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## Interview: March 2002

### Antoine Schmitt in Conversation with Sabine Breitsameter

#### Sabine Breitsameter:

Antoine Schmitt, what is the best term to describe your artistic work?

#### Antoine Schmitt:

The most precise way to describe my work is to say that I create artificial beings.

#### Sabine Breitsameter:

For many people the term "artificial being" evokes immediately the allusion of "Artificial intelligence".

#### Antoine Schmitt:

Well the word "intelligence" is a bit a strange word, I think. It is a very Anglo-Saxon word, a very American word, and it means the ability to solve problems. What I am dealing with is different. It is more about the essence of being, that's all.

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[Biography Antoine Schmitt](#)

#### Sabine Breitsameter:

You had been conceiving and designing the virtual creature which is the center of Atau Tanaka's interactive radio-internet-piece "Frankensteins Netz/Prométhée Numérique". The web

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Thu, 9.00 - 10.00 p.m.

Sun, 4.05 - 18.00 p.m.

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The Final Mix of the Internet-installation by Atau Tanaka

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visitors can feed it with audiovisual materials. How did you conceive the creature's motivation to interact with the web visitors?

**Antoine Schmitt:**

Basically the creature is seeking affection. That is the basic energy or force inside the creature. There are two reasons for this. The first is really the parallel with the Frankenstein creature, which had the same problem, because it was created out of the experiments of science. So it was not created for itself, but for what it represented. So it lacked affection, and this why it suffered and why it killed everybody afterwards. Also, what is quite important in this project is that the visitors get attached to the creature. And having a creature that is demanding, is a very good way to attach the visitor.

**Sabine Breitsameter:**

And in which way does the virtual creature get attached to the visitor in "Frankensteins Netz"?

**Antoine Schmitt:**

It recognizes the person who is coming back to it. So it can have a special relationship with this visitor: for example, it is going to show the images, that this visitor gave him the last time and play his sounds that this special visitor gave it the last time. Also it is going to send special e-mail- and SMS-messages to each visitor depending on when they came for the last time. So as the creature is having a special relationship with each visitor, I think, the visitor is having a special relationship with the creature, too.

**Sabine Breitsameter:**

This conceiving and designing of life-like behaviour needs a relational database and a lot of creative programming. What does this artistic programming mean to you?

**Antoine Schmitt:**

I think, programming is like clay or paint - not painting, but paint. And it is just matter, something that you mould and you shape. And once you attain a certain level of professionalism or habit - I don't know - there is not any more a dialectic between the idea and this matter that is moulded.

**Sabine Breitsameter:**

How do you conceive behaviour? Are there theories, on which your work is based?

**Antoine Schmitt:**

Psychology, psychoanalysis and philosophy are the two main source of inspiration for me to try to

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Information and Biography

imagine and build artificial beings.

**Sabine Breitsameter:**

And what does this mean in detail? Could you explain this?

**Antoine Schmitt:**

Well that's very difficult for me to say, as I am not at all a scholar. But I try to give some small hints. For example, what was very important in Aristotle for me was his questioning about the Four Causes he gave. It was his four answers to the question "why?". All these questions about the causes of something were really important for me to try to approach the decision of somebody and something. And this led me to Schopenhauer and his very important idea of "will". He has a very special way of talking about the will, which is not the will of decision, but the energy of living, which is a will to live. And this concept was very important for me. For Freud it is much simpler for me, because Freud had a very analytical and scientific approach and tried to modelize the human psyche. And in computer science and programming, when you have a model, well, and if the model is clear enough then it's quite easy to create a program, which implements or creates or plays this model. This is called a simulation. So, with Freud, it was actually really a hands-on to proceed. I could actually start from his theory and program right away.

**Sabine Breitsameter:**

This sounds quite humanistic. But visiting your virtual creature in "Frankensteins Netz" for example, or your other work, like "Venus #1" doesn't remind very much of a human being...

**Antoine Schmitt:**

Well, I never create something anthropomorphic, that is the first thing, but "anthropo-behaviourist". Basically, when I deal with artificial creatures I am questioning the human being. And in "human being" you have two words: "human" and "being". I am interested in both words. The being aspect and the human aspect.

**Sabine Breitsameter:**

Thank you very much for the interview, Antoine!

