

Changing Spaces

Galinsky and the Virtual Furnace

an interview by Toni Sant

Before the end of the 1996/97 season, Franklin Furnace announced it was going virtual. The organization sold its premises at 112 Franklin Street in downtown Manhattan and with that ceased using any physical space to present its art and performance programs. For the first two seasons following the decision, a number of works were presented on the Internet in conjunction with Pseudo Programs Inc. Through Pseudo.com, Franklin Furnace started making the works and ideas of the artists on its program available to a broader audience on the web.

The main producer working with Franklin Furnace at Pseudo was Robert Galinsky; an artist in his own right known only as Galinsky. Born in New Haven, Connecticut, Galinsky moved to New York in the early 1990s to develop his career as a writer. In 1995 he cofounded Pseudo Programs. He left the company in 2000 and briefly worked with Arts International as Director of New Technology and Media. I interviewed Galinsky at my apartment in Jackson Heights, NY, on Wednesday 9 August 2001. Galinsky is no longer professionally involved with Internet technology. He continues to write poetry, perform, teach, and produce performance on screen. His website is available at <<http://www.galinskyplace.com>>.

SANT: The Internet became available to communities outside academia and the government in 1994. By the end of that year, the World Wide Web really started getting major public attention through Netscape Navigator 1.0, the first commercial browser release. What were you doing in 1994, the year before Pseudo.com appeared?

GALINSKY: In 1994, and for a few years before that, I was teaching. I was also producing, mostly spoken word shows. I was doing the occasional theatrical audition, but I was mainly teaching conflict resolution and drug prevention—using theatre, film, and poetry—to special education kids in all five boroughs.

SANT: Were you teaching in the New York City public school system?

GALINSKY: Yes, but I was working for a private company called L.E.A.P.—Learning through an Expanded Arts Program.

SANT: How did you meet Pseudo's founder, Josh Harris?

GALINSKY: I met Josh in mid-1994. I was teaching and producing what I called *Live Axe!* and *Galinsky's Full-Frontal Theatre*, which were multigenre shows. In-

stead of getting seven of the same type of artists, I got seven different types of multigenre artists and did an evening where the audience saw seven different things. On the producer's side of it this was great because we had seven different groups promoting the show, and seven different types of audiences were showing up: a poetry audience sitting next to the singer-guitar audience, sitting next to the live fashion show audience. It made for a great evening because you have drag queens sitting next to completely intellectual, book-minded poets in the audience. This was at La MaMa Galleria and later at a place called Play Quest Theater on 28th Street.

SANT: Did you meet Josh at one of these shows?

GALINSKY: I had seen him at the shows but I never met him. Then Josh was doing a pilot for TV and Spyro Poulos, one of the original Pseudo founders, invited me to perform there at the pilot party, and then we met and talked. He liked what I was producing so when it was time for him to do his radio show he said, you know, you want to produce this show about the Internet? I didn't own a computer in 1994. I didn't have email and I didn't know about the Internet either. I didn't care. I thought it was interesting. I was into the raw live experience.

SANT: Was this how you started working on Pseudo?

GALINSKY: Josh called what he was doing Jupiter Interactive but it was too close to Jupiter Communications, the company he had just sold and so he had to change it, and he came up with Pseudo.

SANT: I know you got involved with Prodigy at the time? Was this part of your deal with Josh?

GALINSKY: No. Josh told me that if I tried to work with Prodigy that he would box me out of New York because they were his competitors. He knew he had a resource that he didn't want diluted by them. But I went there anyway without him knowing and negotiated a contract.

SANT: What did you do for Prodigy?

GALINSKY: What Prodigy was doing at the time for the Internet was a great idea. They were experimenting in this particular field: web groups that had chat, bulletin boards, and content based on the Internet. If you were knowledgeable on a subject, like somebody who understands cars, they start a car interest group. Everybody in the world who was on Prodigy could migrate to this car group. And the same applied for poetry and spoken word, of course, which was my group.

SANT: How is it that you claim to be a cofounder of Pseudo?

GALINSKY: At first I was still teaching. From 9:00 A.M. till 1:00 P.M. I was teaching, and then from 2:00 till 10 or 11 at night I was at Pseudo, getting paid \$300 a week.

SANT: What was your role at Pseudo?

GALINSKY: In the beginning I did everything, as did everybody. My job was to structure our one-hour AM radio show on WEVD, make all the promos that go on that show, create deals and barter with other websites to get advertising for trades of advertising, go into the studio and actually produce the acts, produce the music, work with the musicians, do the voice-overs myself, hire other voice-over talent, hire other talent, create the system of how to trade links with people so as to get more exposure, create affiliations with other websites, create



1. Halona Hilbertz, Pseudo Studio Walk, 6 February 1998. The inaugural netcast presented by Franklin Furnace in collaboration with Pseudo Programs, Inc. Galinsky produced the netcast for Pseudo's performance channel, ChannelP.com, which developed into a two-season collaboration and a CD. (Video by Galinsky; screen grab by Tiffany Ludwig; courtesy of Franklin Furnace)

affiliations with non-website businesses, try to get sponsorships, book the show, cohost the show, and run the control board during the show.

