In the hardware of computers, connectionism or parallel processing (multiple low-level memory units linked in a network) is replacing (experimentally) the more standard serial processing (a central processor sequentially addressing large storage units). In short, the change in thinking from linear indexical to network associational - a shift often used to summarise the difference between alphabetic and electronic cognitive styles (or between masculinist and femininst styles, for that matter) - is happening at the level of the technology itself. (my italics) Greg Ulmer, Heurletics: The Logic of Invention.

During long periods of history, the mode of human sense perception changes with humanity's entire mode of existence.


Heard of the Internet? Then you've probably heard of cyber-surfing. The surfing metaphor is presently riding high (or hangin' ten) in the mediatrix. From Radio National ("Surfing the Internet") to the Computer Age ("Cyber-surfing"), everyone is jumping into the panel van. And why not? On the surface it's an attractive metaphor for internet activity. You 'cruise' the net for 'cool sites' just like you can cruise the coast for hot beaches and big swells. You then select the appropriate baud and, launching yourself into the digital sea of data, ftp in a killer swell and try to catch the next wave of cool information. When you're spent, you can then hangout and talk about the waves that nearly were and laugh at the rubbernecks who still haven't upgraded their 286/1 megRAM Malibu's to tri-finned 486/8megRAM Thruster.

Read with nostalgia, the surfing metaphor and its resonances of lapping shores, peace on earth and goodwill to all mankind, evokes surfing in ways which sit easily with the revival of interest in seventies pop culture. But it's not an evocation I feel comfortable with, for my experiences of surf culture were problematic.

By a teenager in Melbourne in the seventies, surfing for me was more than just cruising and waves and being cool. Actually, it wasn't any of these things. Surfing as a lived experience for me, a teenage girl living in Springvale, was only, in fact, remotely connected to cruising, waves and coolness. I was a 'surfie chick' and I listened with almost reverent intensity to Neil Young but I had to fight tooth and nail to get my older brother to let me wax his board. Riding it, needless to say, was right out! I was the cruiser not the cruiser. I couldn't keep my crocheted bikini top either filled out or on straight in a big swell. But I had a kind of faith in surfing. At 16, not even the promise of a week in Disneyland could have lured me away from the caravan park at Kennett River on Victoria's West Coast where my mother, brother and I spent the Christmas holidays. Never mind the fact that I spent most of the time on day trips with mum and thinking up ways to talk to boys. It wasn't about a 'way of life'. It was about a way of thinking, of engaging with my social world. The idea of surfing just held more appeal than getting a sharp cut and a connie. And besides, I had blonde hair. My idea of surfing was good but my experiences of surf culture were problematic.

But wait, let me just carry all this baggage over to the Internet... Well, fortunately for me, I don't think about surfing when I sit at my computer. And I use the metaphor only in ("""). Because the Internet offers me, again in lived experience, such wonderful opportunities. For research, for a promise of two way communication of the order imagined by Brecht for radio. As a remarkable medium for remodelling our very modes of conception. As a material embodiment of a critical practice.

But I wonder what effect the overwhelming plethora of references to the surfing metaphor in the mediatrix will have on the development of this emergent technology? What happens when we close off the way in which we imagine an apparatus? When we au-
authorise meaning? Perhaps there's something to be learned from the evolution of other once emergent technologies.

Radio broadcasting was officially established in Australia in September, 1923. However, the technology which enabled broadcasting to take place was invented and refined between 1885 and 1911. Radio technology allowed, in the same way as the telephone, point to point communication. That is, two way communication. Yet the radio broadcasting system we have today doesn't reflect this potential inherent in the technology. Clearly, other factors have inhibited the use we, as a society, have made of radio and one of these factors has been the way in which the public, at that time, was invited or encouraged to imagine the new technology.

