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Situating Internet Art in the Traditional Institution for Contemporary Art

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis provides a critical analysis of the relation between Internet art and the traditional institution for contemporary art in the North American and West-European regions. Thirteen years after its inception as an art form, the Internet art world finds itself in a developmental stage and its relation to the traditional institution for contemporary art is accordingly. Through an elaborate discussion of the key players, institutions and discourses on aesthetics, economics and exhibition methodologies, this sociological analysis of the past and current situation hopes to offer a solid ground for extrapolation and predictions for Internet art's future as an art world in its relation to the traditional art institutions.

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Biographical note

Karen Verschooren started her undergraduate studies in Communication Sciences in 2000 at the University of Leuven (K.U.Leuven, Belgium) with plans to become a journalist. As an exchange student at the Complutense University of Madrid, she did extensive archival research into Spanish cinema before 1939, work that formed the basis for her undergraduate thesis. Upon graduation, she decided to pursue her passion for the arts with a Masters in Cultural Management at the University of Brussels (V.U.B.), combining it with a sponsored three-month investigative journalism project on European brain drain, which brought her to the Boston area. Verschooren graduated in 2005 from the V.U.B. with a thesis on Art and New Media @ MIT.

At MIT's Comparative Media Studies Department, Karen Verschooren extended the previous research in new media art, focusing on Internet art and its relation to the traditional art and academic institutions both in the North American and West-European regions. She was the co-organizer for the second and third MIT Short Film Festival (April 2006 and April 2007) and as an Art Scholar and Arts Representative, actively worked on the development of the arts community at MIT. She is the recipient of the Belgian American Educational Foundation-fellowship as well as MIT's D'Arbeloff Award for Excellence in Education.

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0. Introduction

The Internet has influenced our society in numerous ways and to a greater extent than could have been imagined in 1994. As the unruly object it is, the Internet is both subject to the appropriation of thousands of individual internet users and grass root movements, while at the same time being utilized and subject to the controlling attempts of centralized industries and institutions. It is both appreciated and feared for its democratic potential, and at the same time condemned and loved for its economic opportunities. It is everywhere and its pervasiveness is bound to increase in the future, for better or worse.

Just as the Internet can be characterized as an unruly object – still young and still lacking a dominant definition or institutional form - its creative offspring, Internet artworks, are equally difficult to define. They are art, and they are technology, they adhere to an art historical context and aesthetic, while strongly relying and often speaking to a programming aesthetic. They are immaterial, but require hardware to be experienced. They are anti-institutional, but use an evermore commercially owned network, not to speak of commercial software. They have their own models of evaluation but speak to traditional parameters of success as well. And to complicate things even more, after every 'but', one should place an 'often', as homogeneity and uniformity are as rare within the Internet art community as in any other international grassroots organization.

Although the above paragraph makes clear that Internet art and its community in all its aspects necessarily go beyond the institutional walls of the art museum, this text will focus on the relation between the Internet art world and the traditional institution for contemporary art. Rather than writing a manifesto for or against the inclusion of the art form within the institutional walls based on Internet art's intrinsic worth, this text will – through a combined sociological and historical approach - offer a dissection of the intermediate stage in which the Internet art world finds itself in relation to the traditional institution of contemporary art. Through an elaborate discussion of the key players, institutions and discourses, this analysis of the past and current situation will offer a more solid ground for extrapolation and predictions for Internet art's future as an art world in

relation to the traditional art institutions than any textual analysis of Internet art's intrinsic value.

From the viewpoint of the museum or institution for modern and contemporary art, this investigation into its relation with Internet art can be understood as an investigation into how a traditional institution, characterized by strong hierarchical relations and centuries-old customs and habits, can come to terms with the artworks the 21st century networked society is developing.

The traditional art institution, via its art museums, today continues to filter what the public at large understands to be art. Contemporary art museums have, as museums have always had, the power to define what art is to the public at large: for this public, contemporary art is what one can find in the galleries and rooms of the contemporary art museum. This statement is hardly new: the idea that "museums are where the great majority of people in the West encounter art" has been used widely and most recently as the premise of the 2006 publication *Art and its Publics. Museum Studies at the Millennium*, a collection of essays edited by Prof. Andrew McClellan. "Since their inception two centuries ago, museums have been vested with ever greater responsibility to define what qualifies as art. Art is what is shown in museums."[1] This is not to say that there is no art outside of the museum, quite the contrary. When one looks closer, the museum for contemporary art does not encompass all art, but rather works as a cultural filter, showing merely a tiny sample of what exists. These divisions between what is "in" and what is "out" do not run equally within all art forms, but between art forms. Painting and sculpture were the first art forms to be shown in the public museums, later joined by graphic art, installation art and photography and most recently video art. Performance and site-specific art have always been difficult categories, digital art and new media are more recent problems. In addition, the selection does not only run between art forms, but also within art forms to guide the public's understanding of what the art form encompasses: it

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[1] McClellan, A. [Ed.] (2006). *Art and its publics. Museum Studies at the Millenium*. Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishing.

is only a certain kind of video art that finds its place within the museum today.[2] The result of the filter function is a privileged set of art forms and art genres that the public comes to understand as art. The privileged set of art forms and art genres, selected by the art museum, then enjoys the further care-taking the museum offers: besides its inclusion in exhibitions and thus its influence on the public at large, it is subject to documentation, study, preservation and archiving. The contemporary art museum in that way does not only decide what today's public understands to be art, but also affects what the public of the 22nd century will believe art of the 21st century encompassed and what issues were of concern to 21st century artists. The museum thus has the power to create the art canon and art history. One can lament or praise it, but in today's reality, the system of values that art museum institutions present are still prevalent to a public at large and its core functions on the level of public outreach, culture filtering, art form authorization and care-taking (in terms of documentation and preservation) are crucial for the establishment of any art form in the art world and in art history.

In the following pages, I will lay out the demographics, examining the relation between the Internet art community and the traditional institutions and museums. On the North American continent particular institutions under scrutiny are the Dia Center for the Arts, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Museum of Modern Art, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Walker Art Center. On the European continent, institutions such as Centre Pompidou (Paris), MuHKA[3] (Antwerp), SMAK [4] (Gent) and Tate Modern (London) will be extensively referenced. Attention will be paid to key players within the institutions, intra- and inter-institutional relations, and Internet art engagement strategies. Chapter one will conclude

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[2] Michael Rush points out in his 1999 publication *New Media in Late 20th-Century Art*, that "in the very beginning there were two types of video practices: activist-driven documentaries linked with alternative news reports and more properly so-called videos. Among the former camp are the political activities of so-called guerilla videographers like the Canadian-born Les Levine and US artist Frank Gillette, who forced their way into political conventions and other newsworthy events without the proper credentials customary to news media. (…). The more purely 'art'-oriented video histories will usually point to (…) Korean-born Fluxus artist and musician Nam Jun Paik." It is primarily the second type of video practices that made it into the museum and art history.
Rush, M. (1999). *New Media in Late 20th Century Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, pp.80-81.
[3] MuHKA stands for 'Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, Antwerpen' – Museum of Contemporary Art, Antwerp.
[4] SMAK stands for 'Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst' – Municipal Museum of Contemporary Art.

with an overview of how the institutions' engagement with Internet art has fluctuated over the past thirteen years, both on a geographical as well as a temporal level. Chapter two then will reflect on the context in which this relation between Internet art and the traditional institution for contemporary art is taking place. Indeed, the museum institution has not been the only venue for Internet artists to work and exhibit in. On the contrary, a number of alternative production and distribution channels have been crucial in the development of Internet art as an art form. It is primarily in this chapter that we will look at the activities of alternative venues such as non-profit online organizations Rhizome.org, Turbulence.org and the online collective Furtherfield.org, as well as the new media art centers Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (1997) and Eyebeam (1996). Chapter three, with its attention to Internet art aesthetics, will initiate the discussion of discourses, which surround the relation between Internet art and the traditional institution for contemporary art. Questions such as what the art in Internet art is and why an explication of the matter is important will be addressed in this section. Chapter four turns its attention to a second strand of discourse, which deals with the economic value of Internet art. Perceptions of aesthetic and economic value, generally intertwined, influence whether or not an artwork merits inclusion in large museum collections and spaces. However, the immateriality and universal accessibility of a large number of Internet art pieces virtually excludes Internet art from any economic value, at least where economic value is directly linked to tangible objects and scarcity. Besides these discourses on aesthetic and economic value, a number of practical issues equally color the relation between the Internet art world and the traditional institution for contemporary art under scrutiny in this work. Chapter five as such, will focus on one such practical issue that directly influences the visitor's perception of the artwork: exhibition methodology. Of course, these practical issues are not limited to exhibition methodologies. Addressed throughout the chapters are preservation and archiving issues as well as insecurities on the level of ownership, copyright, and display responsibilities. Having offered a critical analysis of the relation between Internet art and the traditional institution of contemporary art with all the discourses surrounding it, the conclusion chapter will present a careful prediction for the future, an assessment of this evolution and some recommendations to ease the transitions.

However, before we start, allow me to say just a few more things about the methodology used and what I will, for the purpose of this text, understand to be 'Internet art' and the 'traditional institution or museum for contemporary art.'

0.1. Methodology

In characterizing this research as an investigation into the relation between Internet art and the traditional institution of contemporary art, I situate myself within one of Howard Becker's art worlds. The Internet art world then consists of "all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art. Members of the [Internet] art world co-ordinate the activities by which work is produced by referring to a body of conventional understandings embodied in common practice and in frequently used artifacts."[5] As Becker stated, this "existence of art worlds, as well as the way their existence affects both the production and consumption of art works, suggests a sociological approach to the arts. It is not an approach that produces aesthetic judgments. (…) It produces instead an understanding of the complexity of the cooperative networks through which art happens."[6] This research then looks at one of the possible cooperative networks that emerge within the Internet art world; the relations among the production site, the Internet artists, and one possible distribution/exhibition site: the traditional museum for contemporary art. Note that Becker's 25 year old writing – crafted well before the World Wide Web - will be used in this thesis primarily for its methodological value and mapping strategies, which identify different key players and developmental stages in the creation of a new art world.

In Becker's view of art world developments, Internet art would be perceived to proceed through the same set of phases photography and video art have gone through: from grass roots practices in limited circles, to the development of institutions within the art form

[5] Becker, H.S. (1982). *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 34.
[6] Becker, H.S. (1982). *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 1.

community, to an eventual acknowledgment by the established art world. Internet art, after about 15 years, seems to be lingering in the second phase: with its own settings for Internet art exhibits in new media art centers and online venues, its specific mailing lists, discussing Internet-art specific critical notions and appropriating existing theories, its own artists community, and its own conferences, yet without the acknowledgement of those brick-and-mortar institutions that are still considered the sacred temples of fine art. Becker's [Internet] art world is, in this scenario, in the developmental stage.

As a researcher, I have focused on analyzing the key players, institutions, discourses and practical problems that characterize Internet art's relation to the traditional institution for contemporary art. In order to account for these different dimensions, I have carried out extensive in-depth-interviews with artists, curators, and gallery and museum directors. The list can be found in Appendix 1. These conversations focused on the interviewee's perspectives on the history and current state of Internet art in its relation to the traditional museum and their visions of a more ideal situation. Conversations about future directions further focused on the interviewee's perspective on Internet art aesthetics, economic viability, and exhibition methodologies.

Whereas these interviews with representatives from both sides provided me with the raw data, theoreticians provided the grid through which the data was filtered. On the side of the museum institution, I attended to theories of Stephen E. Weil, Friedrich Kittler, Douglas Davis, Ursula Frohne, Jessica Grace Foote, Susan Morris, Victoria Newhouse, Charlotte Meijer and Andrea Fraser. On the side of Internet art, I relied on theories of Tom Corby, Mark Tribe, Reena Jana, Julian Stallabras, Jon Ippolito, Tilman Baumgartel, Vuc Cosic, Rachel Greene, Brett Stalbaum, Peter Lunenfeld, Michael Rush, Christiane Paul and Frank Popper. In addition to Howard Becker's sociological theory of the art world, Nicolas Bourriaud's relational aesthetics were also influential. The writings of Steve Dietz and Sarah Cook were specifically important for theorizing the relation between Internet art and the museum. Finally, the media theories of Marshall McLuhan and Lev Manovich entered to inform this text. A general grid mapping the theoretical field for this research can be found in Appendix 2.

