

The following is an excerpt from an interview conducted by David Jay Brown and Rebecca Novack, with Joseph Matheny and ennercore of MediaKaos. The full interview will be appearing in Renaissance_of_Misfits, a book of interviews, due for release in spring 1994.

MediaKaos Interview
08-12-93
San Francisco

RKN: Tell us about MediaKaos. What do you guys do aside from apart from spending a lot of time at the photocopy machine?

ennercore: (laughing) it's basically an amalgamation of what we are and are not.

JM: MediaKaos is a cultural experiment. What we're attempting to do is break down the predominant method used to transmit information. In the theatre there is something called the proscenium, the precise definition of that is "the area that separates the stage from the auditorium." We're attempting to bridge that sacred moat. The method of information or entertainment presentation in this culture is predicated on the stage, or many people focused and passively receiving from a mono-source of information. You see it everywhere, I call it the screen. It can be a newspaper or magazine page, the computer, the television, the cinematic screen, the stage, all have in common the passivity on the part of the audience and many people sitting or standing around focusing on one source of transmission. I see the by-product of this in the generation of passive consumers or passive receptors to information that we have in abundance now in this culture.

DJB: Can you tell us about MediaKaos, and outline some of the theory behind your concepts?

JM: We are influenced by things like the experiments in ethnomethodology conducted by Harold Garfinkle, the works of Situationist International, the Burroughs/Gysin cut up method, the guerrilla hi-jinks of people like Negativland and the Cacophony society, the Immediast Underground, the Immediasm theories of Hakim Bey, to name a few. Basically anything that jams the signal or attempts to break the spell of the consensus reality.

ennercore: Maybe you should explain ethnomethodology.

JM: Basically it's the study of the rigidity of people's belief systems. Garfinkle proposed something called breaching experiments. In my view the documentation of the experiments that Garfinkle carried out read like pranks, or in the words of the Discordians "guerrilla ontology". Studies in Ethnomethodology is probably the funniest and most enlightening scholastic work I've ever read. I'd suggest that work to anyone interested in EM.

RKN: So MediaKaos if it is a break from passive entertainment, than it's more than just live performances?

ennercore: It's a combination of space and general vision. It's abstract and there is no set pattern to what we do or how we do it. It may be a live situation where the public is openly invited to participate one time, and another time the experiment may take the form of a media prank or some other sort of "poetic terrorism", to borrow a term from Hakim Bey. We don't always publicly acknowledge our actions.

RKN: To get a visual orientation, when you look around at one of your events, what are you seeing?

JM: Lot's of things happening simultaneously, several different rooms or spaces with things happening at the same time, or several things happening in a space at the same time. That's what happens at the public situations, if that's what you mean. It's very similar to the descriptions I've read of Hugo Ball's Cabaret Voltaire.

RKN: I'm curious as to whether you experience a lot of synchronicities at these public situations, discrete events carrying over from one space to the next that seem to be part of one dialogue.

JM: Yes we have noticed this. One of the methodologies we incorporate is the Burroughs/Gysin cut-up method, in that we've extrapolated from the literary/ sound aspect of this method, and began attempting something called "reality cut-ups". In this context, it makes it more interesting when you come across a string of events or words that seem to lead into each other. Our reaction to this phenomenon is to note it and move on to the next string. It will be a different association for different people because everyone has different things that will seem important or will resonate with their particular experience. Whenever you take something that seems to be in a rational order and randomize or cut it up, you begin to see how random random really isn't, or how rational rational really isn't, if you follow my butchered syntax. One thing we've discovered is that cut-up seems to be a good language for relating to the MTV generation because it allows for more room to switch modes or focus points, much like the "blendo" technique utilized by MTV and it's multitude of imitators.

DJB: Kind of like channel grazing?

JM: It allows the audience to turn off something they're losing interest in, and turn on something else, but don't confuse that with me endorsing T.V. or channel grazing, I'm merely saying that when you're trying to engage someone in a dialogue it's usually easier if you can begin by speaking a common language.

