



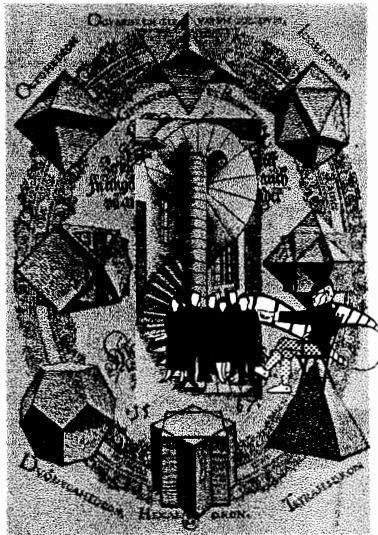
December, 1993

Volume One, Number Eleven

A FEW THOUGHTS ON
INTERACTIVE ART
BY BOB MOSES

in•ter•ac•tive, a. to act
mutually; to perform
reciprocal acts.

“Interactive art” has become quite the trend. The promise of interactivity is that we, the “audience”, get to participate in the creation of the experience. I’ve thought a lot about that concept, and I’ve had fulfilling discussions about it’s artistic, technological, and metaphysical ramifications with some of my friends. A few of us even produced a show last month that experimented with a couple interactive ideas.



In an interactive event there is a reciprocal exchange between what has traditionally been the “performer” and the “audience”. The performer is more of a “facilitator”, and the audience participates in creating the experience. The facilitator is responsible for providing an environment for the participants. The focus of attention is not on the facilitator, it’s on the shared experience in this environment. The facilitator must give up control over what is happening, the event is democratic.

CyberArtist

What is the value of interactivity? For one thing, it forces us to take responsibility for our own experience. Rather than going to a club and expecting someone else to entertain us, we entertain ourselves and each other. I’m fascinated by the human and social ramifications of such events. This might wake some people up and empower them. In an era when people (especially kids) spend a large portion of their time sitting unconsciously in front of a television, interactivity may teach them that *they* matter. This could boost people’s self esteem, unleash their creativity, and save the planet from a race of helpless zombies. At the very least, it would be a lot more fun.

Of course, our culture is egocentric. Convincing people to shed their reticence and participate is a great challenge. No one wants to look like an idiot in front of millions. Moreover, most of us have been taught that interacting with strange people or things is dangerous. Therefore, it may be very uncomfortable for performers and audiences to drop their shields

and interact. But maybe not. At the *Synesthetics* show we were surprised at how willing people were to climb on stage in front of everyone and interact with the show. Einar’s MIDI trees were mobbed by intrigued participants. Allowing people to take control of the lights and sound via the data glove was also a hit. My hope is that there are a lot of people out there ready to role up their sleeves and interact.

New technologies are making interactive events easier. MIDI allows virtually anything to talk to virtually anything else. Very soon, new computer networks will become available which tie the participants, facilitator, and equipment together into a “peer-to-peer” system. Multimedia adds new dimensions (graphics, lights, smells, and so on) to the event

Continued on page 6

**DECEMBER MEETING:
MONDAY, DECEMBER 6**

**THE ART INSTITUTE
OF SEATTLE
ROOM 717/718
2323 ELLIOT AVENUE
7:30PM**

**OUR GUEST:
JEFF BERRYMAN
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
THE CENTRE FOR
IMAGE AND SOUND
RESEARCH
VANCOUVER, B.C.**

by Steve Turnidge

Well, its time for our group to start connecting with the world. We did a good job saying "Hi" to the community by putting on our **Synesthetics** show. Now we have the opportunity to collaborate as individuals with other groups.

Close to home is the **911 Media Arts Center**, who are planning good things for next year. *Come to the December meeting* and find out what good things, and what part we can play.

A little farther away, but still in our neighborhood is **Jeff Berryman's** group, the **Centre for Image and Sound Research**. They have good ideas for getting our groups closer together by having combined meetings over a video-conferencing link, among other things. *Come to the December meeting* and find out what other things, and what part we can play.

Our video shoot of **Synesthetics** turned out very well with three cam-

eras and digital sound, and is in the last stages of editing (a million thanks to **David Wheeler** and **The Art Institute of Seattle!**) The release date, availability and cost of the tapes hasn't been figured yet, let us know if you're interested.

