The Intruder

NATALIE BOOKCHIN

Natalie Bookchin developed her interactive art project, *The Intruder*, by merging video games, literature, and social and political activism. *The Intruder* is an Internet-based art project that uses a series of ten arcade-like game interfaces to tell a short love story by Jorge Luis Borges. In combining these familiar scenarios with Borges' short and brutal tale of a tragic love triangle, *The Intruder* seeks to make the metaphors in these interfaces—shooting, wounding, surveying (a woman's body)—grossly apparent.

Players move forward through a linear narrative only by shooting, fighting, catching, or colliding. Instead of winning a point, a player is rewarded with a piece of the narrative, told in a voice-over. Playing transforms readers into participants who are placed inside of the story. Throughout *The Intruder*, players' subject positions shift back and forth between different and opposing sides in the same story, sometimes assuming the position of the male character, sometimes controlling the female character.

The definition of success is not always apparent in these gaming interfaces. In some games, a player must lose or receive a penalty to continue moving forward through the Borges tale. The story is told in ten game scenarios that together present a loose parallel narrative of a history of computer games. The abstractions in the game are not unlike the abstractions seen in military pursuits where human contact is purged from the brutal acts. *The Intruder* begins with a reconstructed version of one of the earliest computer games, Pong, and ends with a war game that, like its real-life screen-based counterpart, serves to simultaneously reinforce and abstract violence—in this instance, the story's violent end.

The Intruder is not the only instance in which Bookchin uses the game format to express ideas. Bookchin's *Metapet* project encourages discussion about biological innovations while players manage an office full of genetically modified pets. Bookchin illustrates moral dilemmas in a playful manner, one that

engages the participant-observer through role-play as the corporate leader with the power to construct his workers' DNA. The project ultimately challenges notions of humanity and biotechnology of the future.

By creating art that is a game, Bookchin targets the computer gaming crowd as well as net art and net activism audiences, providing access to her projects through a variety of channels.

Natalie Bookchin rejects labeling her pieces, as the labels tend to exclude or isolate viewers and participants. Definitions of net art and net activism are best constructed within the context of their exhibition and use. According to Bookchin, net art and net activism are not mutually exclusive. Both forms of Internet work can be creative, thought provoking, and can encourage action.

Screenshot from *The Intruder*, 1999.

heard it again. The second and more elaborate version closely followed the one Santiago told, with the usual minor variations and discrepancies. I set down the story now because I see in it, if I'm not mistaken, a brief and tragic mirror of the character of those hard-bitten men living on the edge of Buenos Aires before the turn of the century. I hope to do this in a straightforward way, but I see in advance that I shall give in to the writer's temptation of emphasizing or adding certain details.
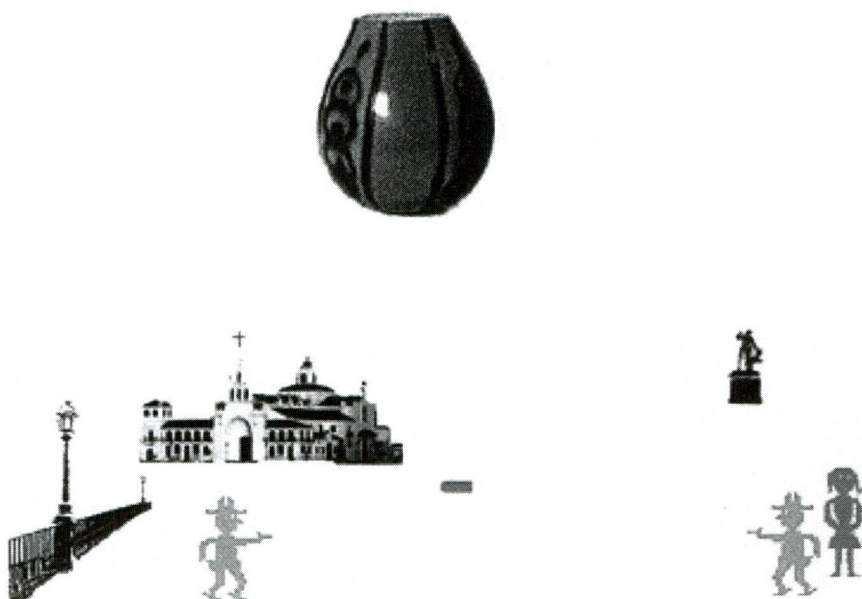
Screenshot from *The Intruder*, 1999.

