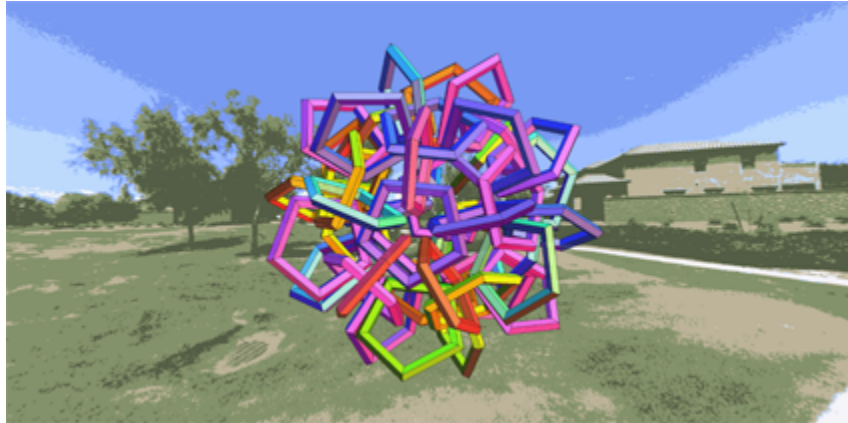


## [An Interview with READ/WRITE Curators Caitlin Denny and Parker Ito](#)

[Ceci Moss](#) | Wed Mar 16th, 2011 10 a.m.

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Mitch Trale, [Analog Environments](#), 2009

*This Thursday night, March 17th, the online curatorial platform [Jstchillin.org](#) will celebrate the last year and a half of their programming with a large group exhibition involving [all thirty-five](#) of the artists who have developed special projects for the site. Opening at [319 Scholes](#) in Brooklyn, the show, entitled "[READ/WRITE](#)," will remain on view until March 30th. Begun in October 2009 by [Parker Ito](#) and [Caitlin Denny](#), Jstchillin.org has emerged as one of the most playful and innovative destinations for internet-based art. I interviewed Parker and Caitlin over email in January 2011. This interview appears in the catalog for "READ/WRITE," available for purchase [here](#).*

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**The experience of running an online platform for art, like Jstchillin, has its own set of challenges and advantages, in terms of the flexibility of display, a potential for a large, diverse audience, serendipitous reception and circulation. I'm wondering if you can talk more about your experience with Jstchillin, and how this may have led to some of the key themes in READ/WRITE.**

**Caitlin Denny:** JstChillin started with ambitious goals, and now we're seeing it all come together even better than we had imagined. It's been somewhat surreal to reflect on the process, people and conditions of the project. It had originally been a Rhizome proposal that got rejected called "Cosmos" that included a small group of friends, some of whom are a part of JstChillin. I wanted to keep going with the project even after we got rejected, and it seemed Parker was the only one on the same page as me. We developed our ideas

and mission for the project very loosely when we made "An Essay About Chillin'", a screen capture movie of a staged AIM conversation. After that, we started our now year and a half long exhibition on our site called "Serial Chillers In Paradise" which is what we have become most well known for. We were fans of surf clubs and the like, but wanted to do something more immersive that would almost abolish the body yet make one hyper aware of their own physicality. We chose to let the artists take over our site every two weeks instead of using a blog-like style to highlight work. We weren't interested in highlighting just any art we liked at the moment, we were interested in commissioning new works made especially for our site. This, I think, stands us apart from a lot of other online exhibition sites. We also wanted to create a seemingly naive and simple charisma to our project that over time would unfold the complexities of our digital condition. I think we've been successful so far. [Reading Brian Droitcour's essay on us](#), first published on Rhizome's blog, made me realize that we had accomplished something, whether people liked it or not. I was somewhat blind, and probably still am, to who our audience is. I imagine it is mainly people involved in an online art community of sorts, but I frequently get hints and clues to other worlds of people who see the site. I like this ambiguity, that's what the internet is to me. I don't want to know facts or numbers, I want to keep the internet wild and mysterious... but it seems now we are getting closer and closer to the limits of the internet. I've felt these changes in my own surfing and online time - it is harder to discover the vast net terrain more than ever. Not that there isn't anything to discover, but the way I surf the net is so much different, and so much more boring, than I ever used to. I am definitely more in the Tim Berners-Lee camp than the Tim O'Reilly camp - the web was made as a read/write vehicle, a vast anonymous space for interaction and discovery. With Web 2.0, the enchantment of the net is slowly disintegrating. We need the Jim Henson of the internet to step up and tell us what's up.