However, I did not just come into this relation as an 'objective' researcher, but also and undeniably as a 'subjective' human being. My starting position was characterized by insecurity and doubt, which quickly moved towards a distinct liking for Internet art as an art form and further, in Becker's words, a knowledge of the "history of attempts to make similar works in that medium or genre; characteristic features of different styles and periods in the history of the art; the merits of different positions on key issues in the history, development, and practice of the art; an acquaintance with various versions of the same work; and the ability to respond emotionally and cognitively to the manipulation of standard elements in the vocabulary of the medium."[7] In Howard Becker's classification, I can thus be considered a 'serious audience member' and those serious and experienced audience members – as Becker says - belong to the art world. Combining thus my serious audience member status with the role of a researcher, I reach an insider-outsider status with regard to the research topic, allowing an understanding of the day-to-day ins and outs of the art world, a deep caring and a will to improve it while at the same time being able to step back and see where internal assumptions about how the work is done (what Becker calls conventions) are getting in the way of optimal performance (in this case optimal relations within the art world).[8]

The result of this research is written down and printed out. It takes the form of an object, call it a book if you will. With regard to the subject of research, this might come as a surprise. Indeed, the web is usually the platform to go for when thinking and writing about these matters. However, a danger is inherent in choosing that platform for elaborate writing, not just for its preservation, but also for its readability. Print on paper, in contrast, allows for the imaginary fixing of a history, in this case the story of the relation between Internet art practices and the traditional institution for contemporary art. It presents a stable platform for the discussion of something that in the future will inevitably be lost, due to the unstable and ephemeral qualities of the medium it lives in. And last but not least, even though I grew up with computer and Internet technologies, I still prefer the smell of a freshly printed book, and the rustling of paper between my fingers.

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[7] Becker, H.S. (1982). *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 48.
[8] Klein, J.A. (2004). *True change. How outsiders on the inside get things done in organizations.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p.4.

0.2. Defining the entities in the relation

0.2.1. Defining Internet art

> The question is not so much whether this or that is Internet art, but whether they are art. What distinguishes their status as art at a certain point? This I think is a question that is actually part of the strength of Internet art. It is this space where this question kind of pops up and that is its force in a way, that's what makes it interesting. Charlie Gere - 2006[9]

New media art, digital art, software art, networked art, Internet art, net.art… over the past decade, this mish-mash of terms has been used seemingly without distinction. The need for clear definitions is apparent and is felt both by theorists as well as those working within these overlapping fields. Attempts have been highly contested and the story goes that when the concepts new media art and Internet art first made their appearance on Wikipedia, they were so hotly debated that they were quickly taken down again.[10] Today, one can find an explanation for both terms on the free encyclopedia site.[11] A more recent resurgence of the matter surfaced when Mark Tribe and Reena Jana published *New Media Art*, in the fall of 2006.[12] Discussions on mailing lists such as CRUMB[13] elaborated on the meaning of new media art, Internet art and net.art and whether or not concepts such as "art movements" and "avant-garde" were applicable.

Within the framework of this text, I will briefly situate the relation of Internet art and net.art to other terms such as new media art, digital art, software art and networked art. However, primary interest lies in defining Internet art and net.art. The goal is to spell out

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[9] Verschooren, K. (May 31st, 2006). *Interview with Charlie Gere*, London.
   Charlie Gere is currently Reader in New Media Research at the institute for Cultural Research, Lancaster University.
[10] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Lauren Cornell.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.
[11] Wikipedia (2007). *New Media Art.* Retrieved April 8, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_media_art
[12] Tribe, M. & Jana, R. (2006) *Art des nouveaux médias*. Köln : Taschen.
[13] CRUMB stands for Curatorial Resource for Upstart Media Bliss. The website is hosted by the University of Sunderland and administered by Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham
   CRUMB (2007). *Curatorial Resource for Upstart Media Bliss.* Retrieved April 8, 2007 from the World Wide Web: http://crumb.sunderland.ac.uk/%7Eadmin/beta/

what art form is the center of focus and – maybe more importantly – what art forms are not. In addition, I will briefly cover the subgenres that the genre of Internet art contains and make a distinction between those works that exist solely on the Internet (thus are ubiquitous and un-embodied) and those works that have a physical component, for instance in the form of an installation or an architectural space (thus embodied and limited).[14]

I will start with identifying what is meant by new media art. But first, what is new? Probably one of the most time-relative concepts, the meaning of the term 'new' changes continuously. This is definitely the case in combination with the concepts of 'media' and 'art'. "Whenever a new art form comes along, it is usually accompanied by a classifier. Today's qualifier of choice, 'new media' renders the newness of yesterday's new media form obsolete and already implies its own datedness."[15] Indeed, at the end of the twentieth century 'new media art' was mostly used for film and video, as well as sound art and other hybrid forms.[16] Today, its meaning has changed quite a bit. Alexander Galloway, assistant professor in the Department of Culture and Communication at New York University, artist and author of *Protocol: How Control Exists After Decentralization* clarifies: "New media art – which I would define as any contemporary art that uses new media technology – covers the fields of Internet art, CD-ROM, certain kinds of installation art, digital video, electronic games, Net radio, and so on. (…)"[17] Also Mark Tribe, artist, curator, founder of Rhizome.org and Assistant Professor of Modern Culture and Media Studies at Brown University and BusinessWeek.com innovation and design writer Reena Jana, identify in their 2006 publication *Art des nouveaux medias*, new media art as those art projects using emergent media technologies, but they add a specific mode of engagement to it. In addition, their understanding of its different forms is more specific than Galloway's: "[Les] art des nouveaux medias [sont] les projets qui font utilisation des technologies médiatiques émergentes et se consacrent aux potentiels

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[14] In defining Internet art, I will not pay attention to preservation strategies of DVD storage and documentation creation. Those practices will be addressed to a greater extent in chapter four.
[15] Paul, C. (2002). Renderings of Digital Art. [Electronic Version] *Leonardo* Vol. 35 (5), p.471.
[16] Paul, C. (2003). *Digital Art*. New York: Thames and Hudson, p. 7
[17] Galloway, A.R. (2004). *Protocol. How control exists after decentralization.* Cambridge: MIT Press. p.211.

culturel, politique et esthétique de ces outils. Nous considérons l'Art des nouveaux médias comme un sous-ensemble de deux catégories plus générales : Art et technologie et Art des médias."[18] Tribe and Jana then understand emergent media technologies to be the Internet (which he states to be at the heart of numerous artistic projects), computer video games, surveillance cameras, mobile telephony, handheld computers and GPS systems. It is this definition of new media art we will accept within the framework of this thesis. However, unlike Tribe and Jana, I would not call new media art an art movement, of a particular historical moment (1994-2004; the scope of their writings). Agreeing with Chris Byrne and Simon Biggs, I would rather emphasize the volatility of the term and its wide use in art history, media theory and museum practice. In addition it indeed seems strange to historicize a term, which clearly still has currency today, although this might be a strategic choice.[19] But let us move back to the definition and its relation to Internet art. Indeed, Internet art has played and I would argue still plays a key role within the category of new media art, without exhausting it: Tribe and Jana: "...l'Art en ligne joua [1994-1997] un rôle-clé dans le mouvement de l'Art des nouveaux médias, mais il ne constituait certainement pas la seule practique artistique utilisant les nouveaux médias. Parmi les genres significatifs, citons l'Art logiciel, l'Art du jeu vidéo, les installations et la performance virtuelles, tout en précisant que nombre de projets individuels tendent à brouiller les frontières entre ces catégories."[20]

Moving from Tribe and Jana's definition of new media art to digital art, it is clear that all artworks understood to be new media art projects make use of digital technologies and can thus be called digital art. However, new media art projects do not exhaust the category of digital art, which encompasses virtually every art form that in one way or the other relies on the 0 and 1s, the bits and bytes of the digital language. When these bits and bytes are combined into an application that forms the basis of an art project, we can call the latter 'software art'. For a definition of the term, Rachel Greene points towards the writings of British author Saul Albert. He deems software art to be "art that is made

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[18] Tribe, M. & Jana, R. (2006) *Art des nouveaux médias*. Köln : Taschen. p. 7
[19] CRUMB (November 2006). *Responses to "The Last Avant-garde. Interview with Mark Tribe and Reena Jana".* Retrieved November 7, 2006 from CRUMB mailing list.
[20] Tribe, M. & Jana, R. (2006) *Art des nouveaux médias*. Köln : Taschen. p. 12

from, uses, or interrogates software as a cultural form and context."[21] It is obvious that therefore a lot of digital art, new media art and Internet art can also be called software art. Digital art and thus new media art may require the artist to use public software applications, to master programming skills or to collaborate with a programmer who can speak the digital language as to create a new software application. However, software art lacks the networked component of Internet art. Indeed, whereas code is software art's material, and process its context, Internet art's material is web protocol, and its context is connectivity[22] (cf. infra). This brings us to our last context-term to define: network art.

Network art, cited as one of the important precursors to Internet art, focuses on systems, be they technological network systems, social network systems or biological network systems. Not identified in those terms at the time, it has been argued that the art form dates back as far as 1916, when Duchamp sent four postcards to his then neighbors in what is now considered the first mail art piece. It was primarily in the 1960s that network art, identified as such, blossomed, when a large number of artists shifted their attention to processes, rather than the art object. Hans Haacke, but also Eva Hesse and Sol leWitt are worth mentioning here. To understand network art's relation to Internet art, the writings of Tom Corby, senior lecturer at the University of Westminster (School of Media, Arts and Design) are illuminating: "…network art is conceived as being less doctrinal [than Internet art and net.art]. (…) [it] is inclusive of practices that are formally complex but also works in which technology is not a necessary and present condition for the realization and dissemination of the work – such as books and performance. (…) [It is] inclusive of practices that thoughtfully respond to the emergence of and widespread social, cultural and economic impact and take up of networked technologies. (…) [Network art] takes many forms that are often technologically situated but [it] may also be disseminated through other channels."[23]

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[21] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., p.152.
[22] Arikan, B. (May 2006). Conversations. Cambridge, Massachusetts.
[23] Corby, T. [Ed.].(2006). *Network Art: Practices and Positions (Innovations in Art and Design)*. New York: Routledge, p.2.
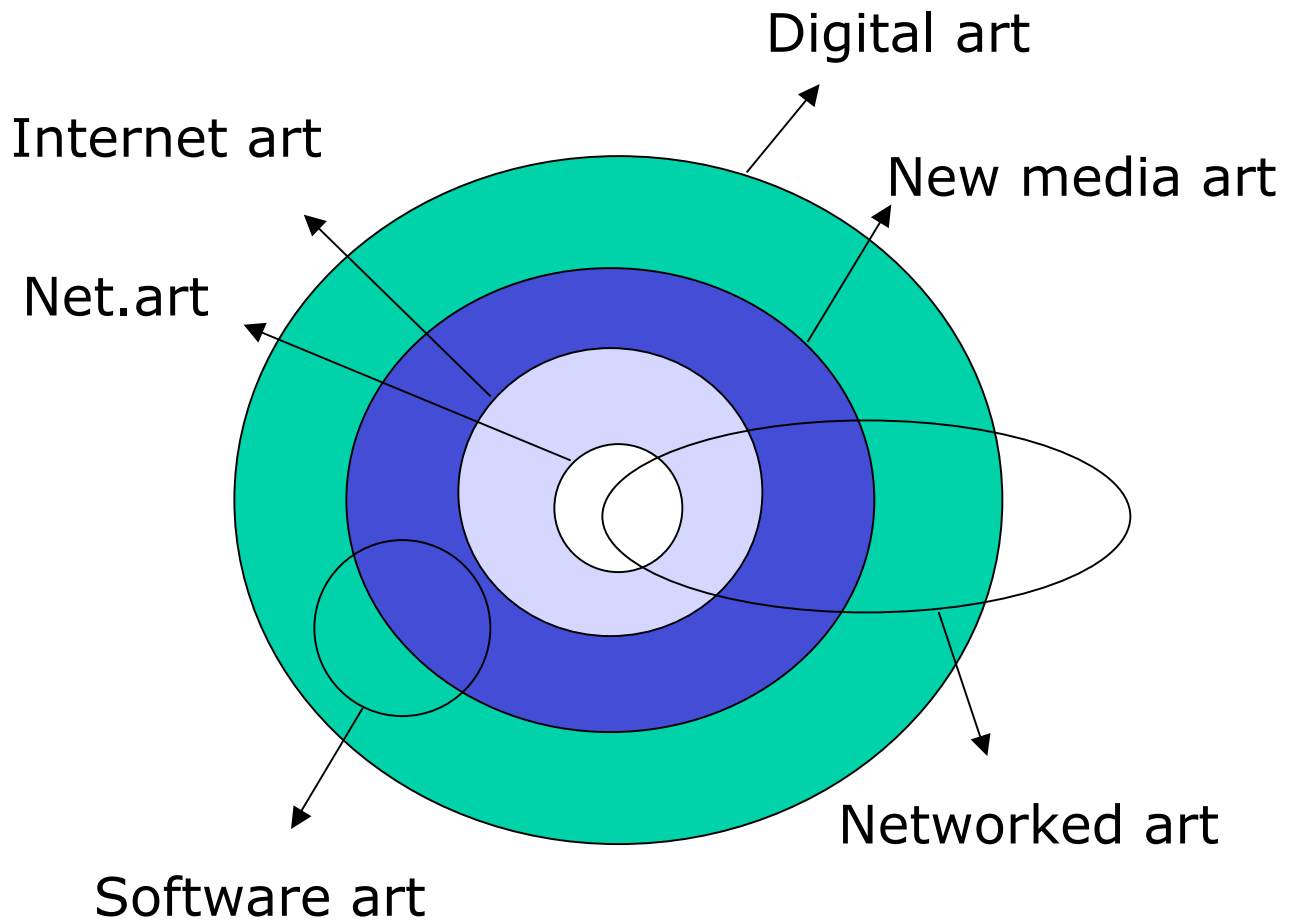
Let us now take a closer look at what makes up this genre of Internet art and within it net.art. Over the course of its roughly 15-year existence, the terms have been defined by a number of players in the field. Both artists and theorists alike have taken a shot at identifying the ontology of Internet art and Steve Dietz concluded early on: "there appears to be little consensus in the museum community about the definition or over the value of Web-specific art."[24] The paragraphs below will cover some of the most interesting attempts:

[24] Dietz, S. (1998). Curating (on) the web. *Museums and the Web98 Papers*. Retrieved November 17, 2005, from http://www.archimuse.com/mw98/papers/dietz/dietz_curatingtheweb.html

Susan Morris' interviewees in the 2001 research report commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation included Internet art in the category of new media art and defined it as: "art that is made using the internet. (…). The exhibition of Net-based pieces generally does not require resources beyond an off-the-shelf computer and Internet connection."[25] One might argue however, that almost every artist nowadays *uses* the Internet at some stage of the creation process. As such, it seems insufficient to merely point towards the use of a certain technology without specifying the type of relationship established between the artwork and the medium. More guidance can be found in the writings of Alexander Galloway, artist, writer and assistant professor in the Department of Culture and Communication at New York University. He states that: "Internet art, (…) refers to any type of artistic practice within the global internet, be it the World Wide Web, email, telnet, or any other such protocological technology. (…)."[26] His readings further indicate that what makes an artwork an Internet artwork is not just its use of a certain technology. Rather: "the definition of Internet art has always been a tactical one, Internet art doesn't simply mean using browsers and HTML, but instead is an aesthetic defined by its oppositional position vis-à-vis previous, often inadequate, forms of cultural production."[27] It allows Galloway to incorporate Jodi's[28] OSS into his writings; a hybrid piece that used both Internet and non-internet technologies and is issued on both CD-ROM and as a standalone application. Thus for Galloway, an Internet artwork is any artistic practice that occurs within the global Internet, yet this technology is not its defining component; it is merely a precondition. For Galloway, what defines an Internet artwork is its tactical relation to protocols, in which tactical is to be understood as the bottom-up struggle of the networks against the power centers.[29] A computer protocol is then a set of recommendations and rules that outline specific technical standards.[30] I could not agree

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[25] Morris, S. (2001). *Museums and new media art*. A research report commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation. Retrieved November 23, 2005, from http://www.rockfound.org/Library/Museums_and_New_Media_Art.pdf

[26] Galloway, A.R. (2004). *Protocol. How control exists after decentralization*. Cambridge: MIT Press. p.211.

[27] Galloway, A.R. (2004). *Protocol. How control exists after decentralization*. Cambridge: MIT Press. p.212.

[28] Jodi is the name of the collective formed by Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans.

[29] Galloway, A.R. (2004). *Protocol. How control exists after decentralization*. Cambridge: MIT Press. p.175.

[30] Galloway, A.R. (2004). *Protocol. How control exists after decentralization*. Cambridge: MIT Press. p.6.

more with Galloway in situating the ontology of an Internet artwork within a relation between the artwork and an Internet component, rather than in the Internet technology. On this particular level, his definition by far surpasses Susan Morris' attempt. However, I would not characterize the relation between the artwork and the Internet as being tactical for all Internet artworks. Rather, I would call it *play* – be it subversive or normative. Not all Internet artists are out to defy the protocols established by the power centers, some do indeed comment on it or try to subvert it, but others just use it or even have fun with it. In addition, the protocols to which the Internet artwork relates are not limited to technological or commercial protocols, mentioned by Galloway. Inspired by the writings of media theorist Lisa Gitelman I would go one step further and add social and cultural protocols. Gitelman: "Media include what I call protocols; they include a vast clutter of normative rules and default conditions, which gather and adhere like a nebulous array around a technological nucleus. Protocols express a huge variety of social, economic, and material relationships."[31] Merging Galloway and Gitelman's views, the relation between the artwork and the medium can thus be defined as a play with technological, economic, social and cultural protocols, which are understood as a set of recommendations and rules that outline specific [explicit or implicit] technological, economic, social and cultural standards.

Before moving to a summarization of our own definition, let's just briefly take a look at a last, and widely accepted attempt by Steve Dietz, pioneer in the field and former curator of new media art at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis (cf. infra). Dietz has since the late 1990s defined Internet art projects as "art projects for which the Net is both a sufficient and necessary condition of viewing/expressing/participating."[32] However, unlike the interviewees from Susan Morris, he does not understand the Net-component as a restriction: "Internet art can also happen outside the purely technical structure of the Internet, when artists use specific social or cultural traditions from the internet in a

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[31] Gitelman, L. (2006). Introduction: Media as Historical Subjects. In Gitelman, L. (Ed.), *Always Already New. Media, History, and the data of culture.* Cambridge: MIT Press.
[32] Wikipedia (2006). *Internet art.* Retrieved September 14, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netart

project outside of it."[33] His definition supports my excursion in the field of social and cultural protocols. However, I would not go quite as far as Steve Dietz; the network still needs to be present.

Based on the definitions of Steve Dietz and Alexander Galloway and inspired by Lisa Gitelman's understanding of protocols, I will thus in this volume define Internet art as that set of artworks, which uses Internet technology for its creation and presentation, and is characterized by a play with protocols, be they technical, economic, social or cultural. As such, for an artwork to be considered Internet art, it needs to make use of Internet technologies, ranging from data transfer technologies (standardized in tcp-ip and udp-ip protocols for instance) to data representation technologies (standardized in protocols such as http, html and ascii).[34] However, this is not sufficient. The work can only be considered Internet art in this definition if it presents a certain way of relating to the medium, a way I have chosen to call *play*.[35] This playful interaction between the artist/viewer/participant and the Internet as a medium can focus on the different sets of standards that rule our interaction with the Internet; the technological, economic, social and cultural protocols. Each Internet artwork of course can play on one particular or multiple protocols. Examples of subgenres are browser-based art, ASCII-based art, Automation and Error-based art, data visualization and databases, Email art, Blog art, Vlog art, real-time performances, etc. As the Internet technology is seen not as a defining ontological feature, but rather as a precursor, the possibility of an embodiment does not prevent an artwork from being included in the Internet art genre. Internet art thus may or may not have a physical component. In its purest form, the physical component is limited to the medium (typically the computer screen) on which the artwork's interface appears. In other forms, the interface might be expanded, through artist intervention, into larger

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[33] Wikipedia (2006). *Internet art.* Retrieved September 14, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netart

[34] A full range of internet technology terms can be found on http://whatis.techtarget.com/definitionsCategory/0,289915,sid9_tax1670,00.html. [March 24, 2007]

[35] Note that the term play here refers to a mode of engagement with Internet protocols, rather than a mode of action in a ludic universe. Online Games (whether multiplayer, massive multiplayer and/or role-playing) must as such be distinguished from Internet art, although some Internet art genres do reflect on this form of entertainment within the realm of the World Wide Web.

installations or architectural spaces. In yet other forms, no control is executed over the forms the Internet artwork takes in physical space.

Net.art then, is that part of Internet art, which emerged in the very first years of Internet art production and which is characterized by a play with the limiting technologies of low bandwidth. Using our definition above, net.art can be understood as the subset of Internet art that played with the specific *technological* protocols and peculiarities of the Internet of that time. The low-tech aesthetic was popularized by the 7-11 email list and artists like Jodi.[36] Different than new media art and Internet art, net.art has been widely accepted as an artistic movement, and possibly constituting an avant-garde. The origin of the term net.art has been explained in so many publications that it would feel like blunt repetition to repeat it in this work.[37]

In the text presented below, I will consistently use the term Internet art to refer to the practices as defined above. However, a number of the interviewees used the term net art (without the dot between net and art) when referring to Internet art practices. In quotes, the reader thus may find this alternative term, which I have chosen to insert unaltered, as it illustrates again the variety of terminology currently still present in the debates and discourse surrounding the practice.

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[36]Galloway, A.R. (2004). *Protocol. How control exists after decentralization. Cambridge* : MIT Press. p.211.

[37] In summary, the origin of the term goes back to a mail message Internet art pioneer Vuk Cosic received in December 1995 from an anonymous mailer. Because of the incompatibility of the software, the opened text appeared to be practically unreadable. The only fragment that made any sense was the junction Net. Art. Vuk Cosic decided that the net had given itself a name for the activity he was involved in and the term spread like wildfire. The more elaborate version of the story can be found at http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9703/msg00094.html [March 24, 2007].

0.2.2 Defining the traditional institution for contemporary art

The notion of the 'traditional institution for contemporary art' is used to indicate brick-and-mortar institutions; those museums of contemporary art defined by Becker to give an art work the highest kind of institutional approval available in the contemporary visual arts world.[38] The notion "contemporary" is difficult to define. Referring to the present, it changes continuously, much in the same way the meaning of 'new' can never be static. Everyone agrees with the fact that it refers to artwork from the present era, but less certain are we about its starting date. Some use the term to refer to art which was produced during the second half of the twentieth century, others point towards the late 1960s as its starting point, or after the end of the modern art period. In this work, the notion of the contemporary art museum is used to refer to those museums that have expressed a commitment to stay up-to-date with contemporary art practices, those from the end of the 1960s to 21st century art works.

On the North-American continent, I will pay attention to the activities of the Dia Center for the Arts, The Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, The Museum of Modern Art, The San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Walker Art Center. This collection resembles what Susan Morris has listed as those major art museums, those brick-and mortar institutions with permanent collections (excluding university art museums) that have made a commitment to patronizing new media art[39] as well as Richard K. Merritt's listing of the first American museums to pay attention, commission and award the digital arts.[40] On the West-European continent, the museums under scrutiny will primarily be the Centre Pompidou (Paris), MuHKA (Antwerp), SMAK (Gent) and Tate Modern (London). Each of those institutions carry a strong cultural authority within their region: Centre Pompidou decides what is contemporary art for much of France, Tate Modern is the authoritative voice in Britain in the field of

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[38] Becker, H.S. (1982). *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 117.
[39] Morris, S. (2001). *Museums and new media art*. A research report commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation. Retrieved November 23, 2005, from
http://www.rockfound.org/Library/Museums_and_New_Media_Art.pdf
[40] Merritt, R. K. (2001). From memory arts to the new code paradigm. The artist as engineer of virtual information space and virtual experience. [Electronic Version]. *Leonardo Vol 34 (5)*, p.406.

contemporary art and culture and SMAK and MuHKA share the same role for Flanders. In the study below, these institutions have been investigated in terms of their mission statement and activities, how both relate to Internet art activities, and the key players influencing each institution's engagement with the new media art form of our 21st century networked society, in order to present an overview of past and current relations between the traditional institution for contemporary art and Internet art, as well as to address a wide range of discursive positions and issues regarding the place of Internet art.

Making a selection means excluding some institutions, which would otherwise merit coverage. I will only briefly mention the Institute for Contemporary Art in Boston, which with the opening of its new building and the start of a permanent collection will claim a position in museum hierarchy on the level of the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Walker Art Center. I will not have the time, nor the space, however, to talk about the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, the Smithsonian's American Art Museum, the Hamburger Bahnhof or the Museum of Contemporary Art in Berlin, to name just a few. As is clear from the selection above, I have limited the scope of this research to western democracies, with the majority of the museums under scrutiny on the North American continent. This is not to say that elsewhere relations between museums for contemporary art and Internet art are not worth researching, on the contrary. It is my hope that this beginning will inspire others to continue the research across different borders in the future. For this work, looking at what was closest, both culturally as well as physically, was a choice that had to be made.