When we began this newsletter at the beginning of the year, there was only one mainstream (sort of) magazine covering the "Cyber" thang (**Mondo 2000**). Now we are fortunate to see magazines like **Wired** and **New Media** on newsstands everywhere. These types of periodicals can provide the main source of our "new media" information, and the content of the Northwest CyberArtist can remain focused on the interests and activities of our group. As you find good magazines and newsletters, please let me know about them, and I'll pass them along. (**Ylem** in San Francisco is one good example...)

Adobe has a new portable document file format called **Acrobat** which I am excited to begin releasing the CyberArtist in. This allows you to view on your Mac or PC documents formatted just like on paper! More next time -- ...Steve>>>

More info about Jeff Berryman

We are very excited to welcome our December speaker, **Jeff Berryman**. Jeff has a varied background in technology, industrial development, and the arts. As an audio professional, his specialties are large-scale loudspeaker system design, computer control software, and audio systems engineering. In computing, he has 20 years experience in operating systems design and programming, computer networking, research computing, and information systems planning. He is

currently Executive Director of the **Centre for Image and Sound Research (CI*SR)**, a nonprofit research foundation in Vancouver B.C., Vice-President of the **Golder Group**, a computer control company serving the performing arts and professional entertainment, and Technical Director of **Jason Sound Industries**, a touring concert sound reinforcement company with international clientele.

At the December meeting, Jeff will introduce CS*IR and describe some

The Northwest
CyberArtist

ISSN 1068-9850

Vol.1/No. 11 December 1993



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of its current projects in interactive performance, multimedia, telecommunications, and video and film post production. He hopes to begin dialogues concerning cross-border research collaboration between us (Northwest CyberArtists) and CS*IR. Jeff is an internationally recognized authority on technology in the arts. You won't want to miss this meeting!

COMPTON'S NEWMEDIA RECEIVES PATENT FOR MULTIMEDIA INVENTION

LAS VEGAS—(BUSINESS WIRE)—Compton's NewMedia, a leading publisher, developer, and distributor of multimedia titles, today announced that they were granted United States Patent Number 5,241,671.

The patent identifies Compton's NewMedia as the owner of the "Multimedia search system using a plurality of entry path means which indicate interrelatedness of information."

An abstract in the patent document further describes the invention as: "A database search system that retrieves multimedia information in a flexible user friendly system. The search system uses a multimedia database consisting of text, picture, audio and animated data. That database is searched through multiple graphical and textual entry paths."

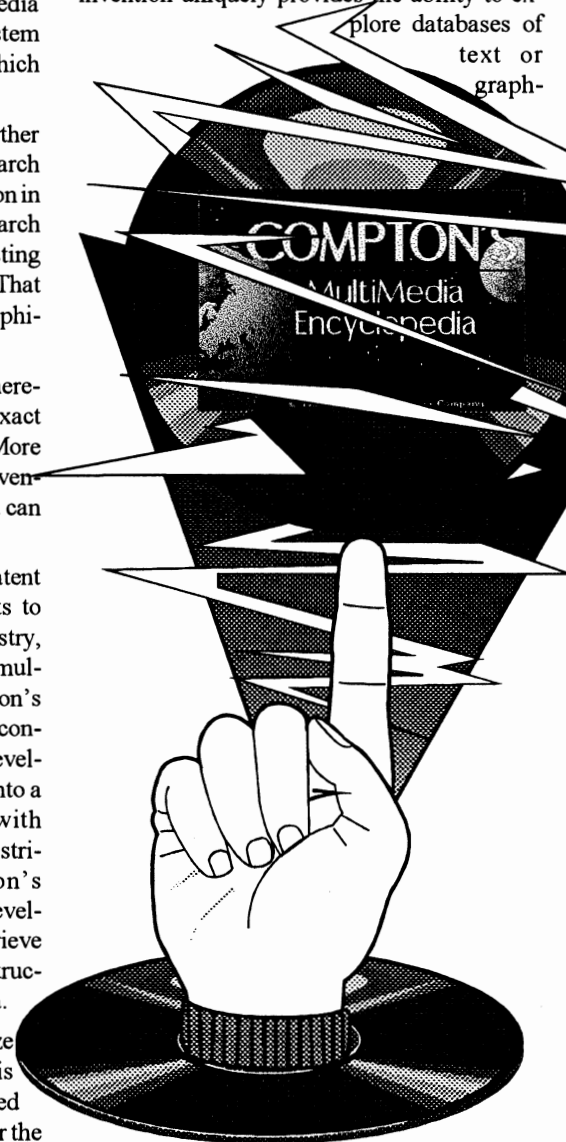
And further, "There is no intention, therefore, of limiting this invention to the exact abstract or disclosure presented herein. More particularly, it is contemplated that this invention can be used with any information that can be stored in a database."