**Parker Ito:** JstChillin is always framed as a curatorial project. I feel kind of weird saying that at times. It's more like a performance of curating. For me, it's just about hanging out online and looking at what people are doing and it's really hard to know who's seeing what, but at least with our site people can sorta respond and be like "I really like so and so's project." A lot of the Surf Club era artists used, and still use Delicious to spread stuff they're excited about, or get out the word about a new project. JstChillin in my mind is an extension of that. It is a crazy ambitious project, a year and half exhibition, that is kinda insane now that I think about. Reflecting on the project now, I don't really know what to say, it's a really overwhelming feeling. The themes for the show occurred very naturally. This show will never live up to the beauty of my daily interaction with people online, it's just an opening paragraph in a really really long essay. There's a lot of power to be harnessed.

Martin Kohout, [Watching Martin Kohout](#), 2010 (Video from [the series](#))

**In your email to me about the show, you said that the title “Read/Write” is an attempt to highlight the collaborative nature of Web 2.0 and social media, where the “writing” capacity of “Read/Write” refers to interactivity and not to the actual derivative of the term, the computer memory’s ability to read and write. Do you have any plans for exhibition layout or presentation that might try to provoke participation by viewers, allowing them to “write” themselves into the show?**

**Caitlin Denny:** We made our first step into this type of exhibition with a show called [Avatar 4D](#) in San Francisco last year. Our plan was basically chaos, to have everything going at once, overlapping, intersecting. Our space with that show was pretty small, but overall it was a chaotic success. This time around we are more interested in letting the viewers and visitors intersect the work, rather than work doing it to each other. All of the work in the show is participatory and active, you really can't be lazy going into this show.

**Parker Ito:** "Read/Write" is a term coined by Lawrence Lessig used to differentiate between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0. I was inspired a lot by the TV show "The Wonder Years", just this overwhelming sense of nostalgia. There is this term the Greeks used, I can never remember what it is actually called. It's the period of time between the ages 17-23, the Greeks believed this is when a person was in their physical prime and the mind is most

flexible, open to learning, taking in loads of information. This translates into our modern times, this span of time is now like when a user is most open to power of the Internet, something like an "Internet surfing prime" (chillin'). With the acceleration of web time the previous ages the Greeks referred to are no longer relevant, the gap for "Internet surfing prime" has obviously increased. I hope when someone steps into the exhibition they feel like they have 50 browser tabs open; simultaneously stalking someone on Facebook, gchatting, bookmarking something on delicious, updating one's tumblr, torrenting some porn, and watching the new funniest cat video.

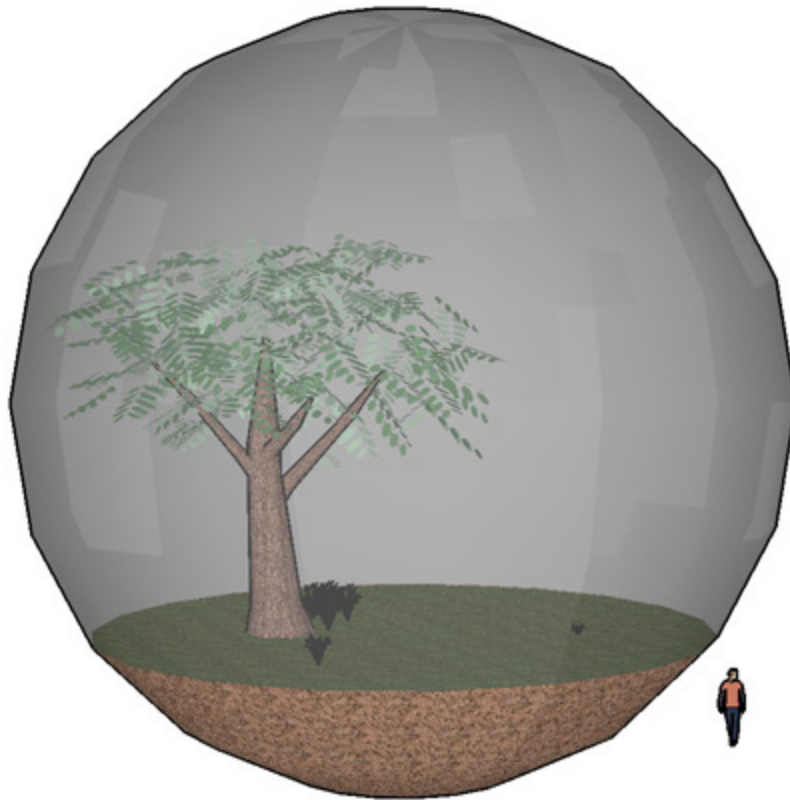
READ/WRITE trailer

**You also mentioned that you're interested in dealing with the isolation of the computer viewing experience, and the psychological effects that this may have on the user. Are there ways in which you, in your position as curator, will counter this in "Read/Write"? Do any of the works address this topic?**

**Parker Ito:** I went camping with my parents recently and I was freaked out about not being able to check my email for a couple of days, I ended up being okay though. I think

people are addressing these issues, but it's more built into the work than presented as a central issue, more subtle. I rarely leave my apartment, most of the time I'm wearing a bathrobe. I may or may not be dressed like this at the opening.

