital sport, cyber-athletics—these labels are all just different ways to characterize a new trend in the arena of digital culture. What's up?

progaming.de

KAMBIZ: Competition-oriented play of computer games. A new age of gaming in which you measure your strategic ability and your skill against others all over the world. Experts are even predicting that the biggest area of Internet use in the future will be this market.

TNC: Kambiz, is the founder and head of *Progaming.de,* a platform for pro gamers with international experience. And Dominik, is one of Germany's best gamers, a semi-pro at the moment, and student of philosophy and mathematics at Oxford. You're internationally known, notably as captain of the German national *Broodwar* team. How does gaming relate to sports?

KAMBIZ: Drawing a parallel to conventional sport is by no means outrageous. Just like top-level athletes, computer gamers want to be recognized for their efforts and achievements. After all, that's what they train for.

DOMINIK: For me, gaming is absolutely equivalent to a form of sport. Before I got intensively involved with games, I was a successful handball player.

TNC: What do you play?

DOMINIK: I only play *Starcraft/Broodwar* because it's the game in the pro gaming field that places the highest demands on strategic insight *and* motor skills, and can thus constitute a challenge over a very, very long time. Even after three years of intensive play, you can still keep on learning, and every game is different.

TNC: This development originated in Korea, where there already exists a massive professional gamer scene.

KAMBIZ: Korea continues to lead the way in this sector. Tournaments are already being broadcast live on TV there. Pro gamers are celebrated like top athletes are in this country. They're under contract with firms like NTT or Samsung, and receive fabulous salaries. The social status they already enjoy in East Asia is illustrated by the fact that respectable company CEOs approach pro gamers with a deferential posture in order to signal their respect.

DOMINIK: In Korea, gaming's status is like that of tennis or soccer in Germany, which means that virtually every stratum of Korean society is familiar with *Starcraft/Broodwar.* Almost everyone under 40 has already played it. And young people are enthusiastic followers of pro gaming. They watch games on TV, write fan mail, request autographs from pros, etc. I know it's hard to believe if you haven't seen it for yourself.

TNC: Computer game tournaments in Korea are also funded by the Ministry of Culture and Science. A novel idea that might interest a few Europeans.

progaming.de

KAMBIZ: "Play promotes health." In contrast to the view held around here that playing computer games makes you "dumb," the Koreans have recognized what a positive influence gaming has upon youth. Learning strategic thinking, quick reaction and team spirit, in addition to becoming familiar with other peoples and cultures, are decisive arguments in support of the efforts by the Korean Ministry of Culture and Science.

E-SPORT: GAMING GOES PRO (www.progaming.de)
Digital Culture in full effect: the first World Cyber Games, something like an Olympics of computer gaming, will take place in December 2001 in Korea. Dubbed pro gamers, these evangelists for the professionalization of gaming, are already full-blown media stars.
Feat: Kambiz Hashemian, Ana Vranes, Dominik Kofert. In cooperation with Progaming.de

TNC: Why is Europe lagging so far behind developments in Korea?
KAMBIZ: Development here is being retarded by prejudices held by those Europeans responsible for decision-making in this area, as well as deaf ears in the industry.
TNC: The cliché image of the typical gamer is getting very dated.
DOMINIK: The image that has long prevailed among large segments of European society, and is unfortunately still widespread, is a very negative one that is being continually reinforced by the media, even when they have to twist the facts to do so (which I have personally experienced a number of times): the "typical gamer" is said to be socially isolated, withdrawn, prone to violence, ugly, boring, and living in a dream world.
TNC: Ana, you're 16, one of the most active girl gamers in Germany. Why do women still play much less than men do?
ANA: Hmm, I guess you don't necessarily get the idea to start playing on your own. You just have to encourage women more and show them how to do it. I'm also continually learning more about it, and the only reason I even got started was because of my brother. In my circle of friends, of course, it's just naturally accepted that I'm a gamer. I don't have any girlfriends who play Ego-Shooter too (although I also know in real life a lot of the girls who play on the Internet).
DOMINIK: I think this also has to do with the numerical preponderance of men in the natural and computer sciences during the early phase of this development. It was for this reason that the first computer games were also mostly played by men, and the industry therefore subsequently developed computer games that appealed to men.

TNC: The first World Cyber Games (www.worldcybergames.org)—something like the first Olympic Games of e-sport—will be held in late 2001 in Seoul. You've already been to Korea twice. How have you been preparing for the WCG?

DOMINIK: 3–4 hours of training a day.

TNC: The games will feature several categories.

KAMBIZ: There are going to be six games representing the 3-D shooter, strategy and sport simulation genres. The contestants will include over 400 cyber-athletes from a total of 25 countries. Last year, I was already able to get some idea about the scale of this spectacle: the Olympic spirit of a new generation with a completely new look...

TNC: ... and digital culture & lifestyle in full effect.

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1   cf. Beusch / Cassani: "electrolobby—the top level domain of life,"
    in: Katalog *NEXT SEX,* Ars Electronica 2000, pp. 325–371

2   ibid., p. 325

3   cf. Beusch / Cassani: "Respect!—Statement of the Net Vision / Net Excellence Jury,"
    in: Cyberarts 2001, International Compendium Prix Ars Electronica, p. 18

4   cf. Beusch / Cassani: "electrolobby—the top level domain of life,"
    in: Katalog *NEXT SEX,* Ars Electronica 2000, p. 342

5   ibid., p. 340

6   ibid., p. 325