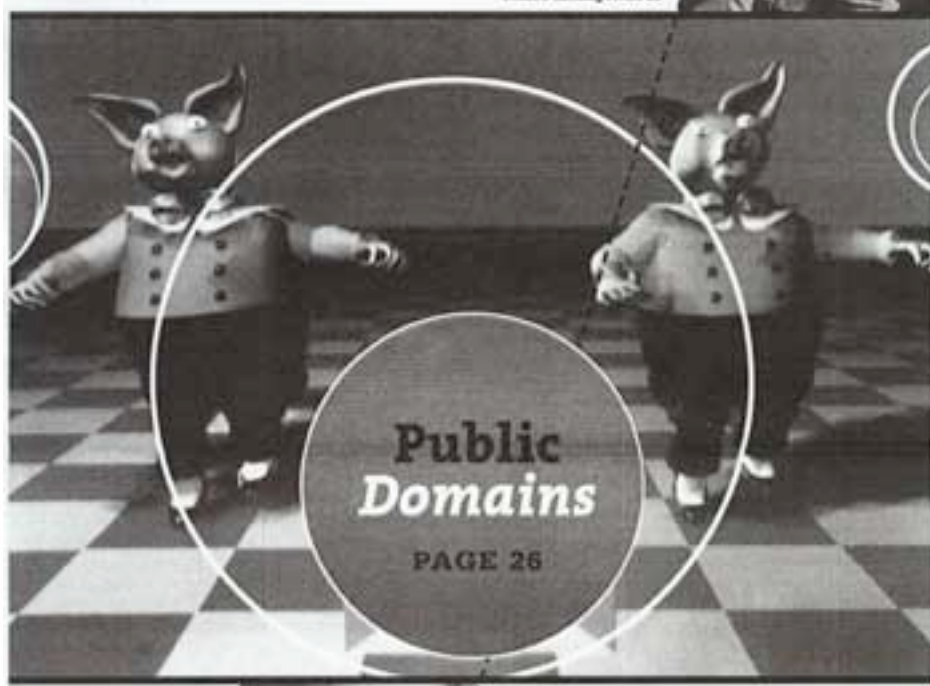


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Eminent Interactive Domains

WRITER: ALICE WINN

Installation art is beginning to suggest a new relationship between maker and viewer. *Interactive Domains*, a new exhibition at Wood Street Galleries, actively involves audiences through state-of-the-art devices. Visitors' actions affect the workings of pieces, altering artists' visions.

Those who enter Eduardo Kac's laboratory take on the enclosure's black-light discipline. Within darkness glows a synthetic gene Kac designed by translating a sentence from the Bible into Morse code, which was then converted into DNA base pairs.

Interactive Domains continues through March 10 at Wood Street Galleries, Downtown. 471-5605.

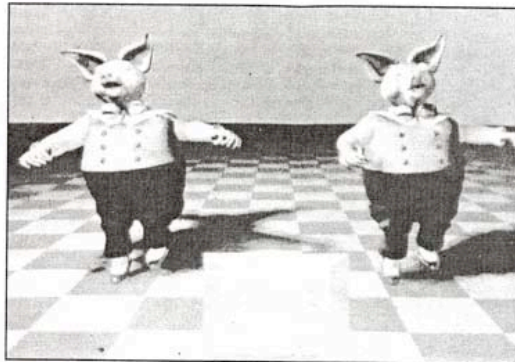
Incorporated into bacteria, the mix is projected as live video in the gallery, streams over the Internet. It's subjected to an ultraviolet flash activated by Web participants (at <http://genesis.woodstreetgalleries.org>) which causes actual mutations.

When the transformed DNA's translated back into Morse code, then English, the Biblical sentence's meaning also shifts. This effect symbolically lifts from us the weight

of imposed structures we've inherited, resisting and rearranging them, making the static dynamic. But the change is slow, the new message enigmatic, underlining the distance between humanity's imaginative freedom and its effective ability to realize its aspirations. There's also an undercurrent of unease here: Through our submitting to a process, the indulging of curiosity and the consequences of that indulgence, we're left with the precarious feeling that, despite the strength of human will, we're always unconditionally subject to the laws of a higher, cosmically creative force.

Voyeurism is a means of keeping life at a distance, of remaining a spectator, of preserving one's detachment. Yet

what we see before us becomes a projection of our own desires. We spot what's more relevant to us, identifying with someone within view as a means of gaining self-knowledge in fantasy form. Luc Courchesne draws us from our shadowy lookout into a growing involvement with the virtual characters of his narrative installation. Our attraction to their stories entices us to become part of them.



"Playworld 02," 2000

Within his video-projected, 360-degree recreation of Montreal's Mont-Royal Parc, we get sensations of moving through its spaces while immobilized in one spot. We see, within limits, what we choose to see, but also what the artist

chooses to show us. We're free to select and reflect upon the action and reach our own decisions, but in Courchesne's hands our responses are themselves carefully controlled and organized. We follow people's paths, directing them through voice or

touch. Through subjective tracking shots, we wander at their paces, as they lead us into pockets of silence and solitude. There's an occasional exchange of intimate overtures. Or our playmates will move off and disappear among the trees, leaving us to speculate about their states of mind. There's a simultaneous awareness of the immense value of human relationships and their inherent incapability of perfect realization.

Camille Utterback and Romy Achituv's infectiously playful piece also maintains a balance between the real world and the visionary. An installation participant becomes a mirrored video projection grasping at falling letters of a dismantled poem to discover its elusive meaning, as one might search the mind for a face that dances away. Each line becomes a bodiless thought that finally falls at one's feet and fades away, like time that's gone or a love that never returns.

Using digital animation and motion-detecting sensors, Claudia Hart simulates the forms and strategies of computer gam-

ing to convey a savage flavor of social criticism. Spectators encounter an audience of giggling, clapping pig people. One may press a virtual button, causing a woman to weep in a comically overwrought manner. The work's light tone gives us license to accept the notion of common guilt as something of a joke, allowing ourselves to be implicated in the "game" of causing torment to an unseen person who is represented as trivial and stupid. Then abruptly, the joke rebounds on us; swift modulations of tone are used to disturbing effect. We're horrified to find that we've momentarily identified with the grotesque porkers. We have the feeling that, through our action, we've unleashed something cruel and dangerous into the world and may be punished by the very forces we helped release.

Playing with new forms and technical experiments, these artists transport the spiritual into physical space, presenting places where illusion and reality become constantly ambiguous, even interchangeable. **E**