The popularisation of radio coincided with the introduction of electricity. And in the discourses of both the government and business community of the time, who each had an interest in both, electricity and radio were technologies which validated the 'wonder of science'. Newspapers and journals spoke of the 'miracle of electricity' and the 'spirit of radio'. And the observation that both would transform the very fabric of modern life seems to mirror reality. The transformation is not at issue. The manner of transformation is: The limits of the imaginary are the limits of the transformation. Radio, a technology which was instrumental in changing the rhythms of daily life; which assisted in the establishment of factory time and the transition to an automated workforce; which helped to institute the primacy of domestic consumption; carried the seeds of a different order of transformation. But in the representational logic of the times, with the signified attached firmly to the signifier, it became another instrument in the quest for the Enlightenment ideal. And I'm not talking about content. I'm talking about it's actual presence in our lives.

Clearly, technology does not have a project. People do. Radio did have advocates who resisted its enslavement to broadcasting. The wireless enthusiasts of the time in many ways resembled the cyberpunks of today. Interested more in the potential of the technology for two way communication and almost zealous in their belief that it could revolutionise and democratise. And both prepared to allow their way of imagining the new technologies to be incorporated into the mediatrix and to cement itself into the public imagination. Signifiers of a different order to official channels of discourse. But ironically, they were all speaking the same language. And they still are.

Ultimately, the surfing metaphor doesn't affect me because I have access to the Internet and I can feel free to imagine it in any way I want. (In fact, I rather like to think of it as a great big interconnection of wombs. There they all are, those rhythmic, pulsating balls of energy, each with the potential to generate life. Floating around, connected by fallopian tubes through which the little eggs travel, carrying messages around in a bloody, fertile kind of way.) But the point is, there are only 105,000 internet terminals presently in Australia. Assuming generously that each of these has 5 users, we still have a very small percentage of the country 'on-line'. Why then are we prepared to let the way we imagine this technology be closed off before it has even begun? I read a lament recently about how boring radio is. Broadcasting, with pockets of resistance, is boring. Radio is radio. We have come to the end of what radio can do in its present form. A form imagined. Let's defer our reading of what the Internet is, indefinitely. Information might want to be free...but so too does the signifier.

"Remember that we sometimes demand definitions not for the sake of the content, but of their form. Our requirement is an architectural one: the definition is a kind of ornamental coping that supports nothing" Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations.

Industry Profile - Energee Interactive

Digital animation specialist Unlimited Energee have recently launched a new company dedicated exclusively to the production of new media such as interactive games, CD-Rom titles and live action special effects.

Known as "Energee Interactive" the company's recent emergence reflects the increasing growth in the Games and CD-Rom industry, particularly in overseas markets like the United States and Asia. Headed by John Travers, the company employs a small team of programmers and visual artists, as well as a special effects consultant from Los Angeles.

Current projects include an interactive game for the Los Angeles based firm Virgin Interactive; an interactive game based on Jim Lee's classic comic character "Wildcats"; as well as four "edu-training" CD-Rom titles for the Longman Asia, Hong Kong multi-media division. One of these titles - "Go-Go's Adventures with English" features a game, interactive animation and design, and is described by Travers as "basic English lessons in an ESL format". They will be distributed for the Asian/Japanese market.

"All of our clients are based in the States or Asia and they have come to us because we have been in the digital production business for over five years", said Travers, "we have a team of over thirty animators, designers, and directors to assist clients with the brief, so we are both creatively and technically strong".

With the assistance of the Department of Industry Science and Technology and in conjunction with the Western Australian University Centre for Intelligent Processing Information Systems, Energee Interactive have been developing their own proprietary multimedia software for the past two years. "We are currently talking to the Department and people from Apple Computer to assist with the commercialisation and distribution of the software when the Beta testing is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 1995".

In conjunction with the shelf authoring packages, C++ is used extensively to ensure compression and maximise playback speed. Energee Interactive are currently testing new authoring programs such as Script X from Kalida and Next Stop.

Travers said clients need to be careful when commissioning multi-media work as there are a lot of people claiming to have the necessary skills and experience, when really all they have done is played around with Macromind Director and created a few quick time movies.

Energee Interactive provides the full range of design, storyboarding, programming and production management skills. The company has recently purchased a new Avid editing system to compliment existing production skills.

For more information on Energee Interactive see Metro's inside back cover.