

The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader
Edited by Stella Brennan and Su Ballard
Designed by Jonty Valentine
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Aotearoa Digital Arts Trust
www.aotearoadigitalarts.org.nz



Clouds
PO Box 68-187, Newton, Auckland 1145
Aotearoa New Zealand
www.clouds.co.nz

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Onsite and Online

Stella Brennan and Stephen Cleland

The relationship between contemporary art galleries and Internet art projects is complex. Many online projects are now lost; remaining archives are festooned with broken links, missing files and unavailable plug-ins. They represent an early bloom of interest when the Internet was seen as a new and experimental context, and artists were working out what exactly it might be good for. As the Internet has become more widely accessible and more ubiquitous, the impetus for galleries to stake a claim in the digital has subsided and the realms of gallery practice and online art have diverged. This separation avoids the often clumsy gallery articulations of net art that is decontextualised and removed from its network habitat, yet most galleries' use of the Internet as space for documentation misses the opportunity to expand discussions around digital practice. Surges of online art have often had connections with prominent contemporary art institutions, such as the Walker Art Centre's Gallery 9 that ran from 1997 to 2003 and the Internet works initiated in conjunction with Documenta 10 in 1997.¹ In a local context, the 1997 Codec project presented online works commissioned by artist-run galleries Teststrip in Auckland and Galerie Dessford Vogel in Dunedin, and public galleries Artspace in Auckland and The Physics Room in Christchurch.²

Michael Stevenson's work for Artspace, *alt.waysofseeing* was a project blending dodgy HTML aesthetics and luridly coloured text and tessellating images of UFO conspiracy sites with artworld paranoia. Could a sphinx-like structure on Mars be proof of alien influence in modern sculpture? Was Dan Graham secretly working for NASA? Stevenson worked with Robert Hutchinson in realising this project. Hutchinson's own Spatial State of A and B was the first local site dedicated to contemporary art projects for the Internet. As he describes it:

Really it was some kind of idealist fantasy: 'We can bring artists and technicians together and they can make amazing computer art.' I had been working in the web industry for a while so was able to access considerable resources at little or no expense.³

The first Spatial State project, in 1996, was Terrence Handscomb's *Before Information there were the Machines*,⁴ an Internet version of the interactive work included in the *Electronic Bodyscapes* exhibition held at Artspace that same year. *Electronic Bodyscapes*, curated by Deborah Lawler Dormer, was a key moment for digital art in New Zealand, investigating the interface of art, electronics and the body through the work of local and international practitioners. Works included Sean Kerr and Keri Whaiteri's *Dialogue*, an interactive installation juxtaposing Māori and European concepts of *te kore* or the void, French artist Orlan's photographs of her self-orchestrated cosmetic surgery and Australian artist Stelarc's performance *Ping Body*.

Ping Body interfaced the artist's body with the Internet. Pings are electronic signals measuring both physical network distance and traffic loading. In the performance, ping values controlled electrodes that applied voltage to the artist's body, creating a spasmodic contraction and relaxation of muscles, movement

Previous page top: Nathan Pohio, *Asleighofhamanewerihogofastillimgentinosomethingmoving: Horses 2*, 2006, dual screen video projection.
Below: Nathan Pohio, *Sleeper*, 1999, two-channel video, 3 minutes.
 "In the early eighteenth century Edward Muybridge used the most extraordinary technologies of the time to give still images the illusion of movement. One hundred and fifty years later, and after the cinema, the video, and the digital revolutions, Nathan Pohio reduces movement back into something realised by the human hand. Holding a lenticular photograph of horses in front of his camera Pohio reanimates the inanimate. In the dual screen projection *Asleighofhamanewerihogofastillimgentinosomethingmoving: Horses 2*, we see gentle blurred movements as running horses shift in and out of focus. This is cinema returned to its roots: tricks of the eye, illusions of movement, and the captivating magic of slow motion. *Sleeper* is an equally slow cinematic video. Movement is reduced to the flickering light of a surreal night sky. The artist's nephew dreams beneath the day-go lights of his decorated bedroom ceiling, to a soundtrack of Angel Corpus Christi's *Dream Baby Dream*. A peaceful portrait, evoking the deep calm of watching a child sleep, *Sleeper* generates an awareness of the intimate lure of the screen." (Su Ballard)

1. <http://gallery9.walkerart.org> and http://www.documenta12.de/archiv/dx/english/frm_home.htm
2. <http://www.dannybutt.net/codec.org.nz>
3. Danny Butt, "Spatial State of A and B: Robert Hutchinson," 1997. <http://www.dannybutt.net/codec.org.nz/robnj.html>
4. <http://www.terrence.org/old/>