**Caitlin Denny:** It naturally takes its course in our curation – the psychological effects caused by the internet is something I've been dealing with personally. Sometimes I feel like Parker and I play good cop/bad cop - I can't be online for more than a couple hours a day anymore, and I know Parker's dream is to be online forever. So, we are very different in this respect, I'm not sure what Parker thinks about this. But, depression linked to computer usage is a real thing. I've seen others go through it and now I am. I found myself reaching for my laptop as a comforting device, which in the end was really unhealthy for me. Works in “Read/Write” address the power dynamic between user and machine (though we are not too keen on that distinction). I'm not sure who's in control anymore.



Guthrie Lonergan, [google 3d warehouse](#), 2010

One major strand in discussions revolving around “post-internet” or internet aware artworks – most recently elaborated in the essay published on Jstchillin “[The Image Object Post Internet](#)” by Artie Vierkant and elsewhere, on Gene McHugh’s [blog](#), in

the [interview with Guthrie Lonergan by Thomas Beard](#), on Rhizome's discussion boards, etc. – is how their porosity allows them to travel across multiple environments, such as in AIDS-3D's *OMG Obelisk*, which originally existed as a temporary installation, whose photo was translated into a popular animated gif, which was then the basis for another sculpture presented in "The Generational: Younger Than Jesus." Is this same translatable quality apparent in the works in "READ/WRITE"? Would you say that the works in "READ/WRITE" come under the header of "post-internet" art? If so, why?

**Parker Ito:** Yeah, this is really a big thing that is defining this whole project. I really believe in the term "Post Internet", I think we need a different term though. I had this idea for the term "Alter Internet", just throwing that out there.

**Caitlin Denny:** This was the most basic outline of "Read/Write" - to translate a website for a gallery space. Now, that means something different to every artist in the show, so don't expect uniformity in presentation and methods. I found there's something about websites that make people want to build shrines. A lot of the work in the show could be categorized under shrine-art if there was such a thing. I find it pretty uplifting to know that people have a vague sense of faith connected to the internet. As far as the post-internet term goes, I suppose you would call it that. I'd also call the works modest.



Ryder Ripps and Jacob Broms Engblom, [Stop Internet Time](#), 2009

I'm wondering if you could talk more about this element of spirituality in the work you're presenting. It calls to mind [an interview Gene McHugh conducted with Kevin Bewersdorf](#) for Rhizome a few years ago, where Bewersdorf said:


*"We make pilgrimage to the same web sites at regular and repeated intervals, paying homage to them by contributing or partaking, and then we move on to our other daily needs like eating and sleeping. But all the while, we have faith that this plane of information we have become so dependent on is tangible enough to provide a worthwhile connectedness. For many of us, the web has become almost sacred, its ritual use is the embodiment of our spiritual needs. So I suppose that my conclusion is this: surfing the web can be a fulfilling spiritual experience and a direct interaction with a transcendent reality."*

**How are the artists in the show dealing with this “transcendent reality”?**

**Caitlin Denny:** Kevin Bewersdorf is one of my biggest inspirations. I've never met him or talked to him, but I remember seeing his work while I was still in school making films and it had a huge effect on my life. He redefined art for me in a way... and allowed me to keep redefining it for years afterward. I'm not sure if it's so simple, though. I do agree, the internet has a ritualistic occult power to it, probably more so even two years ago than today. It was ok if websites evolved or just ended, we would find a new spot, a new ground. In fact, the internet had no grounding at all, though we had our reliance on the daily use, it was a dependence on an unknown that we were all so drawn to. It can still be that way, but for most internet users today I would say using the internet is far from being a spiritual experience... it has become an expected chore. Somebody has an idea that they're going to update their status about a movie they watched, and they expect others to like the post or comment on it. It's very predictable. Spirituality, or whatever you want to call it, is about the unknown. That's what I'm talking about with keeping the internet mysterious and wild, we have more chance to enlighten ourselves in one way or another if there is no grounding. I'm guilty of participating in the solidification of the net, too, though. I wonder how we can get out of this rut... it may just take time. Artists in Read/Write, most of whom make most of their work online, have come to us with brilliant object oriented works. It's clear through the works in the show that actually "being online" is not a requirement for being in the net.

Tags: [curation](#) [meme](#) [pop](#) [social media](#) [surfing](#) [Writer's Initiative](#) [Writers Initiative](#)


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-  [Rachel Howard](#) | Wed, Mar 16th, 2011 11:43 a.m.

I only know her last name-*Ulysses*

*I she is From [Portugal](#) She lives and works as an artist in New york  
Such a graceful stance...*

reply

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- o  [Rachel Howard](#) | Wed, Mar 16th, 2011 12:21 p.m.

“Obviously, he had this native intelligence, this sensitivity and this ability to move rapidly through a whole range of material, ... You could just feel him taking stuff in with that gadfly energy, that hummingbird energy, taking a little something from here, there and everywhere, taking a little something from everything.”

reply

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