RKN: So does it ever reach the point where the audience actually takes over and becomes the performance, is it that interactive?

ennercore: It seems to happen more and more with each public performance, but we've found that some people panic when saddled with that much responsibility right away, other people jump right in because this is what they've been looking for all along. We're using the gradual immersion technique because these are some pretty heavy programs we're bucking.

JM: People are figuring out that when they attend they become a major part of the show.

DJB: Are you seeing a learning curve?

JM: Or an unlearning curve, as the case may be.

RBK: Do you see the audience as becoming more diverse or do you see it tuning in to a very specific band?

ennercore: It ranges, but the normal situation (laughter) has participants that range across age, ethnic, economic, and social groups. The demographics are all over the map.

RKN: With all this breaking down of structures ,do you find that sometimes there's so much chaos that there's nothing to grasp on to?

JM: At times there will be weird little moments where the energy lags or becomes unintelligible, and then Wham! it takes off in a different direction and everyone's back up and moving.

DJB: You have said that your shows,are not really shows, but what you call "situations",and that you at times create a what you have termed an "anti-rave".Can you explain what you mean by this?

JM:We were inspired by the promise of the early rave gatherings, and even participated in the production of a few, I would say we've used or even helped develop some of the better elements of a rave.As far as I'm concerned, rave has become as commodified as any other musical fad. Fans of rave music would disagree with that statement by saying that the money only goes to good causes or that it stays in the "Community" or that rave records are not produced by mega-music corporations. Ok, so what? What 's really going on to liberate the human spirit? What's being done in the way of cultural experiments or information dissemination? Where's your bloody \$20 really going? I'm sorry, but I think, and this is an opinion gleaned from being on the inside of this phenomenon, that there really isn't much that's different from other so called movements that have promised liberation. A lot of people made a lot of money last summer on this thing, and I saw a lot of people jumping on the bandwagon as I was jumping off. I personally know a few people who are what you would call "alternative trend surfers". I saw them jump from crystals to food supplements to smart drinks to raves, and I'm sure I'll see them jumping again, now that the large centralized rave phenomenon seems to have decentralized into smaller, more specialized house trends.

ennercore: I like it better decentralized, there's more room for experimentation with things like deep house, trance...more room for general weirdness.

RKN: Maybe the resistance to interaction runs pretty deep, and people have

a tendency to
fall into the old modes.

JM: All I can say to that is, I agree. One thing we try to do is keep the installations at these situations interactive, that is to say, dependant on the input of a group or individual to make it do something.

RKN: What's the difference, in your opinion, between a culture that's interactive and say a culture that's passive in it's approach to information?

JM: A culture that's interactive by nature is curious. Interaction is a dance rather than a dictation, or a dialogue rather than a monologue. It's like the difference between a finite game played for the purpose of winning, and an infinite game played for the purpose of continuing the play.

DJB: What are some of the reactions you've experienced from people after one of your public situations?

ennercore: On the positive side, we've had people express to us that they were inspired to create art, or do something to drastically alter their life pattern as a result of their own personal experience at a situation.

JM: On the negative side, I was actually told by someone that we were attempting to make them think, and that wasn't the reason they went out at night.

DJB: (laughs) What was your reaction to that?

JM: All I could think was, "my god!" I can't believe she said that! That statement actually inspired me to incorporate a little of the traditional stage delivery back into some of the events, if only for a safety net so people didn't feel so unbalanced.

DJB: So you're creating a safe environment for people to let down their guard and shed old belief systems. Are you doing something to help encourage people to take responsibility for creating new belief systems?

ennercore: We're not encouraging people to create any belief systems.

JM: But rather to find their own.

DJB: Explain this to me on a practical nuts and bolts level.

JM: There is no real practical nuts and bolts level to this. It's a cut up. If it were anything other than that, it would be in danger of becoming a program that we were trying to propagate. All we're trying to do is create an environment period. We're only midwives there to facilitate a birthing process. Like any good midwife, we recognize that we are not in control, and can or will only do so much to influence the natural process. From the point that someone realizes that they are in control of what's going on, they are on their own.