SANT: And what went on during this radio show?

GALINSKY: The show was better than anything we produced afterwards. It was a wild party show. The whole thing was scored live by the incredibly talented sound designer and musician Tom "TBO" Linder, who was also a cofounder of Pseudo. Every show we booked three or four technology-oriented people who could speak about the changes that were happening with the Internet, because it was changing all the time. First the modems connected at 14.4 Kbps and then it was 28.8 a week later. Then we also had the sexy side of things. We booked people who were doing interesting content on the web at the time, like *The Spot*, which was the first online soap opera from California. We had the Mighty Sparrow from the West Indies, the King of Calypso, on the show. My philosophy was, and Josh agreed with it, that we didn't just want to bring the net out on the radio but we also wanted to bring people who had never been on the net to the net and then out to the radio. It was a very action-packed hour. We had the Isley Brothers on the show and we invited the cybercafés at the time, the guys from alt.coffee on Avenue A. We were really marrying what was offline with what is online. It wasn't like a *Home Improvement* kind of show about the net. It was about getting to people who had never really touched the net and how it can really affect that person or that person's opinion or how their work as artists might be affected by it.

SANT: Were you aware of anybody else doing this elsewhere at the time?

GALINSKY: There were two others. One show was really like *Tool Time*, a technical point of view. And then there was another group that was syndicating short show pieces in the same vein for other radio stations. So we were the only ones who were really dealing with the culture, human beings first, how it affects them or how they affect it, and that's the beauty of it.

SANT: Still, the show and the new medium evolved very quickly. When did you start having the audio streamed on the web?

GALINSKY: At the beginning we did the show on a Thursday night starting at 10:00 P.M. The show was like a party, and sometimes there would be a party afterwards too. At 11:05 P.M. we'd have a full tape of the show and one of our guys would walk down to our place at 600 Broadway and put it on the encoder and within two hours it would be on the net as an hour-long file that could be downloaded.

SANT: I remember that it took people quite a while to download large audio files on a 28.8 Kbps modem.



GALINSKY: Right, but our file was not the sort you'd download that way. It was streamed, but not live.

SANT: That was when Progressive Networks, as Real Networks was called back then, developed RealAudio which was probably the first real webcasting product on the market.

GALINSKY: And within a five-month period we went live with the stream. That was when we actually decided to dump the radio show and build our own studio in the Pseudo loft.

SANT: Yes, Progressive Networks had developed their system for live streaming by the beginning of 1996.

GALINSKY: Live streaming of audio only. I remember the first night we ran it; it must have been like what Alexander Graham Bell did, except we had a party going on with about 40 people! Somebody ran down the loft to the another room where there was a computer and went to hear it live, with all the crackling.

SANT: When and how did all this develop into the various channels—like the Performance Channel at ChannelP.com—which made up what came to be called the Pseudo Online Network?

GALINSKY: When we got off the radio we went down and dark for about three months and said that when we came back we were not doing just one show. Josh's philosophy was "think wide and the investors will come." We had a 10,000-square-foot loft on the corner of Broadway and Houston; it was wide open and empty except for this little studio and Josh's bedroom in the back. People came to me with their show proposals and I'd say show me what you've got, and they'd do their act and if I liked it I'd say that's a show, let's do it. We put all our resources behind these shows. So the network started out with about 25 different radio shows on the web. The thing ran for probably like a year, just us burning through shows. We probably created 60 different shows, but only about 20 of them ultimately stuck.

SANT: What was happening on the Pseudo.com website at this time?

GALINSKY: There was a chat attached to the audio files, so we also had a live chat audience during the shows; we had chat-jockeys running each channel.

SANT: Was Prodigy involved in any of this?

GALINSKY: This was never done on Prodigy. We had a client-contractor relationship with Prodigy. They contracted us to build new chat software so Josh hired this contractor to build this chat software for Prodigy, and he told Prodigy that the only way he would do this is that Prodigy would let him have his own area labeled "Pseudo" on Prodigy chat.

SANT: During the time that Pseudo had chat rooms on Prodigy the various Pseudo channels were still being organized into a network. How did you organize all the different shows into a network of channels?