Chapter 1: Towards an understanding of the museum's relation to Internet art

Although without a doubt interesting, this text does not aim to retrace the history and precedents of Internet art. A number of academics, art historians, art critics and Internet artists have done this over the previous years, some more successfully than others (cf. infra). However, to allow for a better understanding of the relation between the museum of contemporary art and Internet art and their inherent domains of friction – the focus of this work – I will start with a brief and thus largely simplified overview of the emergence and development of Internet art, drawing heavily on Rachel Greene's 2004 publication *Internet Art*. More information on Internet art history can obviously be found in that publication, but also Tilman Baumgärtels writings as well as Corby's *Network Art: Practices and Positions* and Stallabras' *Internet art: the online clash of culture and commerce* deserve recommendation. For a brief history of the development of the Internet, consider Brian Winston's insightful chapter 18 in *Media, technology and Society: A history from the telegraph to the Internet*, or check Tim Berners-Lee *Weaving the Web* for the full story on how the World Wide Web came into being.

Internet art, in its first years (1993-1996) introduced a set of new methods for production, consumption and exchange. Although very much tied to the technology and politics of the 1990s on the one hand and post-conceptual art on the other hand, early Internet art practices did introduce a new arena expanding artistic production and its reach and introducing at the time unique economies of attention, where success was measured in terms of net traffic instead of museum visits, magazine reviews and monetary worth.[41] Internet artists formed close-knit online communities, facilitated through the many mailing lists formed in these formative years; THE THING was founded in 1991, äda'web - described to be the first and foremost platform for Internet art in the mid-1990s - saw the light in 1994, Nettime as well as Syndicate were born in 1995 and Rhizome.org emerged in 1996. Benjamin Weil's relay of the founding of äda'web gives a lively impression of the aspirations of these early Internet adventurers. Having been part of THE THING and with a background in curatorial projects engaging artists in exploring

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[41] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., p.31.

the idea of context outside of the art world, Weil, together with a friend started in 1994 what he would later refer to as a 'digital foundry':

> Our goal was to (..) develop something predicated by the idea of the print studio or of the foundry (…) where we would try and bring together the most sophisticated producers (…) and artists, primarily conceptual artists, to (…) investigate the medium. (…). [We wanted to] involve artists at the very early stages of the development of what we perceived would be a new medium, a new realm, a new way to communicate, which it has become. (…) So the idea was to not necessarily produce artworks, or if we were to produce artworks for it, that we would try to establish a sort of vocabulary, and participate in this establishment of the vocabulary that would later become the World Wide Web. (…). That is how äda'web was founded. (…). And then the next thing was to (…) really reflect upon a form of art making that could not be monetized or commercialized.[42]

However, it was not the online meetings, but the festivals and conferences that were crucial for the development of the early net.art scene and culture. This scene found a hub in Eastern Europe, after the fall of communism, when funding from the European Union poured in and NGO's such as the Soros Foundation fostered artists' engagement with the Web. The Internet audience in the first years consisted of a small group of people, artists, critics, collaborators and 'lurkers' with a direct relationship to Internet art. In its early years, between 1994 and 1996, Internet art mainly took six forms: email, web sites, graphics, audio, video and animation, and early Internet art pioneers such as Heath Bunting, Olia Lialina, Alexei Shulgin, Jodi.org (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans), Michael Samyn, Simon Biggs, Douglas Davis, Vuc Cosic, Vivian Selbo and Peter Halley often combined two or more of these forms in their projects.[43]

Between 1997 and 1999, Internet art forms shifted from straightforward web pages to forms of parody, appropriation and remixing in the works of RTMark, 0100101110101101.ORG and Mark Napier, and formal explorations of Internet protocols such as browsers, ASCII, Automation and Error in projects from I/O/D, Jodi.org, Jonah Brucker-Cohen, Rachel Baker, Vuc Cosic and John Simon Jr.. Email, music and

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[42] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil.* New York.
[43] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art.* New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., pp. 31-71.
　Gere, C. (2006). The history of network art, p.18 In T. Corby (Ed.), *Network art. Practices and Positions. (Innovations in Art and Design).* New York: Routledge.

animation stayed in vogue. Internet artists were still connected through email-based communities - in 1998 the artist-oriented mailinglist 7-11 was founded by Cosic, Bunting, jodi.org and Shulgin - but as more and more of the email lists grew into populous, archive-friendly forums with the audience as a main consumer, many major Internet artists abandoned them altogether. As in the previous period and even more so in this second phase, actual meetings were vital for Internet art production and collaboration and an increasing number of them took place; *Beauty and the East* conference in 1997 in Ljubljana, yearly *Next Five Minutes* conference in Amsterdam, *TO* in Vienna, *C3* in Budapest, *Ars Electronica – Infowar* in 1998, etc. In the meantime, offline galleries stayed largely uninterested in Internet art in the 1990s, with one exception: The New York Postmaster's Gallery, which organized in 1996 the *'Can you digit?'* exhibition (cf. infra). Online presentation was the way to go and it was mainly Internet artists themselves who aggregated artworks on websites, curating them into online exhibitions: Alexei Shulgin curated both *Form Art*[44] and *Desktop Is*[45] in 1997, Cornelia Sollfrank organized *Female Extension*.[46]

The turn of the 21st century can be considered a third phase in the development of Internet art, with a steep rise curtailed by the dot.com crash (2000-2002).

> The emergence of discursive models, such as mailing lists, bulletin board systems and conferences helped Internet artists in the first and second phase to build and sustain vital networks outside the Internet art world and to generate fruitful relationships with both audiences and each other. (…) The net.art community had maintained a general sense of intimacy and trust for several years. (…). But as the internet expanded exponentially, and as participants found themselves in different places in their lives, perhaps with children, consumed by other events, as many were by the war in Yugoslavia, or by more demanding personal responsibilities offline, this sense of community began to give way.[47]

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[44] Shulgin, A. (1997). *Form Art Competition.* Retrieved April 8, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.c3.hu/collection/form/
[45] Shulgin, A. (1997). *Desktop Is.* Retrieved April 8, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.easylife.org/desktop/
[46] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art.* New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., pp. 73-116. Cornelia Sollfrank's *Female Extension* project is no longer accessible online
[47] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art.* New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., pp. 128-129.

Growing institutional interest in Internet art, support from dot.com design shops, increased status of interactive design, more sophisticated production tools and coding standards and a rising Internet traffic and popularity, all these factors indicated the end of what Tilman Baumgärtel called the first formative period of net culture and what Alexander Galloway indicated as the Net.art period.[48] The constraints of low bandwidth disappeared and plug-ins and Java ran high. In this period, Internet artists focused their attention on data visualizations and databases (0100101110101101.org, Amy Alexander, Josh On and Futurefarmers, De Geuzen, Lisa Jevbratt, Benjamin Fry, MTAA), games (Natalie Bookchin, Brody Condon, Eddo Stern, Thomson and Craighead, Mongrel), generative and software art (Golan Levin, Martin Wattenberg, Graham Harwood) and open works. Right at the time when it seemed both academic as well as museum institutions were realizing the value and force of online art forms, the collapse of the American stock market in spring 2000 brought with it a sense of cynicism about the Internet and not surprisingly Internet art suffered significant losses in prestige and funding.[49]

Indicating its ability to survive in hostile and unsupported times, however Internet artists continued their activities during those first few difficult years of the 21st century. Besides the artistic responses to the legacy of the dot.coms and Internet art's formative years, artists focused on the Internet's social and economic protocols, creating what Greene calls 'art for networks.'[50] Major themes included voyeurism, surveillance and telepresence in the works of Wolfgang Staehle, Radical Software Group and boundaries in the works of Lim Yi Yong, Woon Tien Wei and Heath Bunting. Instead of parodying existing Internet businesses, artists in the 21st century attacked the basic processes of buying and selling. Projects from Michael Mandiberg, John D. Freyer, Keith Obadike and Michael Daines should be mentioned here. The copy-left movement[51] gained support from a number of Internet artists in their active contestation of ownership and the

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[48] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., pp. 129-130.
[49] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., pp. 130-170.
[50] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., pp. 173-212.
[51] Copy-left is a play on the word copyright and is used to indicate a form of licensing in which any receiver of a work is free to reproduce, adapt or distribute the work as long as any resulting copies or adaptations are also bound by the same copy-left licensing scheme. The opposition copyright and copy-left is often made in ideological debates over intellectual work and the rights of its creators.

establishment of open systems of exchange. Internet artworks in addition turned towards narratives in their interest for video and filmic discourse. A sense of nostalgia for the early net.art days revamped the low-fi aesthetics in the works of Cory Arcangel, Paperrad, Miranda July and Harrell Fletcher. As I will elaborate in the following paragraphs of this first chapter, mainstream museums, having taken a blow with Internet art, largely turned their back to Internet art practices. Again, the new media art centers, alternative galleries and of course the Internet itself formed the main distribution channels for Internet art.

Today, we can situate Internet art in a fifth phase. After two formative years in which the Internet art community grew and institutional support rose, a collapse of support in the third phase and a continued and expanding production characterizing the fourth phase, this fifth phase, starting roughly around 2005, features an ever expanding field of Internet art production in which more and more artists become interested in and acquainted with the use of Internet technology in their artistic practices. The Internet artworks dominating this phase, as we will see to a greater extent in chapter three, can be called 'art for social networks' and it is in this phase in particular that Nicolas Bourriaud's theory of relational aesthetics becomes relevant. A large number of Internet art productions deal with online social networks such as Flickr, Myspace, Facebook, Friendster, etc. Internet art as such chooses to comment critically on the network culture experienced by the Western population of the 21st century. In this fifth phase, the rise of interests from artists is slowly responded to by the art world at large. Education programs in digital art and new media are arising[52] and more galleries and institutes of contemporary art than ever before feature an occasional show dedicated to Internet art. Not to be forgotten in this context is the *Rhizome Artbase 101* show at the New Museum of Contemporary Art (June 23 - September 2005), which presented forty selections from Rhizome.org's online archive and as such surveyed the salient themes in ten years of Internet art. In 2006 Team Gallery, NY presented *Re-Rendering Relics*, a solo-exhibition of Cory Arcangel whereas

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[52] For an extensive list compiled through the list of the Institute for Distributed Creativity (IDC), moderated by Trebor Scholz, visit: http://www.collectivate.net/journalisms/2006/12/16/a-survey-of-new-media-programs.html and also John Hopkins has compiled a nice collection on his website: http://www.neoscenes.net/links/bookmarks.php [March 24, 2007].

Virgil de Voldere Gallery, NY showcased work of Jacob Ciocci and Brody Condon, the ICA in Copenhagen collaborated with Artnode to present Heath Bunting and UBERMORGEN.COM in a show, curated by Jacob Lillemose (June 15, July 16, 2006) and finally *On and Off*, curated by Caitlin Jones, featured artists such as Vuk Cosic, Olia Lialina and Dragan Espenscheid, Thomson & Craighead, YOUNG-HAE CHANG HEAVY INDUSTRIES, and Lisa Jevbratt at the New York's Bryce Wolkowitz Gallery (October 6th – December 2nd 2006), to name just a few of the many Internet art exhibitions presented to the public in 2006.

Internet art's distribution channels as such seem to expand from merely community oriented websites, mailing lists and conferences, to more mainstream accessible venues such as art galleries and new media art centers. However, as Barbara Pollack has noted: "Of course, none of these venues can achieve the visibility within the art world that is provided by the imprimatur of a major museum."[53] So, where do the traditional institutions and museums for contemporary art come into this story? Steve Dietz claimed in his 1998 paper for the Museums and the Web conference that:

> … museum's embrace of Web specific art has been (…) cautious to date. Two of the earliest pioneers (…) are both university museums with a strong connection to photography and to artist-run programming. The California Museum of Photography at UC Riverside (…) and @art….[an electronic art gallery affiliated with the School of Art and Design at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign].[54]

The following paragraphs thus seek to understand the behavior of a number of traditional art institutions and museums vis-à-vis Internet art anno 2007. They look to articulate what happens in the space between what museums say they do and what they do without saying. In the cross-over between the Internet art community and the traditional museum for modern and contemporary art, a small number of key players from both sides came together, each adhering to or struggling with the mission statements of their

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[53] Pollack, B. (September 2001). Back to the future with 'Bitstreams' [Electronic version]. *Art in America, Vol 89 (9),* 61-63.

[54] Dietz, S. (1998). Curating (on) the web. *Museums and the Web98 Papers.* Retrieved November 17, 2005, from http://www.archimuse.com/mw98/papers/dietz/dietz_curatingtheweb.html

constituencies, yet all of them modeling ways for inclusion, convinced of the cultural and aesthetic value of the new art form.