Compton's NewMedia, while granted patent rights described in the 671 patent, wants to continue to foster the growth of this industry, and will license developers the use of the multimedia invention as defined in the Compton's patent. Compton's licensing program will consist of a tiered structure which will give developers several options including: entering into a strategic joint venture relationship with Compton's NewMedia, entering into a distribution arrangement with Compton's NewMedia's Affiliated Label Program, developing a product using Compton's SmarTrieve technology, or complying with a royalty structure as set forth by Compton's NewMedia.

"We simply want the public to recognize Compton's NewMedia as the pioneer in this industry, promote a standard that can be used by every developer, and be compensated for the investments we have made to make multimedia a reality for developers and end users," said Stanley Frank, Ed.D., president and chief executive officer of Compton's NewMedia. "We encourage developers to use the distribution channels and development tools Compton's NewMedia has made available to them. Our royalty structure and distribution options will benefit our licensees."

Compton's intends to offer a special reduced royalty program until June 1, 1994 for licensees who sign with Compton's prior to that date.

Compton's NewMedia applied for the patent on Oct. 26, 1989, immediately after the release of Compton's MultiMedia Encyclopedia, the first electronic encyclopedia to integrate pictures, sound, motion, and multiple entry paths. A continuing application is currently pending. To distinguish it from other CD-ROM based products in its time, the Compton's multimedia invention uniquely provides the ability to explore databases of text or graph-



ics that can be interrelated and yet searched independently of each other.

"We knew immediately that we had an important development when we first conceived of Compton's MultiMedia Encyclopedia," said Stanley Frank. "We decided to patent a system to search and display multiple databases that would include graphics, sound and video in addition to text. It just happened that the first product we developed was an encyclopedia that would set the standard for educational and entertainment multimedia for years to come."

The multimedia concept is not limited to CD-ROMs on PCs. As the storage and delivery capacity of media have expanded, Compton's has continued to enhance its technology to extend to other platforms including the Macintosh, Sony Multimedia CD-ROM Player, Philips CD-I, and Tandy VIS, to name a few. The encyclopedia and other Compton's titles will soon appear on other interactive delivery systems as explained by Norman J. Bastin, executive vice president and general manager of Compton's NewMedia:

"Compton's has invested many years and millions of dollars to create a solid, patented foundation of multimedia technology," said Norm Bastin. "The patent is not limited to any delivery medium such as CD-ROM. We are looking far down the road beyond the CD-ROM to the Digital Highway and what it promises for education, information, and entertainment from PDA's to interactive television."

Technology

Throughout its history, Compton's continued to improve its search and retrieval technology. The company developed SmarTrieve in 1986, a developer's tool designed to index unstructured databases (such as encyclopedias or book text) and make them searchable. Compton's SmarTrieve SmartKit Developers Toolkit was released in 1992 providing indexing tools and a standard user interface which gives developers the flexibility to use Compton's front end interface or substitute their own end user interface if they wish. Distribution

Shortly after announcing its encyclopedia in 1989, Compton's NewMedia began breaking new ground in multimedia software distribution. Instead of relying entirely on traditional channels such as computer speciality and software only stores, Compton's immediately set out to bring multimedia to bookstores, record stores, mass merchandisers, and consumer electronics retailers. In January of 1993, Compton's announced that it had broken through the software rental barrier by providing CD-ROM titles to Major Video Concepts, one of the nation's leading rental distributors and only last week through Blockbuster. In August 1993, Compton's announced its titles would be available for lending in public libraries.