GALINSKY: After running 26 different shows we realized that we needed to organize the shows so that people who come to our website could really get to know quickly and understand what this is all about. Someone who shows up for Love and Romance or Hip-Hop doesn't want to sit through the Indie Film Show or the Indie Rock Show. So we came up with six or seven channels based on genres.

SANT: Was this when you stopped being involved in the whole of Pseudo and focused on just one channel?

GALINSKY: Yes. This was when I went from macro-Pseudo to micro-Pseudo. I had hired the brilliant Janice "Girlbomb" Erlbaum to be my associate producer on all the Pseudo shows, and when we decided to go to channels I said, "I'm tired of producing everybody's fucking show and making sure everybody's show is great. I want to make just one show great. I want to go back to my roots in performance and art." Janice was totally psyched about taking it to the next level. So we promoted her to executive producer for the Pseudo Online Network and I became simply executive producer of the Performance Channel.

SANT: Was this when you got involved with Franklin Furnace?

GALINSKY: No. We already had a relationship with Franklin Furnace. Franklin Furnace was actually the first paying customer, client, call it what you want, that Pseudo ever had for a show! They were paying for our services, which was the very first real income we had based on creating a show or program.

SANT: Before we get deeper into your relationship with Franklin Furnace, tell me some more about how you operated ChannelP.com.

GALINSKY: We decided to make ChannelP when we saw what shows we already had in our mix of shows on Pseudo.com. We had Franklin Furnace, we had Taylor Mead, and we had *Go Poetry!* and *Action New York* in the mix of all the shows—and we figured that these shows would go on ChannelP. That was the beginning of our Performance Channel.

SANT: Now tell me more about how you got the Franklin Furnace program going.

GALINSKY: Martha Wilson came to us at one point—late 1996 or early 1997—with this idea of doing a show and said she could get a grant. But at that time we were not ready for what she wanted to do, so she went to Thinking Pictures and she tried to do it with the studio at Exit Art. Two months later it fell through with Thinking Pictures for some reason and we got together again and we sat down and I understood exactly what she was saying. She said, "Let's get X amount of dollars to do X amount of shows. Let's develop this thing!" I said OK, here is the deal: 10 artists, 10 shows—what does Pseudo do for these shows? The contract basically said that each artist comes in for two weeks and gets six hours of production time from Pseudo to do a 30-minute or a one-hour show. So it was great because the artists came in and they always got more than their six-hours—they always needed more. I got to coproduce and codirect and I was exposed to really good and really bad art and artists.

Martha and I reveled in it. We loved it! And at the same time it was informing Franklin Furnace where it could go now. Martha was thinking a lot about the physical overhead, space overhead, and she realized that she didn't need it. She

didn't need to have a physical space of her own now any more because she's got this virtual stage and now she can do everything in this rented physical space, far cheaper and with a lot less intellectual problems and fiscal problems.

SANT: It seems to me that at this time Martha also saw in you someone who could help Franklin Furnace develop its programs. I see your role as the Franklin Furnace program producer for the first two seasons they worked at Pseudo.

GALINSKY: Yes, I had a meeting with the artists Franklin Furnace was presenting every two weeks. I sat down with them and explained the technology to them. Some people knew exactly what they wanted to do, but some other artists came in completely without a clue, and still didn't want to have a clue. Some of them saw it as a place for them to take old material and just cut it together and have it end up being viewed on the web. Kathy Westwater, who is a choreographer, totally got it. She had a 12-section dance piece and concentrated her time on getting the piece shot and then having somebody create a script for it so when the audience on the web showed up they could reassemble her choreography, rearrange these 12-pieces to create their own choreographies. The piece was called *The Fortune Cookie Dance* [19 February 1999]. So there were some artists that really grasped the higher-end technology side and there were some artists that looked at it as a video studio.

SANT: One of the pieces that attracted a lot of attention was Halona Hilbertz's *Pseudo Studio Walk* [6 February 1998].

GALINSKY: She sure did! She came in and said, if I have 15 minutes I want to walk across this 1,000-square-foot loft. Set up the camera over there and I'll come toward it. I'll go away I'll come toward it again and go away. It was a great piece. I loved it because it drove a lot of people nuts! It was one of those pieces that pissed a lot of people off. When people get pissed off that usually makes me happy, and it was very meditative. It was also beautiful because you could hear the wooden floor creaking over the Internet, and I felt that those two technologies meeting, wood-planks creaking against each other meeting the technology of streaming on the net was a great combination.

SANT: You just said, "When people get pissed off that usually makes me happy." Was that why at one point you had a show where you put the Performance Channel on trial?

GALINSKY: Putting ChannelP on trial was like putting Martha Wilson on trial. Basically it was a way for us to take everything that Martha stood for and put it on trial.

SANT: Did she appear during the trial?