1.1 Institutional profiles: mission statements and organization of the institutions

Although the selected group of institutions as described in the methodology paragraph might appear eclectic at first sight, all institutions sing more or less the same song in their mission statements. To use the formulation of the Solomon R. Guggenheim: "The mission (…) is to *promote the understanding and appreciation* of art, architecture, and other manifestations of visual culture, primarily of the modern and contemporary periods, *and to collect, conserve, and study the art of our time.*"[55]

Of course, every institution adds its own touch. DIA explicates its desire to support "'extraordinary artists' projects that might not otherwise be supported by more conventional institutions"[56] and the Walker Art Center contextualizes their activities as an examination into "the questions that shape and inspire us as individuals, cultures, and communities"[57], to name just a few.

Overall, all institutions present some sort of authority in the field, influencing what the public at large comes to think of as contemporary art. As Charlie Gere, Reader in New Media Research at the institute for Cultural Research, Lancaster University pointed out in reference to Tate:

> London has an enormous sort of cultural force. What happens in London is very powerful in terms of what gets understood as the art world and the cultural world altogether. (…). To a large extent, the discussion about

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[55] Guggenheim museum (2007). *Mission Statement.* Retrieved February 17, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.guggenheim.org/mission_statement.html (italics mine)

[56] DIA center for the arts (2007). *Mission Statement.* Retrieved February 17, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.diacenter.org/webproj/index.html

[57] Walker Art Center (2007). *Mission Statement.* Retrieved February 17, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://info.walkerart.org/about/contact.wac#Mission

contemporary art is really conducted by Tate, which means conducted largely by Nicholas Serota.[58]

The same is true for Centre Pompidou in Paris and SMAK and MuHKA in Flanders. On the West coast, SFMoMA is obviously one of the key authorities. On the North American East coast, this role is shared by the MoMA, the Guggenheim and the Whitney. DIA and Walker have indeed a more specific audience, yet their mission statements and engagement vis-à-vis Internet art requires their inclusion.

1.2. Key individuals

1.2.1. Brave young hearts

Within the institutions as listed above, one can identify a number of individuals, key to the engagement the institution has shown and continues to show vis-à-vis Internet art. Rarely awarded the title of curator, people such as Sara Tucker (DIA), Steve Dietz (Walker), and Jemima Rellie (Tate) were hired to work on the database, create a website or otherwise take care of digital resources. Others were working in other departments, as research assistants or – at best – curatorial assistants (Jon Ippolito – Guggenheim and Barbara London – MoMA). The only individual out of the list of researched institutions that entered the museum as an adjunct curator in new media arts and still carries that title today is Christiane Paul, active at the Whitney since 2000. However, as she points out Dietz, Ippolito, London and Tucker were involved with their respective institutions before she entered the Whitney:

> I am sure had I been hired in the mid 1990s, although of course in the mid 1990s no one would have hired me as an adjunct curator for new media art, my title also would have been changed.[59]

[58] Verschooren, K. (May 31st, 2006). *Interview with Charlie Gere.* London.
[59] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.

Overall, the dedication of these early unofficial new media art curators to Internet art commissioning and exhibiting was a task voluntarily taken on, and largely performed under the radar, outside of the responsibilities of their department. Screening Internet artworks, selecting a number of interesting projects, contacting the artists, agreeing on a form of arrangement, and finally uploading the created artworks to the institution's website – which in itself was often created by the same person as well - was largely a one-man or one-woman show. Two quotes are illustrative. First, Jon Ippolito, former curator of Media Arts at the Guggenheim:

> There were supportive people, but the bottom line is that I wrote my text, edited it, made the images, uploaded the webpages, etc. I kind of did everything myself, there was no one really paying attention to my work.[60]

Second, Charlie Gere, Reader in New Media Research at the institute for Cultural Research, Lancaster University about Tate's Head of Digital Programmes Jemima Rellie:

> She is a very good enthusiastic person who has done an enormous amount to kind of keep the debate going, and she is embedded in Tate, but she is not a curator. She is Head of Digital Programs, so she is kind of an administrator at a very high level, but she is not classed even as a curator, I mean everything in Tate is called a curator, so I'm not quite sure whether she is or not, but she doesn't curate art or she is not recognized as doing so, but nevertheless she is more or less responsible for the net art commissions.[61]

In their characteristics and zeal, these individuals resembled the enthusiastic museum workers, routing for inclusion of photography in the early 20th century and video art just a couple of decades ago. Sometimes, they are one and the same person. The story of Barbara London, current associate curator for the department of media is illustrative. In a 2001 interview with Sarah Cook, she explains:

> It all began back in 1973, when I was working with our Department of Prints and Illustrated Books. I have always been attracted by the cutting edge, and early on became interested in artists' books. Slowly I assembled a collection of this inexpensive, mass producible form and organized a show

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[60] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Jon Ippolito.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.
[61] Verschooren, K. (May 31st, 2006). *Interview with Charlie Gere.* London.

for the Museum. Once our new Librarian, Clive Phillpot, arrived and assumed responsibility for artists' books, I became involved with the hot potato of video. At that time, video didn't exist in MoMA. Then in late 1973 the NEA awarded the Museum a grant to purchase a videocassette deck and two monitors. Taking advantage of the equipment, I organized shows with tapes that subsequently entered the canon - including Nam June Paik's *Global Groove* (1973) and Lynda Benglis's *Now* (1973). Then through a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation I was able to get out from under all my Print Department responsibilities. The ongoing video exhibition program expanded, and we started Video Viewpoints, the lecture series where artists come to show and discuss their new work. I organized installation shows with such artists as Nam June Paik, Laurie Anderson, Terry Fox, Shigeko Kubota, Gary Hill, and Bill Viola. We also started to acquire videos by artists from North America, Japan, Latin America, and Europe. I keep up with new technologies, so it was a natural progression to explore 'the new kid on the block', Internet art.[62]

However, not all stayed in one place as Barbara London did. Jon Ippolito officially left the Guggenheim in 2002 and Steve Dietz was dismissed from his duties in the Walker in 2003, under the pretext that Walker could not afford to implement the "dreams of a visionary leader like Steve Dietz"[63], which at one point included the very concrete plan for a $225,000 technologically sophisticated 'Mediatheque' gallery for the new Walker building, designed by Herzog & de Meuron and scheduled to open in 2005. Dietz' dismissal (together with six other members of the new media art department) did not go unnoticed in the Internet art and new media art community and the polemic around it is indicative of his significance for the new media art world in general and the Internet art world in particular. Close to 700 people signed the open letter[64] to Kathy Halbreich , Director of the Walker. Mailing lists held heated discussions, blogs commented widely on the event and even papers were written on the topic.[65] And of course, the Mediatheque never came into being. Note that, in good Internet art tradition, the open letter was the basis for a data visualization project by Andreas Schlegel and Lisa Jevbratt titled *small*

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[62] Cook, S. (March 22, 2001). *Multi-Multi-Media: an interview with Barbara London.* Retrieved December 15, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk/crumb

[63] Roussou, M. (2003). *The Shock of the News: Steve Dietz's dismissal from the Walker Art Center.* Retrieved March 13, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.makebelieve.gr/mr/research/papers/VCMnet_03/mroussou_vcmnet03_sdietz.pdf

[64] The open letter can still be found on: http://www.mteww.com/walker_letter/index.shtml

[65] More info on the polemic can be found at http://rhizome.org/thread.rhiz?thread=8840&page=1#17771, http://www.fibreculture.org/myspinach/fibreculture/2003-May/003019.html, http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/oldboys-0306/msg00003.html [April 9, 2007].

worlds, which tracked the interconnection of the signers of the open letter. Each signer was compared with each other signer through google's database engine and the results were visualized with the nodes with the most links located at the border of the circle.[66]
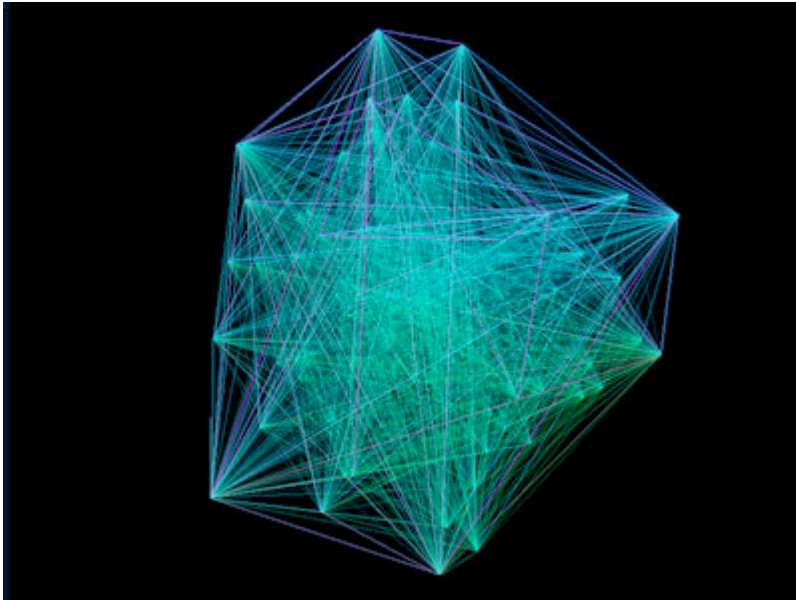
Andreas Schlegel and Lisa Jevbratt – *Small Worlds* (2003)[67]

 Andreas Schlegel and Lisa Jevbratt – *Small Worlds* (2003)[68]

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[66] Sojamo (2003). *Small worlds*. Retrieved March 13, 2007, from the World Wide Web:
   http://www.sojamo.de/iv/index.php?n=1&p=16
[67] Sojamo (2003). *Small worlds*. Picture Retrieved April 9, 2007, from the World Wide Web:
   http://www.sojamo.de/iv/index.php?n=1&p=16

While Jon Ippolito focused on teaching and writing, Steve Dietz – frustrated with the exclusion of new media art works in the exhibitions or festivals for contemporary art – turned his energy towards starting his own festival, the result of which is a new biennial called *ZeroOne San Jose: A Global Festival of Art on the Edge,* organized for the first time in August 2006.[69] Both men's career paths indicate the difficulty faced when working passionately for an art form that, on the one hand aspires inclusion, challenging the established customs and habits of the museum institution and pushing its boundaries, while on the other hand, desiring to roam around freely in its natural environment of community networks, never allowing for complete closure within the institution's walls.

1.2.2. Directors and their departments

Even if young, dynamic – albeit unofficial – curators are in place, and a mission statement presenting a commitment to contemporary art practices is present, a lot still depends on who is wearing the director hat and how authoritatively that hat is worn. As Charlie Gere states it, in reference to Tate Modern:

> [Nicholas Serota] has insidiously supported certain kinds of art, a certain aesthetic that ties in with a certain understanding of art that comes out of the background of his generation. As long as he remains head of Tate, I think, whatever goes on at the lower levels of Tate in terms of what curators are interested in, it'll be very hard for a different kind of view.[70]

This, inevitably, has significant consequences for Tate's position vis-à-vis Internet art and new media art at large:

> What is interesting is this sort of repressive tolerance if you like; this stuff gets into Tate, but at the edge: it gets into the website, it gets into the discussion, it

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[68] Sojamo (2003). *Small worlds*. Picture Retrieved April 9, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.sojamo.de/iv/index.php?n=1&p=16

[69] Dietz, S. (October 26, 2006). *"Just Art": Contemporary Art After the Art Formerly Known As New Media*. Retrieved February 10, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.yproductions.com/writing/

[70] Verschooren, K. (May 31st, 2006). *Interview with Charlie Gere,* London.

gets in the occasional performances, but it doesn't get into the collection or the galleries.[71]

Another very lucid statement on the subject matter came from Sara Tucker when asked to comment on DIA's early interest in Internet art[72]:

> The reason we got started with it so early in particular, was because he [Michael Govan] had come and he was very interested in technology and understood immediately that it really fit the institution's mission. (…) he had just weeks before seen the Warhol museum's website, where it said how to get to the museum, with a few pictures and stuff, but he immediately saw it as the perfect medium for artist to work in. (…) my very first conversation with him after he was hired to be the new museum director was 'I want you to start working on the website for the museum and let's think about who we can ask to do an art project for it.'[73]

That the presence of a director with a zeal for art and technology is an important factor when investigating the inclusion of Internet art in the museum space is again clarified when looking at the role David Ross has played, first at the Whitney Museum of American Art and then at SFMoMA.

Known as a scholar in the field of video art, Ross was particularly interested in artists exploring the intersection of art and technology. As the director of the Whitney museum of American Art between 1991 and 1998, he made sure his museum would not miss the Internet art train. And indeed, right at the same time that the Dia Center for the Arts commissioned its first two pieces - Tony Oursler & co.'s *Fantastic Prayers* and Komar and Melamid's *The Most Wanted Paintings* (cf. supra),[74] - the Whitney Museum acquired their first work of Internet art (1995). Commissioned by the New York Lehman College

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[71] Verschooren, K. (May 31st, 2006). *Interview with Charlie Gere*, London.