In 1991, Compton's opened its distribution doors to other developers. The company launched its Affiliated Label Program, designed to provide avenues of distribution to smaller developers. Together, these companies and Compton's NewMedia team up to offer a selec-

Continued on page 4

Compton's Patent Continued from page 3

tion of appropriate titles for each of the diverse retail channels that Compton's has opened to multimedia. Today, Compton's has over 20 companies in its affiliated label program, distributing over 150 titles in Compton's twelve channels of distribution.

Today, Compton's is a leading producer of interactive information, infotainment, edutainment, and entertainment software on CD-ROM and floppy media. Compton's own titles and those of its affiliates can be found at more than 7,500 retailers throughout the country. Compton's has 22 affiliates bringing the total of titles distributed by Compton's NewMedia to over 150.

Compton's has launched an aggressive marketing program for the mass consumer market, offering such compelling CD-ROM titles as Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia for the PC and Macintosh, The Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous Cookbook, and Jazz: A Multimedia History, and The Sporting News series.

Compton's MultiMedia Group is part of Tribune Publishing Company, a wholly owned subsidiary of Tribune, a leading information and entertainment company. Tribune publishes six daily newspapers, operates seven television and six radio stations, produces and syndicates information and programming, publishes books and information in print and digital formats, and has an ownership interest in one of Canada's largest newsprint manufacturers.

Early Days, Early Visions

What is known today as Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia on the commercial market and Compton's MultiMedia Encyclopedia in schools, started as a concept in the early 80s. Stanley Frank, then executive vice president, and Norman J. Bastin, then executive director of corporate planning and development at Encyclopedia Britannica Inc. were searching for a new generation of products to enhance information delivery. While Encyclopedia Britannica was not interested in electronic publishing of their own volumes, they owned the publishing rights to Compton's Encyclopedia, a well-known, highly regarded family and school encyclopedia. The idea for a multimedia encyclopedia started in 1985 and Compton's Encyclopedia was chosen to be the basis for the product a year later.

Stanley Frank and Norman Bastin realized that the appropriate platform would be one that offered flexibility and interactivity. It had to add value for the user beyond what could be found in a print medium or in the text only CD-ROMs currently on the market at that time.

Until then, CD-ROM was a little-known medium that focused on text and conventionally used Boolean logic for searches. Frank and Bastin knew they wanted to integrate graphics and set out to find the experts to create the search and retrieval software that would provide easy access to all the textural and graphical elements of the first multimedia encyclopedia. To get a feeling for software, Frank and Bastin acquired Eduware and Designware, two software companies that provided important knowledge about the software industry but lacked development staff. Soon, a relationship was struck with Jostens Learning Co., then Education Systems Corp. and the synergy began.

Over the next two and a half years, the Encyclopedia/Jostens team developed proprietary software. Rather than relying entirely on software engineers for their multimedia product, they brought in experts from many disciplines including educational designers, educational consultants, animators, programmers, videographers, marketing gurus, and financial analysts.

"We knew what we wanted, got the people we needed, and together created a product with appeal and relevance to the mass public," said Norman Bastin. "We tested the product in focus groups who confirmed that people learn best when all the senses are used. They loved the way text and graphics were at their fingertips. We had a winner."

In conjunction with the software tool development, the editorial team completed an \$8.5 million editorial makeover of the underlying Compton's print and photo content. "We knew we were going to have groundbreaking technology and wanted the same for the content," Frank said. "Compton's was written for computers in a pyramid style as with newspapers, with main facts up front, then more depth."