RKN: Do you find that this has been a matrix for the creation of a lot of new art or artists?

ennercore: We get lots of art from people who were either inspired by the event or by people that they met there. We get really creative tapes, collages, voice mails, etc. from people after a situation.

RKN: How random is the process though really?

JM: To a point. To arrange a space and plane tickets and so forth you can only be so random and have something actually happen, but we try to leave as much to chaos as we can.

DJB: What would you say you've learned from all this?

ennercore: Or unlearned? (laughs)

JM: (laughing) Peoples belief systems, including my own are resoundingly rigid. For the most part what I've learned is that there are a lot of people walking around using the buzzwords of interactive technology, consciousness expansion, saving the planet, and so on who mouth the words to achieve the same old ends, making money.

RKN: What are your feelings about technology?

JM: The verdict isn't in yet, as far as I'm concerned. Whether or not technology will be used as a means of liberation comes down to intent on the part of the individual. If someone is intent on using it for that purpose, I think they probably will. People, for the most part, are still pretty passive. They still trust the corporations and governments to make the right decisions for them, they still buy advertisement as a statement of fact, when in fact it's the most insidious form of propaganda yet perfected. That's pretty much the bottom line. I'm not going to jump on the multimedia wagon to the point that I'll endorse it as the next new liberator. No technology will liberate us, although I won't say that it can't be used in the process.

RKN: There are a lot of forces that want to keep technology out of the hands of the many, or at least limit its access for that very reason-so that the corporate powers remain in control of it.

DJB: Price range ,for example ,is one barrier.

JM: Price is a barrier that can be overcome in many ways. One example is a situation we created in Santa Cruz California, where we had brain machines being displayed with a \$300 to \$800 price tag on them, and right next to them some friends of ours, the Schroedinger Team, displayed a model made out of Radio Shack parts that cost about \$8.00. After demonstrating that these machines worked the same as the more expensive models, they gave out the schematics free to anyone who wanted one. Also, without going into too much detail ,I will say that I know hackers, without a penny to their name, that have several hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of equipment. Some they built, some they liberated at a "discount". It is that kind of thinking, the spirit of "do-it-yourself ", that we try to encourage.You just have to want to do it bad enough.

RKN: Do you think we need a new technological project like a space station to take our minds off of our little hatreds.John Lilly thinks that the reason we have war is that we become bored and need something to do. What are your feelings on this?

JM: That would be a band-aid solution. It might buy us some time to discover the root cause of why we can't live together. I'm a pragmatist in many ways, I like to find the root causes of things.

RKN: Do you think we have time for that?

JM: Well that's why I said a space station would be a band-aid solution. I don't know if we have time to reverse our self destructive tendencies or not. We have the means on this planet to provide everyone with more than enough, why aren't we doing it? As for MK, we're not going to give up trying to break the born-work-consume-die syndrome, because we see that as a spell that keeps people from simply taking back their own lives. That's the first step to realizing who you are, and who others are, which hopefully might lead to people trying to live together in a more tolerant manner. I know that sounds vague, but it really comes down to this, if we do need a project to keep our minds off of petty differences then why not a terrestrial project like finding out why we have homeless people next to conspicuously wealthy ones, why corporations are allowed to rule our life down to our sleep and eating rhythms, why nuclear testing is still going on even after the evidence points to the conclusion that it hurts people and the ecosystem,and so on. I'm not trying to be a gloomy gus, but as a cultural provocateur I have to report what I see, and what I see isn't good. I think that a space station and space exploration would be great under more perfect terrestrial conditions, but to propose it now is to accept the industrial interpretation of progress, rather than a humane one.

DJB: Then what do you see as the next stage of the evolution of human consciousness?

