

## **A Living Library:**

New Model for Global Electronic  
Interactivity and Networking in  
the Garden

Bonnie Sherk

*Visible Language*, 29:2

Bonnie Sherk, 180-185

© *Visible Language*, 1995

Rhode Island School of Design

2 College Street

Providence, Rhode Island 02903

*education* Two key concepts to emerge with the new communications technologies of video, computers and other electronic forms are interactivity and networking. These terms relate to the importance of the human's role with the hardware and software through some form of creation, choice, user manipulation or linked participation.

We sometimes think of the cliché of a computer-dominated, digital world — a cold and inhumane place with little room for human warmth and passion. Yet the possibilities that these new communications technologies afford are rich in diversity and potential for many kinds of experiences including those that *technology* can help us reach our potential of greater humanity.

Interactivity and networking as modes for experience have also become increasingly important in other fields such as: education, community and international relations, urban planning and open space design and many other art forms from theater and dance to some forms of painting and sculpture. Through scientific discovery, we're also seeing the multitudes of connections and interactivity between all elements of the universe.

In terms of our everyday life, simple reasons to understand our seemingly new interest in interactivity and networking may be because of our deepened awareness that being involved with choice creates greater interest in our lives, promotes a higher quality of learning, and in the process, helps us to develop our self-esteem. It's also an efficient

way to get things done and have some fun, too — whether it's talking on the videophone, banking, maintaining a public community garden or learning about the geography of the world. There are obviously many reasons for us to explore and develop new applications for interactivity and networking, especially when they promote positive human communication.

One such evolving project that explores new potentialities for interactivity and networking is A Living Library. It's an idea to create a network of international culture parks in different cities of the world using new communications technologies on-line in a garden setting. This network would promote greater understanding among

people and diverse cultures from all over the globe

to demonstrate how ideas, events and cultural and ecological forms around the world are connected.

Each Living Library would bring the humanities, social sciences and visual and performing arts to life through plants, lectures, demonstrations and video, computer and on-line

capabilities. Each Living Library would bring the humanities, social sciences to life through plants, performed artworks, programs of demonstration and video, computer satellite (or other) capabilities.

The park, plaza, school-yard or other public open space would become a living learning laboratory, a magnet, bringing together many sectors of the community — all in celebration of learning, creating and maintaining the environment.

Initially inspired and designed for a site in the middle of

CULTURES environmental

New York City, Bryant Park, adjacent to the main branch of the New York Public Library, a Living Library here, would have gardens of know-ledge arranged according to the Dewey Decimal System. There would be a Generalities Garden, Religion Garden, Philosophy Garden, Social Sciences Garden, Language Garden, Science Garden, Technology Garden, a Garden of the Arts and History and a Geography Garden — each with its corresponding plants, artworks and other programs.

*nature*

Because each locale is unique, the participating communities — some large, some small, would have their Living Libraries designed in a site specific and situation specific way — highlighting and integrating the local features and resources of the area — human, ecological, historic and economic. As such, each separate “life frame” or Living Library would be unique. At the local level, the re-sources would be integrated to work better to-gether. The curricula of the schools, for ex-ample, could be linked to the park and maintenance for the environment would become part of the pro-gram. While at the national and international level, communities would be exchanging and sharing vital cultural information that promotes understanding, connectedness and peace.

*public*

**Bonnie Sherk** is an environmental sculptor and planner. She creates unique artistic, ecological and educational environments integrated with programs, called “Life-Frames.” Her new work operates on a global scale and demonstrates the connections between multicultural forms and international styles with other life systems.

As a model for the urban park of the future, A Living Library is part of a larger concept of park and urban design that formulates creative cost-effective solutions to traditional problems plaguing not only parks, but society-at-large, through integrating diverse human, technological and ecological resources.

**The issues that A Living Library addresses are:**

Healing the fragmentation of modern living and *education*

Promoting a more profound understanding and appreciation  
of other **CULTURES** around the world

Creating a sensitive balance between *technology* and non-mechanized *nature*

Developing new approaches to civic management, park maintenance,  
problems of vandalism and inappropriate behavior

Creating innovative solutions for locating monies  
for the operation of *public*-oriented projects such as parks

Proposing alternatives to the "business-as-usual" approach to *environmental* transformation,  
which is often merely cosmetic and overly expensive.

Department of Comparative Literature  
University of Iowa  
Iowa City, Iowa 52242-1408

*Visible Language*, 29:2  
Herman Rapaport, 186-197

© *Visible Language*, 1995  
Rhode Island School of Design  
2 College Street  
Providence, Rhode Island 02903