[72] The Dia Center for Art has overtly positioned itself since early 1995 as a patron for net artists. Its mission statement on the website clarifies: "Since its inception, Dia has defined itself as a vehicle for the realization of extraordinary artists" projects that might not otherwise be supported by more conventional institutions. To this end, it has sought to facilitate direct and unmediated experiences between the audience and the artwork. Beginning in early 1995, Dia initiated a series of artists" projects for the web by commissioning projects from artists who are interested in exploring the aesthetic and conceptual potentials of this medium."

[73] Verschooren, K. (February 15, 2007). *Interview with Sara Tucker*. New York.

[74] Whitney Museum of American Art (2002). *Whitney Artport. About Artport.* Retrieved on Sept 12, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://artport.whitney.org/about.shtml

Art Gallery in 1994, *The World's First Collaborative Sentence* is an ongoing textual and graphic performance on the World Wide Web, created by Douglas Davis and initiated by artist Nathalie Novarina, who provided the first image and words. A year later, Barbara and Eugene M. Schwartz purchased both the concept of *Sentence* and the site itself. In the same year, Mrs. Schwartz donated the work to the Whitney Museum of American Art in honor of her husband. As of today, one can still participate in what Douglas Davis has called "a wild, precious, awful, delicious, lovable, tragic, vulgar, fearsome, divine thing."[75]

In 1998, Ross became director of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art. His passion for artworks bordering the intersection of art and technology was adhered to in exhibitions such as *Bill Viola, Seeing Time: Selections from the Pamela and Richard Kramlich Collection of Media Art* in 1999 and *010101: Art in Technological Times* in 2001.[76] In a 1998 November lecture, Ross emphasized overtly the need for museums to recognize Internet art as a valid medium. "'The artist is not living ahead of their time,' Ross said. 'The artist is living in their time. We're the ones who are 15 years behind.'"[77] It is not surprising, then, that SFMoMA's most interesting years with regard to its engagement vis-à-vis Internet art occured between 1998 and 2001. During this time, SFMoMA launched E-space, an online exhibition and documentation space for commissioned web projects, hosted the very first edition of the Prize for Excellence in Online Art and presented *010101,* which included video practices, sculpture, design projects, computer-driven installations, drawings and paintings, and for which five Internet art projects were commissioned.

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[75]Whitney Museum of American Art (2002). *Collection. The World's First Collaborative Sentence, Douglas Davis, 1994.* Retrieved on Sept 12, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://artport.whitney.org/collection/index.shtml

[76] SFMoMA (2006). *Museum history. Overview.* Retrieved on Sept 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.sfmoma.org/info/mushist_overview.asp

[77] The Stanford Daily (November 18, 1998). *Ross discusses Internet art: SF MoMA director argues that museums can retain relevance in the next century.* Retrieved on Sept 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://daily.stanford.edu/article/1998/11/18/rossDiscussesInternetArtSfMomaDirectorArguesThatMuseumsCanRetainRelevanceInTheNextCentury

When David Ross left the directorship of the SFMoMA in 2001, Neal Benezra took over in August 2002; no Internet art projects have since been added to the *E-space* site. Benjamin Weil addressed this fact during a sunny February afternoon in his office at ArtistsSpace, New York. As the SFMoMA curator for Media Arts between 2000 and 2003 he has worked under the direction of both men and answered rather straightforwardly to the question about the influence of both directors:

> K: Was David Ross's presence as a director influential?
> B: Oh, it was essential. It was totally essential because he was completely convinced that the Internet was an integral part of what a museum should be.
> K: and his successor wasn't convinced?
> B: No
> K: And that explains why no more commissions took place after 2002?
> B: Yes, because he [Benezra] didn't think that there was anything to be done and in the end the only department that continued to do things online was the education department. They were the first to develop pod casts and things like that, or one of the first to develop this kind of content that was basically using the web as a distribution system.[78]

The quote indicates that, just as a director with an interest for and understanding of the value of Internet art can leverage an institution's engagement with the art form, a director who does not acknowledge its value is detrimental to that institution's relation with Internet art. In the words of MuHKA curator for new media art, Edwin Carels:

> The traditional team of a museum and their sensibilities – that for which they have an interest – is often far away from immaterial or networked art. What I mean is that, even though you have an employee that knows everything, who might argue why the museum should buy this or that new media art piece, even then, the team and the director have to be convinced.[79]

And although MuHKA director Bart De Baere's discourse signals openness to the incorporation of networked art, the practice still seems to be fairly exclusive.

Yet even with a director convinced, the contemporary art museum's inclusion of Internet art is not guaranteed. Resources, human and financial, are limited, and all departments

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[78] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil.* New York.
[79] Verschooren, K. (July 12th, 2006). *Interview with Dirk De Wit.* Gent.

are knocking on the director's door. The struggle between departments is real, and until this very day often won by the traditional departments. These departments can indeed more readily present the board with an established aesthetic and economic worth for their art forms, a proven success in attracting corporate, private and governmental funding and an established public for the exhibitions to follow. These discourses in terms of aesthetics and economics that surround the relation between a traditional art museum and an emerging art form will be more elaborately addressed in chapters three and four. Suffice to illustrate this reality here with a number of examples, starting with the cutbacks in the media department in the Walker Art Center in 2003 (cf. supra). In MuHKA, Edwin Carels still seems to pull the shortest string as well:

> What it comes down to is: there are no resources, or better said, within our existing resources, no priority is given to media. So in this again, one can notice the rhetorical claiming of a field, but the refusal to cultivate it as long as the government doesn't pay for it.[80]

And also Christiane Paul had to end Whitney's Gatepages (cf. infra) due to lack of priority claims:

> They stopped because (…) I ran out of my budget for ARTPORT. The Whitney did not finance ARTPORT, it was always financed from the outside by a company (…) who gave us the original amount of money (…).I ran out of that funding, basically it was used up, and then the issue always is making a project like that a priority, so what happened was that there were other projects or exhibitions for which the Whitney wanted funding from the respective funding bodies I would have approached. Of course it all (…) gets channeled through the whole development office and (…) the situation was: 'oh no we want to approach foundation X for this or that exhibition, ARTPORT is not a priority right now.'[81]

Besides looking at limited financial resources, Internet art's need for human resources also play a role in the institution's engagements with Internet art. It was not until Barbara London was able "to get out from under all [her] Print Department responsibilities" that video art within MoMA could grow, and when we look for factors that can explain an

[80] Verschooren, K. (August 1, 2006). *Interview with Edwin Carels*. Gent.
[81] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul*. Telephone conversation.

institution's fluctuating engagement with Internet art, it turns out that a low phase is often due to "too many other things to do". As Sara Tucker put it:

> [Our fall-back on web projects in 2005 and 2006] is just partly because everyone has been so busy with Beacon coming online. We suddenly have a museum with a staff of 100 people and we have to gear up our retail operations and time in attendance applications. All these things that had to be put into place we didn't have to deal with before. So that is mostly a factor; just not having enough time to really focus on it and to keep things going.[82]

Even if financial and human resources can be put in place, internal as well as external support structures need to be created. Indeed, as the history of inclusion of previous art forms has shown, it is not until one creates a broader network of support – going beyond those few pioneering curators and enthusiastic directors – that one can start speaking about developing an ongoing institutional engagement with the art form in question. Institutional structures, collaborations between institutions, and collaborations with funding organizations are crucial in strengthening an institution's engagement with the art form.

1.2.3. Institutional support, foundations and collaborations

As Janice A. Klein has elaborately illustrated in her book *True change. How outsiders on the inside get things done in organizations*, true change in any organization requires that "new ideas become institutionalized and are no longer dependent on a change agent or champion to support them."[83] For the art institution, this is as true as for any other business. If the institution's involvement with Internet art solely depends on one individual working under the radar, more or less supported by the director, the departure of either agent from the museum means a halt for all Internet art engagements of that institution. On the other hand, if structures have been put into place, individuals become

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[82] Verschooren, K. (February 15, 2007). *Interview with Sara Tucker*. New York.
[83] Klein, J.A. (2004). *True change. How outsiders on the inside get things done in organizations.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p.1.

more or less replaceable, without endangering the continued engagement of the institution with the art form.[84] This metric has in the past most clearly been illustrated by the example of the Solomon R. Guggenheim museum, where for years Internet art's inclusion in the institution depended upon the sole activities of Jon Ippolito. Fortunately in 2002, museum staff came together to structure some of the work on the level of commissioning contracts and preservation strategies. With Ippolito somewhere else, it is only the latter that is still remaining.

Guggenheim's turn from individual to structural support was taken in 2002, when Mark Napier *net.flag* and John F. Simon Jr.'s *Unfolding Object* were commissioned. As John G. Hanhardt, senior curator of Film & Media Arts stated: "the act of collecting these works demonstrates the Guggenheim's commitment to art on the cutting edge of culture and technology."[85] Indeed, by 2002, the Guggenheim's commitment to online art was not perceived as a temporary flinch: In *Ten Myths about Internet Art*, Jon Ippolito writes: "the Guggenheim is bringing a particularly long-term vision to collecting online art, acquiring commissions directly into its permanent collection alongside painting and sculpture, rather than into ancillary special Internet art collections as other museums have done."[86] In practice, it went like this:

> a few people got around the table and said, ok, how are we going to do this. (…). We established an endowment that would skim a certain amount of money off of the commission and would be used for reprogramming, migrating and so on in the future. I can't say whether the Guggenheim still honors that, but all these kind of mechanisms were put in place.[87]

If still in place or not, they were one of the first applications of the Variable Media Initiative, founded in 2001, when the Guggenheim felt itself confronted with difficulties surrounding the preservation of their collection of conceptual, minimalist, video and Internet art. A team of researchers, directed by Ippolito, started to work on a new

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[84] This in the assumption that human resources do a good job and acquire capable individuals.
[85] Guggenheim Museum (February 26, 2002). *Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum to launch Internet art commissions on February 18, 2002.* Retrieved on September 14, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.guggenheim.org/press_office.cgi?which=/press_releases/release_20.html
[86] Ippolito, J. (2002). Ten myths about Internet art. [Electronic Version]. *Leonardo Vol 35 (5)*, 485-498.
[87] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Jon Ippolito*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

preservation strategy that would allow an experience of the artwork through more than just second-hand documentation or anecdote at any later moment in time. The Variable Media Network paradigm encouraged and continues to encourage artists to define their work independently from the medium so that it can be translated once its current medium is obsolete.[88] The medium is in other words no longer the message. An interactive questionnaire is at the artist's and museum staff's disposal to assist in identifying the required strategies for preserving the artwork.

The initiative spawned a multi-institutional Variable Media Network, supported by the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology, and with the Berkeley Art Museum/Pacific Film Archives, Franklin Furnace, Performance Art Festival and Archives, Rhizome.org, the Walker Art Center and of course the Guggenheim museum as its founding members. Also the Whitney Museum of American art subscribed and continues to subscribe to the ideas presented by the Network and assisted in the evaluation process through an application of the Variable Media Questionnaire and its related tools to the media-based and performative works in the Whitney collection – including such works as Douglas Davis's *The World's First Collaborative Sentence.* Coordinated by Jon Ippolito, Alain Depocas and Caitlin Jones, the Variable Media Network aims to form and further enlarge a network of organizations that will develop the tools, methods and standards needed to implement the designed strategy.

The Guggenheim today is no longer the leader in new media art it once presented itself as, be it for a short period of time. What has survived is the Variable Media Network, and its ideas have proven to be pervasive within the institution. The Guggenheim is, according to Jon Ippolito, looking at other parts of their collection that need to be preserved in the same way as variable media; with an open mindset and acknowledging the need for adaptability:

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[88] The Variable Media Initiative (2001). Retrieved on July 29, 2006, from the World Wide Web:
http://www.guggenheim.org/variablemedia/variable_media_initiative.html

The turn of these mechanisms away from media and towards installations and these other forms of conceptual and environmental art is fine, it needs to happen and I am glad that these instruments can be applied to that.[89]

The Variable Media Initiative also allows us to further our argument and introduce a second parameter, crucial in broadening and further enhancing the field of Internet art in its relation to traditional institutions: collaboration.