JM: Hopefully to evolve past the industrial, passive consumer mind set. Outside of that, I wouldn't want to hazard a guess. I just want to see people develop the capacity to govern their own lives. I can tell you that I don't subscribe to the hierarchical, pyramidal model that suggests that we're all going to the same place, that we'll all leap into this enlightened ecstatic state. I think it's more complex than that, and ways that consciousness can or will evolve will continue to bifurcate and decentralize into many experiments. I know that I for one do not want to become some New Age conception of perfection. Great gopod, how boring!

RKN: It sounds like what you're fighting is the robot, or people moving toward some kind of corporate concept of evolution.

JM: It's really monolithic hierarchical structures. The time for hierarchical thinking is over. I don't think things are going to move that way anymore.

DJB: So you're seeing a multitude of offshoots?

RBK: Or anarchy?

JM: Everyone has a different concept of what anarchy is. To me, anarchy is not so much the abolition of government as it is the abolition of the need for government. The first 24 hours after the earthquake of '89 showed what's possible. Traffic moved without stoplights, people found out who their neighbors were, block parties ensued in our area, and then the military landed and reinstated "order".

RBK: A friend of mine reported the same kind of feeling during the riots in Liverpool, England. The circumstances were similar to the Rodney King incident, and it started out as a racial issue, but ended up as a class struggle, the poor against the police. He said that there was a feeling of freedom in that.

JM: Of course, the lie was exposed. It was really the disenfranchised versus the guard dogs of the power elite.

RBK: The race issue is covering up something that no one in America seems to want to talk about, and that's class. Everyone has this idea that there's no class divisions in America, but it's defiantly a reality and becoming more evident every day. Yes, there's racial tension, but really it comes down to haves and have nots.

JM: The have not's are never really going to succeed until they lose the desire to be masters themselves, though. As my friend Michael Burton once

said, "Off the pig in yourself!"

RKN: Do you see it all spiraling outwards, like the neo-primitive or tribalism trends? I wonder if the pattern won't just repeat itself again and we'll fall into the same old xenophobic "my tribe's better than your tribe "routines.

DJB: Do you see what you're doing, in attempting to break down boundaries, as a way out of the loop?

JM: Well we are attempting to cross socio-economic and tribal lines, or at least create a line of communication across these lines. What we do has always crossed several sub-cultural boundaries.

RKN: Have you ever had clashes?

JM: Believe it or not, not one single time. I'd like to think of a new tribalism, one that has all the best elements of a community without all the xenophobic elements included. Kind of a tolerant tribalism. I think our vision of that naturally carries over in everything we do.

RKN: Is there a membership in MediaKaos?

ennercore: It fluctuates, between 2 to 100 people.

JM: We use something called "consensual agreements between autonomous individuals" which is to say ,there is no set membership, but that many people have input according to their desires.

DJB: Tell us about Telepresence.

JM: You really want to hear about that?

DJB: Yes, we really do.

JM: Well, okay. Telepresence is an entity, for lack of a better word, that communicates to us via telephone, modem, voice mail, fax, snail mail, etc. who claims to be the soul of Hasan i Sabah reincarnated into the Media/Electronic Matrix.

DJB: What kind of matrix?

JM: The media matrix, the ever growing interconnected highway of lies and partial truths. Anyway, we've been experimenting with this person or group or whatever by feeding it information and having it come back in cut/ up form, or by decoding the multilayered info-transmissions we receive. I have run several cassette recordings of voice mail transmissions through some enhancement equipment and found that there are several messages layered over each other, and multiple sampled voices, really well done I might add, strung together to make complete sentences. So what we have is a piece taken as a whole which makes sense as a sound poem, and the individual tracks that make sense as statements of media terrorism, or just plain anti-media. My favorite line is actually a paraphrase of a Hasan i Sabah statement. Telepresence says " Nothing is real, all is mediated." I would have to agree with that.

RKN: So you don't know anything about these people, or person, with whom you're trading information?

ennercore: No, we don't, although we do know a few other people who have received transmissions from the same source.

