

Q. So what this *virusLife* all about then?

A. Well *virusLife* is an intermedia art project that combines a number of elements to construct a metaphor for the *way we live*.

These elements include: a website (through which you can become a member of *virusLife*, imprison viruses you find on your computer, and design the way those viruses are displayed through a nifty flash interface... they end up looking like little black space-invaders btw!), a webserver (which hosts the site, as no-one would allow me to store viruses willingly on their server), some texts, video and other pieces and an attitude (a way of approaching technology/media that questions it's value in our lives, and who's in control of whom).

virusLife is also a generative art machine, initiated by the artist, but autonomous in it's processes. Indeed, *virusLife* is capable of generating, publishing and distributing it's own content.

Q. And *virusLife* / *the server room* is?

A. A temporary display of some of the elements brought together for the *virusLife* project, especially the webserver that allows the project to connect to the web and the world at large.

This server room is a physical manifestation of the *virusLife* project at this time only. *virusLife* and these physical elements will change as needs dictate, adapting to it's use and the

available resources. It will shrink or grow as required. It has *scalability* and *redundancy* built in. In other words it can grow to meet demand, and if one part of it is damaged another part can carry the load.

Each box is a variation on the same design, like viruses, and function as both projector and monitor (male and female if you will!) allowing an infinite series of connections to be made. These boxes are objects in an array, they can fill this room, or they can fill an entire warehouse.

Q. So, is it just about computer viruses then / what do you do with them?

A. Not as such... I employ the computer virus and the fear it provokes as a signifier of my own paranoid fear of the malignant rational power of computers, my fear of being controlled externally by forces I can't clearly identify or understand, and as if in contradiction, my fear of being infected and destroyed from within when I engage with these forces. So viruses, as in the biological world, represent our fear of each other and our fear of engagement.

What I do with them is subject them to a competitive environment in which they can fight, thrive, mate and die (and in pretty much that order if they're lucky) and members to the site can re-visit them and see how they're doing.

Q. What needs to be engaged with and why?

A. Only through a *full social engagement* that

eschews trading people as *objects* for communicating with people as *subjects* can we meet the challenge of overthrowing the human resource managers of our *object based society* and replace out product lines of desired objects for the relationship with our community that gives life *value beyond capital*.

Q. Can I catch a virus/ are you spreading them / couldn't they wreck your machine?

A. No, you needn't back away, it isn't catching. And no, I'm not spreading them, they are safely tucked away in the server their wrecking days behind them.

Most of the apprehension around computer viruses is a form of *hysteria*, the danger of computer viruses in the wild is greatly over stated. The product of an industry, and a very successful one. That's partly what makes them interesting subject matter for an art project.

Q. Is this illegal, are you allowed to collect these / could this be dangerous / be used as a weapon?

A. Dunno, but I doubt it's illegal as such, not in Ireland yet anyway. If it fell on you it could do some damage, I suppose.

Q. Are you sure this isn't some kind of spoof, an elaborate put-on?

A. Yes, I'm sure.

Q. So is this the start or the end of your project?

A. To paraphrase the Great Man, it's not the start or the end yet, just the end of the start.

This project is only getting going. In Software production when a product is being tested in-house, it's called Alpha Testing, and when it's ready to be tested in-public, that's called Beta Testing, but when it's ready to be distributed to the public and go live, it's given a version number (1.0).

Well you could say virusLife is now in public Beta testing, but has a long way to go before you could call it Version 1.0.

Q. You seem to make all these allusions to computing, is computing art now?

A. Look at it this way: Computers are ubiquitous, computers can't do anything without software, and programmers write software. As this software becomes more and more important to our lives, the issue of who exactly is doing the programming becomes culturally essential.

Artists must engage with the Culture of their time, so the issue becomes less whether computing can be art, or whether this is a good thing, but rather whether *we can afford* for artists not to intervene in the programming of our Culture.

Q. Nice red boxes, folded Perspex, neat tressles etc. Did you make them? If not, shouldn't you

thank whoever did?

A. Yes, they are nice, aren't they? And no, I didn't make them.

So thanks goes to Stephen Killane for his great workmanship, to Seán Kelleghan for digging me out of a big hole, and to Evelyn McGrath for those lovely tressles... promise to get them back to you soon.

To all the Staff at the Media Department NCAD for all your help, especially the Technicians who NEVER get thanked enough, but NEVER take that personally. To Kevin Atherton for being a great Tutor.

And to Pauline Cummins, Sarah Pierce, Chris Maguire, Paul O'Brien and Mick O'Kelly for tutorials, support and insights over the period of the MA.

Thanks to my family, especially my Mother, for everything.

Q. Where can I get more information?

A. virusLife continues a series of art and self-publishing projects that can be viewed on-line:

viruslife.com
niallflaherty.com
blackletter.ie

email me directly at:
flahertyniall@eircom.net



virusLife

FAQ

**Frequently Asked
Questions**

**(don't Destroy That
Computer Virus
send It To Me!)**