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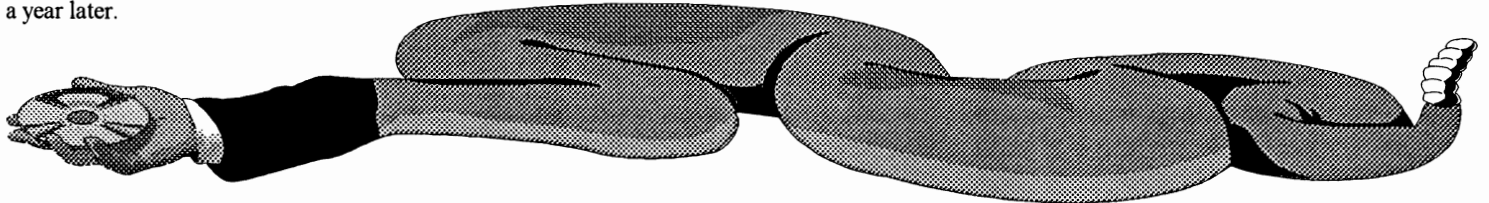
Compton's MultiMedia Group is part of Tribune Publishing Co., a wholly owned subsidiary of Tribune, a leading information and entertainment company. Tribune publishes six daily newspapers, operates seven television and six radio stations, produces and syndicates information and programming, publishes books and information in print and digital formats, and has an ownership interest in one of Canada's largest newsprint manufacturers.

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CONTACT: Christina Germscheid of Compton's NewMedia, 619-929-2500; or Pat Meier of Pat Meier Associates, 415-957-5999, for Compton's NewMedia/ 09:37 EST



"NEW VOICES, NEW VISIONS" COMPETITION

New Voices, New Visions 1994 is a unique competition designed to encourage experimental work in the digital medium. The principal sponsors are *Voyager*, *Wired*, and *Interval Research*.

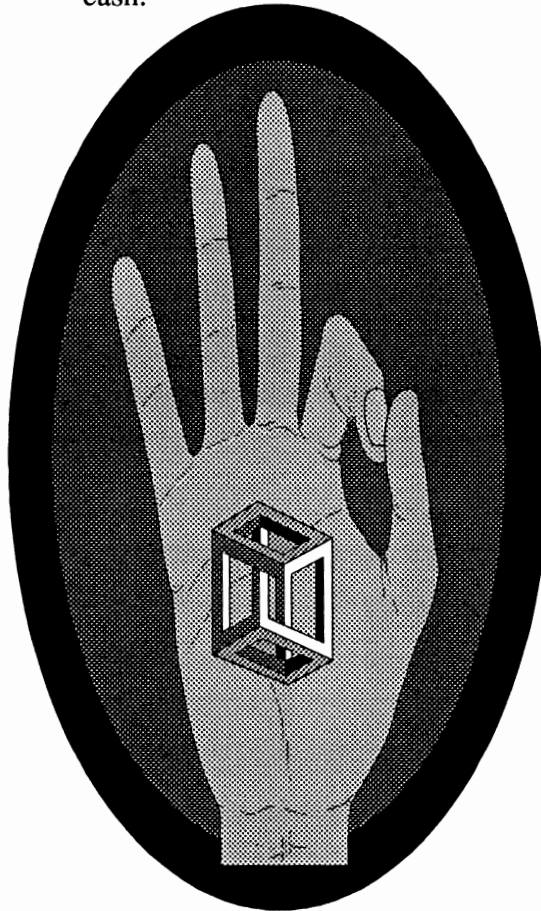
It is clear by now that the computer is at the heart of a profound shift in the way that humans express themselves. Unfortunately, given the financial risk and the conservative sources of funding, there is a strong tendency for published digital works to be rather "safe" in form and content. This is particularly distressing in a period in which the vocabulary of digital expression is being invented. For this reason, **New Voices, New Visions** is aimed at encouraging new experimental work, unburdened by the concerns of the marketplace.

The competition is calling for works on any subject, in any digital format. The emphasis will be on experimental work rather than finished "products." The jurors, each a well-regarded member of the arts community, will judge submissions on merit. **New Voices, New Visions** will be advertised extensively to art, film, and design students and to artists, musicians and writers. The competition will award three first prizes of \$5,000 each.

More Details

- This is an open competition—all valid entries will be considered.
- Entries may be of any length, subject matter, format. Entries may run on Mac, Windows, Amiga, 3DO, Unix and other digital platforms.
- Submissions are due by March 31, 1994 and should be delivered to Voyager by that date.

