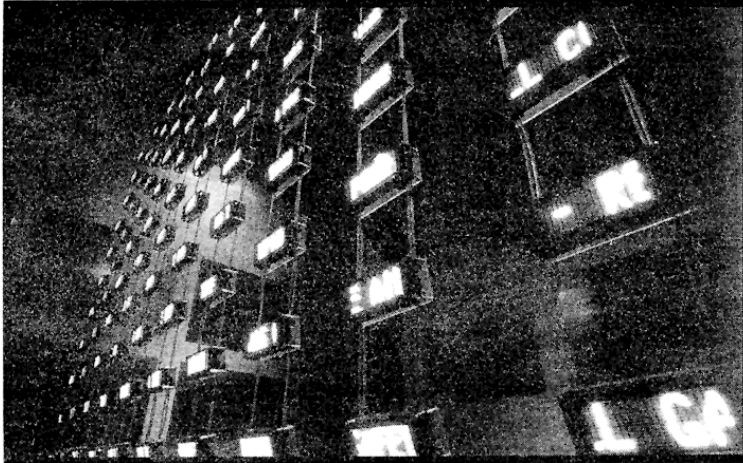


SEATTLE WEEKLY

NOVEMBER 20-26, 2002

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THE LISTENING POST

The amount of oddball banter on the Internet somehow feels warmly vital in the hands of multimedia artist Ben Rubin and Mark Hansen, a researcher/statistician for Bell Laboratories. At *The Listening Post*, their collaborative installation, what looks like a beaded curtain made of rectangular screens captures messages pulled by computer from public chat rooms in real time. The logged-on users ["sinaster666," "Depressed_Gal," et al.] and their overwhelming rush of text become a wave of light, while a deadpan voice synthesizer calmly articulates bits of their "dialogue" (lonely-hearts personals, vitriol about 9/11, non sequiturs about the sex habits of monkeys). Linked by a sound design that assigns a particular pitch to each new arriving message, the conversations take on a sonic resemblance to rain, wind chimes, even to the undersea communications of whales. Seen from a removed perspective, the installation shimmers peacefully in the distance, though the sheer volume of text demands closer inspection. As Rubin says, "It wouldn't be right if you just walked in, sat down, and then left. It's nice to see the shapes and constellations it makes as an abstraction, but it's also important to see the words." The most compelling quality of *The Listening Post* is how it seems to turn those words—random and often ridiculous—into a force of nature.

5-8 p.m. Wed.-Fri.; 1-8 p.m. Sat.-Sun. Ends Sun., Nov. 24. Free. On the Boards, 100 W. Roy St., 206-217-9888. STEVE WIECKING