As a collective, the Variable Media Network took action in 2004 and organized an exhibition *'Seeing Double'*. From mid March through mid May, the Guggenheim Museum was taken over by a series of original art installations with their emulated versions. Conceived of as an experiment in the success/failure of the emulation-preservation technique, visitors could decide for themselves whether the re-creations captured the spirit of the originals. Among the artists at display were video art pioneer Nam June Paik, Internet pioneers Jodi and John F. Simon Jr as well as the more recent generation represented by Cory Arcangel and Mary Flanagan.[90]

Seeing Double had a number of predecessors in terms of collaborative exhibitions and we will only elaborate on a few of them. In 1998, Steve Dietz was ready for his second major online exhibitions and organized, in collaboration with the Davis Museum and Cultural Center at Wellesley College, the San Jose Museum of Art, the Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University, and Rhizome, a second online exhibition only five months after *Beyond Interface*[91]. *Shock of the View: Artists, Audiences, and Museums in the Digital Age* was hosted by the Walker Art Center between September 21, 1998 and March 30, 1999 and paired works of art or events from the participating museums with

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[89] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Jon Ippolito.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.
[90] Variable Media (2004). *Seeing Double. Emulation in Theory and Practice*. Retrieved on July 30, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.variablemedia.net/e/seeingdouble/index.html
[91] Beyond Interface: net art and Art on the Net was organized and co-curated by Steve Dietz on the occasion of the 1998 Museums and the Web Conference and was – in Dietz words - meant to both "educate myself and my colleagues about some of the best work being produced for the Web and to begin a critical engagement with Net practice beyond simply compiling a hotlist of links."
Walker Art Center (1998). *Beyond Interface: net art and Art on the Net.* Retrieved September 14, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://gallery9.walkerart.org/

digital works of art or events, exploring the ways digital media impacts artists, audiences, and museums.[92]

In March 2001, the Walker would put on its collaborator's hat again for *Crossfade*. This time in collaboration with SFMoMA, the Goethe-Institut and ZKM Karlsruhe: *Crossfade* was put together as an investigation of the Internet as the site for sound experiments. The exhibition consisted mainly of commissioned media essays, together with live events both in physical space and online.[93]

Moving beyond the scope of the researched institutions, but impossible not to mention at this point is the affiliation between Rhizome.org, the independent non-profit organization dedicated to creation, presentation, discussion and preservation of new media art, and the New Museum of Contemporary art since the Fall of 2003. In this affiliation, the New Museum provided Rhizome.org with office space and administrative and development support.[94] In the summer of 2005, their affiliation became more visible to the outsider, when the *Rhizome Artbase 101* show, an overview of forty artworks selected out of Rhizome's online archives of new media art, was held at the New Museum.[95] The activities of Rhizome and the polemic around the selection process for *Artbase 101* will be discussed to a greater extent in chapter two.

These collaborations as discussed above not only strengthen the bounds between institutions, allowing for partnership rather than competition, but at the same time develop the field of and heighten the potential appreciation for Internet art. What is more, these collaborations did not stay restricted to organizing exhibitions. Also on the level of commissions, institutions have partnered in support of the emergent art form. Tate and

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[92] The online exhibition can today be found at
Walker Art Center (1999). *The shock of the view*. Retrieved April 12, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.walkerart.org/archive/7/B153919DF735B615616F.htm
[93] Crossfade is still accessible online:
Walker Art Center (2001). *Crossfade*. Retrieved April 12, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://crossfade.walkerart.org/
[94] Rhizome.org (2007). *General Information*. Retrieved March 13, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://rhizome.org/info/
[95] The activities of Rhizome.org will be discussed to a greater extent in chapter two.

The Whitney Museum of American Art have for example joined forces in commissioning three Internet art pieces in 2006, resulting in additional essays and artist interviews.

Not to be forgotten in this context of group effort and structure creation, is the exclusive collaboration between MoMA and P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center, since 2000. The principal objective of this collaboration, as stated on MoMA's website, was "to promote the enjoyment, appreciation, study and understanding of contemporary art to a wide and growing audience."[96] However, some commented that with this act, MoMA appeared to admit their incapability of covering all of contemporary art themselves and critics announced that the affiliation would allow MoMA to both continue its inward focus while pretending to be still present in today's contemporary art landscape via P.S.1. Yet, as it turns out, P.S.1 appeared to have a more progressive impact on MoMA's functioning itself, creating a structure and therefore a long-term commitment to media art:

> October 3, 2006: The Museum of Modern Art announced yesterday that it had created a new curatorial department to focus exclusively on the growing number of contemporary artworks that use sound and moving images in gallery installations. The media department, once part of the department of film and media, will deal with works that use a wide range of modern technology, from video and digital imagery to Internet-based art and sound-only pieces, said Klaus Biesenbach, who was named chief curator of the new department. Mr. Biesenbach, who has been a MoMA curator since 2004 and the chief curator of P.S. 1, said that works relying on media techniques and ideas of conveying motion and time had become much more prominent over the last two decades at international art fairs and exhibitions. 'And it's even more visible now,' he said. 'I think artistic practice is evolving, and so museums are evolving as well.'[97]

Seemingly hopeful words, but Sarah Cook urges caution: "there is no sense yet of where media art projects that aren't moving-image or gallery-based, will go."[98] And also Steve Dietz indicated concern about Biesenbach's apparent emphasis on what Dietz calls the

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[96] MoMA.org (2006). *About MoMA: Affiliation with P.S.1.* Retrieved on Sept 3, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.moma.org/about_moma/ps_1/index.html

[97] Kennedy, R. (October 3, 2006). *Arts, Briefly; New Media Department at MoMA.* Retrieved March 12, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9D02E1D91430F930A35753C1A9609C8B63&n=Top%2fReference%2fTimes%20Topics%2fPeople%2fK%2fKennedy%2c%20Randy

[98] CRUMB (10/16/2006). [NEW-MEDIA-CURATING] *curatorial department restructuring at MoMA.* RSS Feed.

'gallery-ness' of video and performance work. In addition, Dietz problematizes the lack of any notion of interactivity in Biesenbach's rhetoric.[99] Giving Biesenbach the benefit of the doubt, media art aficionados can however be satisfied with this structural commitment to media art.

Last but not least, a third parameter, crucial in broadening and further enhancing the field of Internet art in its relation to traditional institutions, can be found within the connections between museum institutions and their funding bodies. Indeed, bringing the art form to the funding institution's attention and sparking their interest creates a financial support base necessary for an ongoing commitment to the novel art form. A number of the art museums and institutions under scrutiny have in the past created these connections with funding bodies. The majority of the web commissions of the Dia Center for the Arts were sponsored by the New York State Council on the Arts with grants from $8,500 in fiscal year 2000 and 2001 going up to $9,000 in fiscal year 2002 and 2003, back down to $7,600 in 2004, $7,400 in 2005 and 2006 and finally $7,500 in 2007.[100] Although the numbers overall are small, the NYSCA support has nonetheless been important for the DIA's ongoing engagement with artists' web projects. SFMoMA's Internet art commissions program benefited from gifts from the James Family Foundation. As Benjamin Weil explains:

> [He is] a private individual who gave the media department a lump sum of money every year to support the entire program and primarily things that were under-supported. I decided to allocate – with this person's agreement – a certain proportion of that money to pay for the web commissions.[101]

And the Walker Art Center enjoyed support from the Jerome Foundation. Also the industry, and primarily Research and Development departments within, has been a fruitful partner in the past, both to individual artist as well as art institutions. This relation between R&D-departments and new media artists and exhibitions will be discussed to a

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[99] Yproductions (10/3/2006). *Media arts at MoMA! What is media arts at MoMA?*. Retrieved on Oct 16, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.yproductions.com/WebWalkAbout/archives/000803.html
[100] NYSCA (2007). *Past NYSCA Grants – Dia Center for the Arts.* Retrieved March 7, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.nysca.org/grant_app/org_search.cfm?search_type=op&org_id=2823
[101] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil.* New York.

greater extend in chapter four. As for now, suffice to mention the support of Reuters for the *Art Now: Art and Money Online exhibit* (March – June 2001) at Tate Modern, the sponsorship of Aveus for the *Art Entertainment Network* show at the Walker Art Center and the financial aid provided by France Telecom for *DataDynamics* (2001) and the 2002 Biennial at the Whitney Museum of American art.

With the curators and directors in place, a balanced interdepartmental financial and human resources sheet and support structures being created, one can start debating the engagement strategies deployed by the art institutions.

1.3. Engagement strategies

The modes of engagement of the institutions vary significantly, from lectures and symposia, to award ceremonies, commissions, exhibitions and festivals. Each of these engagement strategies requires a different level of financial and human resources and presents a short-term or long-term commitment to Internet art as an art form. However, all of these engagement strategies are potential settings for the articulation and promotion of the cultural and aesthetic value of Internet art, a crucial factor in the development an Internet art world, as I will elaborate on to a greater extent in chapter three.

1.3.1. Lectures and Symposia

One of the least demanding engagement strategies is the lecture series or symposia. Widely organized in virtually all the institutions under scrutiny, this mode of engagement can be often read as a sort of experimentation and exploration of the 'new domain', a first step towards other forms of engagement. However, often times it is also organized in conjunction with other activities, such as award ceremonies or exhibitions and festivals.

Although Centre Pompidou has three Internet artworks in its collection[102], its engagement with Internet art until this day plateau-ed at the level of organizing conferences, debates and meetings that highlight the questions arising in the digital society of the early 21st century. A first series of debates titled *Les Plasticiens du Web* were initiated on October 20, 2003 by Géraldine Gomez, head of the "Ciném@s de demain" program, which is linked to the Cinema department at the Pompidou Centre. Over the course of 18 months, every third Thursday of the month, a group of artists were invited to present their work. The presentations and debates would each time culminate in a brief performance.[103] The program ended on December 15, 2005 with the presentation of the International Online Film Festival Fluxus, organized by Francesca Azzi in Sao Paolo and the projection of a selection of short films, animations, experimental videos and documentaries. A second round of eight debates took place between October 9, 2005 and June 18, 2006 and was devoted entirely to the electronic arts. The meetings explored different facets of the digital world, via discussions and debates on major themes linked to cyber culture and the way in which it nurtures and questions other artistic disciplines. More specifically targeted towards Internet art were the *Tour du Monde du Web* events, a program initiated in September 2002 again by Géraldine Gomez as part of the "Ciném@s de demain" program. Planned as a monthly event focused on the web production of a country or a continent, *Tour du Monde du Web* has featured in its editions web projects from Japan, Algeria, Russia, China, Eastern Europe, India, Argentina and Uruguay, Australia and Greece. Independent curator Isabelle Arvers organized three of the editions. For the Eastern Europe session, she invited Internet art pioneer Vuk Cosic to speak, organized a live net meeting with Spela Kucan, program director of the Ljubljana digital media lab and presented a selection of artists' websites.[104] Australia's web production was presented to the French public via curator Anoanetta Ivanova, and finally for *Tour du Monde du*

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[102] In 2002, Herman Asselberghs & Johan Grimonprez donated their website *Prends Garde! A jouer au fantôme on le deviant* and the same year, Centre Pompidou bought Claude Closky"s *Calendrier 2000* and Igor Stromajer"s *sm.N-Sprinkling Menstrual Navigator*.

[103] Centre Pomipidou (2005). *Les Plasticiens du Web*. Retrieved July 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.centrepompidou.fr/Pompidou/Manifs.nsf/AllCycle/Plasticiens%20du%20web%202005-2006?OpenDocument&sessionM=2.10&L=1

[104] Arvers, I. (Feb 14, 2003). *Tour du monde du web: est!*. Thread posted to the Nettime Email list. Retrieved January 11, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-fr-0302/msg00024.html

Web's last event in December 2003 on Greece, Miltos Manetas was invited to introduce the Paris audience to *Neen*. Both the *Tour du Monde du Web* events, as well as *Les Plasticiens du Web* have currently been discontinued and the internal institutional organization of the Centre Pompidou as well as its ideology is relevant in explaining the centre's limited commitment to new media arts. As Isabelle Arvers puts it:

> Géraldine Gomez [organizer of both events] is like an alien at the Pompidou Center. She has no connection with the exhibition departments... (…). There is no believe in new media at the Pompidou Center (…), it is mostly video and installations. New media are not recognized as an art form.[105]

Another example in terms of lectures and symposia links us back to the Guggenheim's Variable Media Network program, which in 2004, organized – in conjunction with the exhibition *Seeing Double* a symposium *Echoes of Art: Emulation As a Preservation Strategy*, which debated the merits of emulation as a preservation technique. Its transcripts are available online.[106] In 2004, the Variable Media Network published *'Permanence Through Change'*, presenting viewpoints, methods and case studies concerning the preservation of art with non-traditional materials, tools and technologies. It includes texts by Bruce Sterling, Steve Dietz, Jon Ippolito, John Handhardt, and Nancy Spector, as well as excerpts from the March 30-31, 2001 *'Preserving the Immaterial'* conference, which discussed the progress of the Variable Media Initiative March 30-31, 2001.[107]

Also SFMoMA hosted and presented an international symposium on online art, May 13, 2000 as a follow up on the announcement of the first Webby Awards (cf.infra) and the Whitney did something similar, organizing a panel in collaboration with the 'Netart Initiative' after staging Internet art in their 2002 biennial. Walker, in turn, added a publicly accessible listserv discussion about artists, audiences and museums in the digital age to the online exhibitions and invited responses from over fifty participants for *The*

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[105] Arvers, I. (March 18, 2007). *Answers to email-questionnaire*. Own correspondence.
[106] Variable Media (2004). *Echoes of Art: Emulation as a Preservation Strategy*. Retrieved on July 30, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.variablemedia.net/e/echoes/index.html
[107] Transcripts of the conference are available at http://www.variablemedia.net/e/preserving/html/var_pre_index.html [March 24, 2007]

Shock of the View exhibition (1998-1999). It repeated this strategy in 2000, when the museum hosted, in conjunction with the exhibition *Let's Entertain* and *Art Entertainment Network* (aen.walkerart.org), a 12-week online discussion, called E.A.T: Entertainment, Art, Technology, investigating the reasons we are entertained and the ways entertainment affects our relationship to art and technology. Also Tate followed up on its on-site exhibition *Art and Money Online* via a symposium on May 4th 2001 in which curators of new media, net activists, writers and artists discussed the interrelation between commerce and culture online.[108]

Last but not least, we should mention MuHKA's series of talks, organized in conjunction with CONSTANT – a non-profit association developing radio, electronic music and database projects – in 2005 and 2006 (Stitch-and-split@Antwerpen (MuHKA_media),[109] which might indicate a possible museum engagement with the art form in the years to come.