GALINSKY: She didn't appear during the trial, but it was a way to put her, or rather Franklin Furnace, on trial. Many people at Pseudo had never seen Performance Art, and there were others in the company who didn't understand it or they didn't think it was valuable. I would just pull out the contract and say this is bringing in money, and they couldn't say a word. Anyway, so we put ChannelP on trial. The judge was a complete Jessie Helms meets George Washington meets Newt Gingrich, completely politically incorrect. Philip Galinsky, my brother, played the judge. Sometimes it was agreed that whoever we put on trial would know that he had this really bad attitude and sometimes it wasn't made clear to them before they took the stand and they'd get on and realize that they were facing a really ignorant and biased guy.

SANT: Who did you put on trial?

GALINSKY: I was on trial once as executive producer of the channel. One of our associate producers, Megan Williams, was on trial and she broke down crying the first time, so she made a repeat appearance. We put the guys from 88 Hip-Hop on trial, a couple of in-studio engineers who were pro-ChannelP, other producers from other shows who were against ChannelP and were against us in real life.

SANT: What did you have to say to “the judge” in defense of Performance Art?

GALINSKY: My performance was pretty flat because I was straight and logical. The judge was actually over the top but consistent, and it wasn't like some hilarious Benny Hill type conversation or cynical, but you could really engage in an intellectual fight with this ignorant guy. Anyway, I made I guess the usual argument for why Performance Art is good, why Franklin Furnace works, why ChannelP works, what balance it strikes with the rest of the company. These were the arguments we continued to make to the business department until the last moment when they canceled ChannelP.

SANT: What was your reaction when Pseudo Programs Inc. decided to shut down ChannelP and with it the third season of the Franklin Furnace online program?

GALINSKY: That was one of the major death knells at Pseudo, when they got rid of that show and the Performance Channel itself. That marked the beginning of the end.

SANT: I remember that one of the last things the Performance Channel tried to do was to go to all the major downtown and off-off-Broadway theatres and performance spaces like the Kitchen and La MaMa and offer to stream their shows on the web.

GALINSKY: Once these things hit the eyes of the guys who really held the purse strings, they couldn't wrap their heads around that, for whatever reasons. Franklin Furnace and the entire Performance Channel kept the network grounded into seeking a truth.

SANT: Pseudo.com's Performance Channel closed down in December 1999 and Pseudo Programs Inc. went bust in September 2000. When did your relationship with Pseudo end, and what have you been doing since then?

GALINSKY: I left Pseudo in February/March 2000. The timing was such that I was doing my play [*The Bench*] at the Kitchen so I spent 3 weeks doing nothing but working on the play. I never have the opportunity to work for six hours a day on a play, so this was a great opportunity. After the play was done in April, I interviewed with Arts International.

SANT: What did Arts International hire you to do exactly?

GALINSKY: To run the new technology and media division, which means to run the website.

SANT: How do the experiences you had during your five-years with Pseudo inform what you're doing now?

GALINSKY: The pinnacle of it is I know what not to do. I still believe that the best people are still figuring out what to do. The best people stick with an idea and get dedicated and get behind it and will make a way to see it through. Some of these things I get proposed to me now I've seen them crash and burn already.

We're wrestling with the idea of whether to build our own studio or just go out and find a studio and rent it. It sounds great to have your own studio, our

own place, with lighting, sound, streaming, everything—we need the facilities. There is a whole different kind of managerial head that you need to manage a physical space. Then what you do inside it is a whole other can of worms. Do we want to be in the business of managing physical space and programming with the technology in that space, or do we want to just focus on what we know and do well already and just go do it in someone else's space?

SANT: It's interesting that you bring this up because it is also something that Martha Wilson has had to deal with when discussing the idea of going virtual with her board of directors.

GALINSKY: Martha's attempt to get people to understand, for her to make that transition from "I have a physical space" to "I don't need it because I've got a virtual space," was really cool. That was a leap I think she made knowing that it was a huge chance for her to take because of her reputation and her history and her company having a physical space and rocking it out like that. She didn't have full support from the powers within her group but she had plenty of support from the artists and from us, and that was totally the right move. In my heart I know the joy and beauty of having your own space. It's incredible! But then the overhead that goes with it kills you. I agree with Martha, because when you're working in someone else's space the overhead is so much less. There are other spaces out there that you can make deals with or agreements with or whatever and just go and do your thing. Let them handle the ticket office, the ushers, who's cleaning the bathrooms, who's ordering the napkins and the toilet paper, who's the bartender, who's got the relationship with the beer and soda company, and all these things that you forget about when you've got to deal with the director, the producer, the actors, the rehearsal time, the props, the set, the music, the recording of it, and all those other things that people like Martha and myself really want to deal with. The real things that surround the performance, the art.

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