JM: If they wish to remain anonymous then I will respect that anonymity. We did have one of the first transmissions traced because we thought that it was someone we knew and it may still be for all I know. We got as far as a phone booth in Guam and we lost it. They probably had two pay phones taped together.

RKN: How much has your work changed since you started 6 years ago, and is it still fun?

ennercore: I said to myself 6 years ago that when this ceases to be fun I'll stop doing it.

JM: We started out as a performance art group.

ennercore: Before we shattered that with our incessant experimentation.

RKN: Does the chaos ever get monotonous?(laughs)

JM: (laughs loudly)

ennercore: Chaos could never be monotonous.

JM: By it's very nature it defies monotony.

ennercore: The hand that must always put things into rational order, that's monotony. We stay close enough to chaos that we can avoid monotony to a large extent.

JM: What do you think chaos is Dave?

DJB: Lack of monotony.

JM: What else?

DJB: The lack of order.

JM: So there's not a different order implicit in chaos?

DJB: Well, the idea that's emerging from chaos theory is that chaos doesn't exist.

RKN: l Funny how we so often have to define something as the lack of something else.

JM: Like death is the lack of life. Nothing is a state within itself but rather exists in comparison to some other state or structure.

RKN: As your notoriety grows do you find it harder to find venues to create your art?

ennercore: Legitimate ones yes. We're branching out into a more guerrilla approach to this problem.

JM: And that's all we're going to say about that.

DJB: Okay. To what extent has your interest in Magick influenced your technique?

JM: To the extent that I use games of probability as divination or cut up tools. Also, Magick has taught me that I didn't know everything, that science didn't answer all the questions of life and reality as promised in the 19th century, and that there are forces or at least seem to be forces that are just beyond our 5 senses, that can have influence in this world. Also, the strong influence of the magickal concept of will has helped make me the individualist that I am today. Most of all, it gave me a profound respect for the unknown.

RKN: Is this third thing you use, the random factor, is it subjective or objective?

JM: I don't want to define it for fear of killing it. I will say that I've sat down with a piece of paper and listed out evidence for both cases and it seems to be even. I think focusing on that question at this stage of the experiment is putting the cart before the horse. How about this! This is what I'd really like, is if everyone reading this text were to rip this chapter out of the publication it's in. Take it, plagiarize it, cut it up, rearrange it, shred it and use it for packing material to send strange mind altering diskettes to high ranking government and corporate officials, change it somehow, interact with it. I'd love to receive a letter constructed out of this text rearranged.

DJB: Do you want to talk about your new project, The Last Book ?

JM: Sure. The Last Book is an experiment with the concept of the book. In occult jargon, a book could mean a physical tome, or a metaphysical concept. Like Crowley's Book of Thoth. Any Thelemite can tell you that the real "book of Thoth "is the deck of cards and their interaction between themselves and the initiate. By using the cards as Yantras, you create a harmonic, and from the the two tones a third tone is created, called a sympathetic vibration. In literature, I think that was described as the third mind, by Brion Gysin and William Burroughs. The idea of a third thing created by the union of two, simple procreation, a birthing process, or a medium that allows this third thing to come into a dialogue and create a trialogue. Anyway, my idea is to experiment with that notion by creating different mediums that depend on the recipients' interaction to establish a dialogue, thereby allowing for this third thing phenomenon ,to manifest. I plan on using audio cassette, hypercard, board games, maps, voice mail numbers and so on for each successive chapter. One chapter will be mailed from person to person with each person encouraged to add, subtract, or rearrange the text at will. Eventually all the results will be collected on CD ROM. Basically it is an attempt to create an immersion experience for a given amount of time rather than mass -producing a monologue for passive consumption. The first chapter should

be available in bookstores and by mail by the end of 93 or the beginning of 94. In the end, the entire collection of chapters will be made available with an exhortation to burn it when you're finished playing with it.

MediaKaos may be contacted at (415) 241-1568 or
by email : mediak@well.sf.ca.us