- Winners will be announced during May 1994.
- *Prizes*: 3 awards of merit will be given. Each award is \$5,000 cash.



- *Jury*: the submissions will be judged by a panel of 7 jurors from the arts community.
- *Registration*: Prospective entrants should register for **New Voices, New Visions** in order to receive information about submitting entries, special offers on creating CD-ROMs for entries, and new developments.
- *Rights*: Entrants **RETAIN** all future publication rights—no publication rights are granted or implied by submission of a work for judging.

Contacts

Voyager is administering the competition.

Reach Voyager in New York by:

Phone: 212.431.5199

Fax: 212.431.5799

Email: Voyager@applelink.apple.com

Conversations about **New Voices, New Visions** will be ongoing in the *MuchoMedia* conference on the WELL. Information will also be available in the Arts folder on the WELL's gopherspace. Use Gopher client software to get there on Internet via gopher.well.sf.ca.us.

The Sponsors

The competition brings together 3 exciting companies dedicated to the changes in art, publishing, and society created by digital technologies:

Voyager is a publisher of high quality interactive titles.

WIRED is the voice of the digital revolution in the networked world.

Interval Research pursues deep research on new uses for computers.

Send Entry Information

Name

School/Company

Address

City/State/Zip

Phone Fax Email

Where did you hear about **New Visions, New Voices**?

Please register—by fax, phone, Email, post—with Voyager for more info!

The Voyager Company
578 Broadway, Suite 406

New York, NY 10012

Phone: 212.431.5199

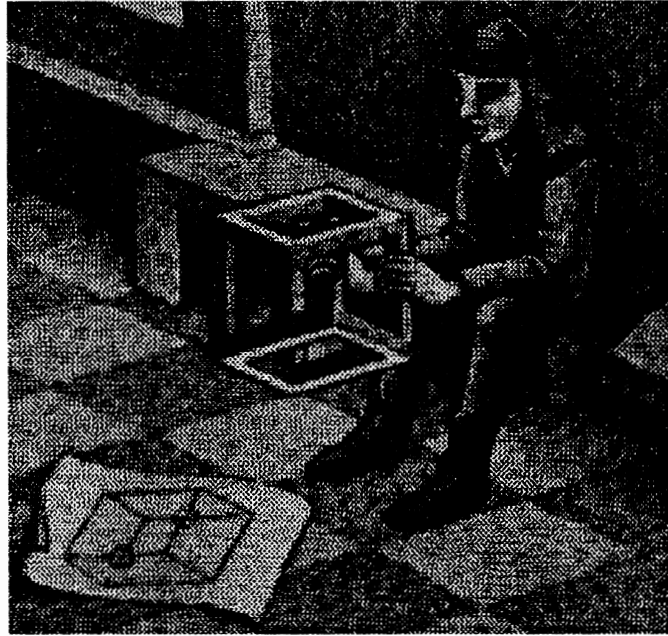
Fax: 212.431.5799

Email: Voyager@applelink.apple.com

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which can be controlled by the participants. Virtual reality immerses people in an environment where they can safely interact with anything imaginable (or at least renderable). As the information age unfolds around us, new information technologies bring people closer together regardless of their geographical location or cultural background.

Of course, you could argue that interactivity has been around forever. Consider, for example, a sporting event. The crowd inspires the home team, which performs proportionally better, and consequently inspires the crowd. There is a reciprocal exchange of inspiration (most often between overly mas-

culine men, interesting...). The crowd isn't really participating in playing



the game, but the minimal interactivity it does have literally drives it to a frenzy sometimes. Imagine what you can do with all that energy!

I've seen a lot of hype in the marketplace for interactive CD's, interactive performances by pop stars, and so on. I've tried a few of these out, and I've been disappointed. I don't think true interactivity has been realized yet. The idea is still young, and I hold great hope for it's future. I hope interactive art escapes commercial exploitation and becomes a meaningful aesthetic. I hope it draws us closer, and gives us all a medium to express ourselves. I would be very happy to interact with other people about these ideas. It's time to start thinking about Synesthetics '94. . .

By the way, the person who has the coolest ideas about all this is my good friend Jeff Berryman, our guest speaker at December's meeting.

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