

Curated by:
Kelly Taxter

Ruth Anderson
Ken Linehan
Kaffe Matthews
Andrea Polli
Scanner and Katarina Matiassek
Laetitia Sonami

January 4 - 26, 2002

Saturday, January 12th, 4-6 pm
performances by Kaffe Matthews
and Laetitia Sonami

apexart curatorial program

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Cover image: Laetitia Sonami Performance with Lady Glove, 1991

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Gain



Despite our design specifications as fully articulated graspers and shapers, we humans are busily constructing an environment that marginalizes our own corporeal presence. Our fingers no longer grip; they click and drag. For better or worse, the twenty-first century promises to be an aetherial landscape of images, sounds, and disembodied voices, all connected by invisible networks and accessed through increasingly transparent interfaces.

-David Toop, Sonic Boom¹

Originally, I conceived of *Gain* as an exhibition of artists who have subverted the original purpose of certain machines and technological devices. Now, nearly three years later, almost all of the artists have changed not only the pieces they were to exhibit, but also my thoughts on what this show is about.

Four out of the six projects originally chosen to appear in *Gain* have completely changed. The artists were dealing with subversion, in the sense that they were mis-using machines or technologies, or designing and building their own. There was an investigation of new material in the form of technologies, and the ways in which they could be altered, tailored, or destroyed. I found the reception of work of this kind, and new-media work in general, fetishized and privileged the work's formal qualities, the "gadgetry" involved. I wish to focus on the meanings of the application of technologies in the arts.

In 2001 much of the excitement around the technology boom quieted. This change has a lot to do with the industry's plummeting stock market

value, but maybe also something else. Hannes Leopoldseder states, on the focus of the 1991 Ars Electronica festival:

In the year 1991, the computer lost its innocence. On January 17, 1991, at 1:00 a.m. Central European time, to be exact, when the first laser-controlled bomb met its target, the Gulf War had started the first "total electronic war" (Paul Virilio)...For Ars Electronica, a festival that has from the beginning always understood itself in a relational network of art, new technologies, and society, a new era has begun...Ars Electronica becomes for the first time the "Festival after," a festival after the first total electronic war.²

This statement is resonant in light of the current war with Afghanistan. Technology is now commonly employed to cause mass destruction, and also as a means of communicating those events. Our experience of this war is one mediated by sophisticated filters, that do not necessarily bring us any closer to the reality of the situation.

Major perceptual changes are occurring as a direct result of the way in which information is disseminated and understood. Technology is, at present, smoothly integrated into human existence and habit. The artists in *Gain* have created works which employ both new and old technology, questioning the comfortable position it holds in our daily routines. As a result of this integration, we have become, in many ways, one step removed from direct contact with our environment and each other. The artists in *Gain* have created works which directly engage the human and the technological in a way which does not privilege one or the other, but sets up a reciprocal relationship. *Gain* is testament to the fact that technology can still exist inside the realm of humanity: "... (we) must understand the need for 'high touch' not as the consequence but rather as the control of 'high tech.'"³ The title *Gain*

refers to the ways in which artists are addressing the effects of a technologically inundated society. Rather than focusing on what we have to lose, these artists are trying to conceive of what we have to gain through the creative application and critical evaluation of technology.

Ruth Anderson: *Time and Tempo*, 1984.

Time and Tempo is an interactive bio-feedback installation, consisting of a clock, a small box, and two galvanic skin resistance sensors, which the viewer attaches to two fingers. The speed of the clock's second hand is controlled by the bio-electrical currents passing through the fingers, influenced in turn by the viewer's mental and physical state. Anderson's work utilizes familiar technology in order to create an interactive relationship with the viewer which is quiet and meditative. *Time and Tempo* allows the viewer an opportunity to literally slow down time, a concept increasingly hard to grasp in our presently accelerated environment.



Ken Linehan: *Speaker Dodecahedron*, 2000-01
Ken Linehan explores the thin, hyphenated line that slips between the realms of the scientific and the para-scientific. His work seeks to better understand the ways in which technology brings us into confrontation with this line. Satellite tech-



nology has allowed us to see alien worlds through radio telescopes, but it has also provided us a sort of, "out of body", view of our own world. A view where we become alien. Robots search for signs of life on remote planets, while at that same moment they exist as signs of life themselves, our lives and the thin probabilities upon which they apparently do stand. F.D. Drake, in *Murmurs of Earth*, a document of the voyager space program, addresses the subject of this experiment, "There is a sphere of radio transmissions about thirty light years thick expanding outward at the speed of light, announcing to every star that it envelops, that the earth is full of people." Speakerdodecahedron: system 2.1 uses a multi-channel mapping process to create an audio model of global radio phenomenon.

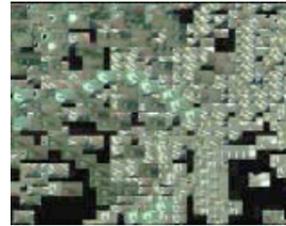
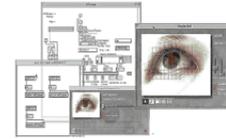
Kaffe Matthews: *wap side up*, 2001
Performance will take place Saturday, January 12, 4-6 p.m. at apexart
wap side up is a 3-dimensional audio environment which takes listeners through a series of spaces, while they sit absolutely still. Using the sound of apexart's gallery space, recorded via cell phone, as source for her composition, Matthews is able to draw out the subtle and hidden complexities of our environment which are remarkably important to our psychological understanding of space. Particularly relevant is her use of the cell phone as recording device. Matthews is typically present in the space she records, but through this method she removes both herself and hence much control over the nature of the recording. This process parallels the very nature of cell phone conversation itself. It is one which allows for more frequent communica-



tion, but the distortion and staccato nature of the conversation often results in mis-communication and lost calls.

Andrea Polli: *The Fly's Eye*, 2001

The Fly's Eye is an interactive video environment which draws its inspiration from the structure, function, and significance of the eye of the fly (the simplest living eye), in relationship to the study of human sensation and perception. Polli has imbued each technical element of her piece with both human and insect characteristics. This work subtly illustrates the importance of the organic within a highly sophisticated technological environment. While the tools of scientific research have radically changed over the last century, they continue to rely on human input, touch, and intelligence.



Scanner (Sound) and Katarina Matiassek (Image): *Echo Days*, 2001

Echo Days is an audio-video environment which uses decelerated and thus audible echolocation sounds of bats flying through cities and landscapes. The audio consists of entirely reflected sound, and the video is a series of after images.



The overall effect of the piece is one of delay: the images that we see and the sounds we hear come to us "after the fact." An analogy is set up between the bat's perception of reality and our own perception in a technologically mediated environment.

Laetitia Sonami: performance of *Birds without Feet Can't Land*
Performance will take place Saturday, January 12, 4-6 p.m. at apexart

Birds without Feet Can't Land is a performance with light and live electronic sound. Sonami will use her Lady's Glove to control the filaments of light bulbs in silent counterpoint to thick sonic textures of data, human, and animal sounds. The Lady's Glove is a gestural controller for the hand, embedded with sensors which track the slightest movement of each finger, hand, and arm. The work physically integrates technology with the human body, creating a symbiotic relationship between the two.



Kelly Taxter
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1. Toop, David. *Sonic Boom: The Art of Sound*. London: Hayward Gallery, 2000, p. 107.
2. Ars Electronica: *Facing the Future*, ed. Timothy Druckrey, Forward. Cambridge: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999, p. 8.
3. *Ibid*, p. 6.