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Contributors

REBECCA WEPSIC ANCHETA served as the coordinator of research for the Techbridge program. She is an affiliated scholar at the Institute for Research on Women and Gender at Stanford University and has published her research on women's experiences with cosmetic surgery. She has a doctorate in sociology from the University of California, San Francisco.

STEVEN BEAN is the senior program manager of the Program Development Unit at Education, Training, Research Associates, where he develops, tests, and disseminates youth development programs. Bean earned his MA in teaching from the University of California, Santa Cruz. He has more than twelve years of experience in experiential education and has worked in a variety of settings including outdoor adventure learning, environmental education, youth leadership, and education for high-risk youth.

LENORE BLUM is the Women@SCS faculty advisor and codirector (along with Carol Frieze and Jeannette Wing) of the new Sloan-funded Women@IT program. For more than thirty years, she has created programs to increase the participation of girls and women in scientific and technical fields, and she cofounded many proactive organizations such as the Math/Science Network and its "Expanding Your Horizons" conferences. She joined the Carnegie Mellon faculty in fall 1999 as a Distinguished Career Professor of Computer Science, where she is also codirector of the NSF-ALADDIN Center.

NATALIE BOOKCHIN connects her extensive knowledge of photographic art to the more experimental genre of Net art to create works that speak of the technology culture. Bookchin's works allow for active participation in the viewing and creating of new temporal art. Bookchin uses the game interface as a medium to share ideas about sexism, Net activism, and biotechnology. Natalie Bookchin received her bachelor's degree in art from the State University of

New York at Purchase, completed her MFA at the Art Institute of Chicago, and studied at the Whitney Museum in 1992. She is a faculty member in the School of Art at the California Institute of the Arts.

SHANNON CAMPE is a research associate at Education, Training, Research Associates. She has a teaching credential with cross-cultural, language, and academic development emphases. She is the program leader for the Girls Creating Games project.

J. MCGRATH COHOON conducts research, publishes, and speaks on women's underrepresentation in IT and gender segregation in higher education. Her research has been funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation and the National Science Foundation. Cohoon is on the faculty at the University of Virginia in the School of Engineering and Applied Science and the Curry School of Education. She has a BA in philosophy (Ramapo College of New Jersey), an MA in student personnel administration in higher education (Columbia University), and a PhD in Sociology (University of Virginia). Cohoon is a member of the National Center for Women in IT Social Science Network, the Georgia Tech College of Computing Diversity Advisory Board, the PROACT Advisory Board, and the Working Committee on Women in Computing of ACM-W. Her research interests include technology and gender, education and gender, higher education, and organizations.

LEDA COOKS (PhD, Ohio University) is an associate professor in the Department of Communication at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Her teaching and research range from the analysis of the social effect of information and communication technologies on gender and communication and interracial and intercultural communication. Her research on the formation of identity and community in ICTs has appeared in journals, such as *Electronic Journal of Communication*, *Feminist Media Studies*, and *Communication Quarterly*, and in the following books: *Cyberimperialism*, *Women and Everyday Uses of the Internet*, *Communication and Global Society*, and *Virtual Morality*.

E. G. CRICHTON melds her interests in young children's playground rhythms and rhymes with her curiosity of single women's gravesites to reconstruct the histories of women's lives. Crichton explores social justice issues through many artistic venues, using historical research, personal experiences, and interview data to invent overlapping narratives told in photographs, prose, and audio recordings. She completed a bachelor's degree in art at San Francisco State University, earned an MFA with high distinction from the California College of Arts and Crafts, and is currently employed as an assistant professor at the University of California, Santa Cruz.