1.3.2. Commissions

For museums whose engagement with Internet art works have gone beyond organizing lectures and symposia, commissioning an artist to create a web project for distribution on the institution's website has proven a popular strategy. Whereas virtually all of the researched institutions have deployed this strategy, not all commissions entail a similar engagement from the institution.

The Dia Center for the Arts, for example, not only provides financial support for their commissions, but at the same time offers technical support as well. The pool from which they select artists, wouldn't allow for any other way of working, as Sara Tucker explains:

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[108] The web casts of the presentations and talks are still available via
http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/archive/art+money/ [March 24, 2007]
[109] Stitch & Split (2006). *Stitch and Split.* Retrieved, January 15, 2007, from the World Wide Web:
http://www.stitch-and-split.org/site/home.php

We ask artists who do not necessarily come out of technology; they are painters, sculptures and performance artists. They wouldn't probably work in that medium unless we commission them to do a project and provide them with the support to do the project. (…) I don't think we could limit our support to only financial with our model of asking artists who don't work in the medium. They often wouldn't even know who to ask for production.[110]

Artists who are interested in exploring the aesthetic and conceptual potentials of the Internet as a medium, sought out by Lynn Cook, curator for the DIA center, work together with Sara Tucker to produce their web projects – either in the DIA buildings or remotely. With the initiation of the series in early 1995, this method has resulted in the commissioning of over twenty-five Internet art projects, three of which were done in conjunction with exhibitions. All web projects can be found on http://www.diacenter.org/webproj/index.html. The commissions entail the exclusive right for DIA to carry the projects on their server and communicate the intent to host them forever. However, the artist remains the author of the artwork - DIA does not accession the series into the permanent collection - and if for some reason DIA's server would stop carrying the projects, the artist recovers the right to host his/her projects.

This strategy is very similar to what the Guggenheim put in place in 2002 (basing their methodology on the Variable Media Initiative project – cf. supra). However, before, their commissions did not entail much more than the presentation online. Illustrative is the story on Guggenheim's first commission in 1998 with *BRANDON: A One-Year Narrative Project in Installments* by Shu Lea Cheang.[111] Per Ippolito:

BRANDON was conceived as a yearlong involvement in installments. It had contributions by lots of different people. Those contributions did not age well, some pieces were fine, others disappeared or 404rd[112]. There wasn't a policy or initiative in place to acquire the work, just to commission it, so there was never an attempt to sort of what we now loosely call archive it.[113]

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[110] Verschooren, K. (February 15, 2007). *Interview with Sara Tucker*. New York.
[111] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., pp.111-112.
[112] Error 404 is the message one receives when a webpage no longer exists.
[113] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Jon Ippolito*. Cambridge, Massachusetts.

This changed substantially in 2002, with the commissioning of Mark Napier *net.flag* and John F. Simon Jr.'s *Unfolding Object*: Jon Ippolito explains:

> We worked with him [Mark Napier] on an acquisition contract - that is a critical piece of the Variable Media Network - including an endowment for future iterations and all that. One of the things that he [Mark Napier] proposed we push through is that if the Guggenheim for financial or technical reasons - the Guggenheim has to keep his work on line, it's not a painting that you can take up or put down, it's a public piece, I showed it today in class, it still has a new flag every 15 seconds, the piece is like 6 years old. We brought in a clause saying, well suppose the Guggenheim can't keep it going, they have to legally, but let's say they run out of money, or a virus takes down all the servers, he [Mark Napier] has the authorization to run it off of his server. It was commissioned and acquired by the Guggenheim, he doesn't own a version of it, but because it is a public work, that's the fall-back.[114]

A different commissioning strategy, however, was deployed by SFMoMA who, guided by David A. Ross, commissioned eight projects between 1998 and 2002, five of which were showcased in the *010101 Art in Technological Times* exhibit (cf.infra). Just like the MoMA's first engagements in Internet art, SFMoMA's first online work to commission was one, which coincided with an on-site exhibition. Julia Scher's *Predictive Engineering 2* was indeed created in conjunction with the exhibition *New Work: Julia Scher's Predictive Engineering*, a show curated by SFMoMA's curator of media arts Robert R. Riley, on display from October 23rd 1998 through January 12, 1999. SFMoMA then waited until the *010101* show to commission five more projects, four of which can still be found on E-space: Thompson & Craighead's *e-Poltergeist,* Matthew Ritchie's *The New Place*, Erik Adigard / m.a.d. (with Dave Thau) *Timelocator* and Mark Napier's *Feed*. For the record, the fifth one was *Eden.garden 1.0.*, a work of Entropy8Zuper!, winner of the first Webby Prize for Excellence in Online Art (cf. infra). Benjamin Weil explains the absence of *Eden.garden 1.0.*, indicating the difficulties preservation possibly entails and revealing SFMoMA's commissioning strategy:

> The Michael Samyn piece was a 3D thing and there was an issue with the plug-in, because it was not an open source, but a commercial plug-in, so we got the first one donated, and then when they upgraded the system, the new

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[114] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Jon Ippolito.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.

client software was not compatible with the old server software and so to be able to view the piece we had to ask Michael to update the code and encode it with the new server software and we had to pay a license for 3,000 dollars and then when the license expired the museum said not to renew it. (…) commissioning implies that there is a maintenance contract signed with the artists (…) the contractual relationship I had with our artists is an exclusive license to display the work for one year and after that one year SFMoMA has a non-exclusive license to display the work online but no obligation to keep it going. (…). The museum doesn't have any claims to own the work, primarily because it was made clear at that point that to apply a conservation strategy to this would cost an enormous amount of money and so, rather than saying, the museum wants to own these works, the idea was that the museum would be the custodian of these works. And it will do its best to keep it going, but it won't guarantee it. (…) So if after one year, the museum wanted to unplug everything they had the right to do so.[115]

E-space features two more Internet art projects, commissioned in 2002: Lynn Herschman's *Agent Ruby* and Yael Kanarek's *World of Awe, Chapter 2*.[116] According to Weil, the commissioning model is an important activity, as he does not foresee any Internet art project becoming valuable in economic terms. The question about economic value for Internet art projects and their exhibiting in on-site spaces is a difficult one to tackle and will be dealt with to a greater extent in chapter four.

Also the Museum of Modern Art appropriated a commissioning strategy vis-à-vis Internet art. Its online project collection features sixteen works, however, only six of them can be considered Internet artworks, five of which accompany an on-site exhibition. The remaining works range from sites documenting offline artworks, symposia, lectures and curator's fieldtrips to an online exhibit on MoMA's collection of German expressionist prints and illustrated books. MoMA's commissions, in general, were all framed as project exhibitions, rather than acquisitions. As such, no archival policy was included, and although some form of exhibition exclusivity was entailed, the details of the contract are still somewhat obscure.

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[115] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil.* New York.
[116] SFMoMA (2006). *E.Space.* Retrieved on Sept 6, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.sfmoma.org/espace/espace_overview.html

Whereas SFMoMA and MoMA still retain the right to an exclusive display license (for one year or longer), The Whitney Museum of American Art's commissions are non-exclusive from the start. The concept is simple as explained by Christiane Paul:

> [The commissions] are not part of the collection (…). All of these are non-exclusive licenses because I believe that for an exclusive license you need to pay a lot more. (…)[117] The artists retain copyright to it and they can show it at exhibitions etcetera. The work needs to be accompanied by a credit line stating that the piece was originally commissioned by the Whitney… all of which is common practice (…) We also always retain – again common practice –a first right of refusal. (…). (…) I very much believe in distribute or die.[118]

At the same time though, Christiane Paul regrets not being able to offer the commissioned Internet artists the care art pieces within the collection receive:

> Unfortunately there is in the agreement no specific mention of the responsibility of the Whitney to take care of the work in eternity. On the contrary there is a line that actually says that they can take it offline if they want to. So, that is of course not in my interest, but you can't really promise these things unless you have an infrastructure set up for actually maintaining and preserving these things.[119]

And although the Whitney Museum of American Art adheres to the philosophy of the Variable Media Network, it is currently only Douglas Davis' work *The World's First Collaborative Sentence* – the only Internet artwork in the collection – that has enjoyed the fruits of this model (cf. supra). To be able to incorporate more of the commissioned art pieces in the collection, Paul adds, not only the development of a preservation strategy is required, but:

> Getting pieces for the collection is also very much a matter of money. I do not think that $5,000 is enough to purchase one of these pieces, they are worth more in my opinion, so I just don't feel comfortable purchasing a piece of net art for that small an amount of money.[120]

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[117] The commissions of the Whitney Museum of American Art usually entailed between $3000 and $6000, as Christiane Paul explained.

[118] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.

[119] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.

[120] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.

Currently, the commissions-page of Whitney's ARTPORT shows six projects between 2001 and 2006, four of which are Internet artworks. On a side note, but important to mention, are the GATE pages, which, from 2001 on, allowed digital artist to present their work on a monthly basis, offering them server space and the Whitney-stamp. Digital artists who have profited from this space are amongst others Andy Deck, Wolfgang Staehle, John Klima, MTAA, Cory Arcangel, Alexander R. Galloway, Jonah Brucker-Cohen, Mark Napier, Ken Goldberg and Abe Linkoln & Marisa Olson. Although meant to work as portals to the artist's work, they often were appropriated as sites to host mini projects or were used as promotional tools for the launch of a larger project scheduled during that particular month. Lots of Internet artists found in Whitney's GATE pages the first recognition for their work from a brick and mortar institution of contemporary art. For some artists, GATE pages meant the start of the creation of a commissioned artwork (Andy Deck for Whitney ARTPORT and Tate Online, Tina LaPorta for Whitney ARTPORT, Natalie Bookchin for Tate Online). Others (Mark Napier, Shu Lea Cheang, John F. Simon Jr.) had first received commissions from other museums and used GATE pages to continue their involvement with the traditional institutions of contemporary art. As explained above however, curtailment of financial resources and the perceived less important status of the GATE pages, resulted in a hold-up of the program in February 2006.

Tate's commissioning strategy in general is very similar to the Whitney's, both in terms of the incorporation of a first right of refusal and the inability to offer the commissioned Internet artists the care art pieces within the collection receive. Jemima Rellie, Head of Digital Programmes and responsible for the Internet art commissions since 2001, explains:

> The contract included and continues to include a first right of refusal, so we can purchase any of the works at any point, before they are sold to anyone else. At this point, we haven't purchased any. (…) Tate has not required any of the net art pieces into the collection or even into the archive and there are several reasons why this is the case, but one is that we don't have yet a preservation policy for this type of digital content. Obviously we recognize

this as a problem and Pip Laurenson in the Media Matters research group is looking into this, scanning the Variable Media Initiative as well.[121]

Also in terms of exclusivity, Jemima Rellie fully agrees with Christiane Paul's motto "distribute or die."[122]:

> We have always taken the line that [exclusivity] is not necessary. As long as there is a credit associated to Tate, we are happy with co-commissioning in fact, or showing it elsewhere. (…). *The Art of Sleep*, the Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries's piece was recently included in a biennial in Australia, the Multimedia Art Asia Pacific biennial and (…) we thought it was terrific that we would get a profile in Australia as well. (…) Also, we haven't always hosted the works on our own site. Almost half of the commissions have actually been hosted somewhere else on the Internet.[123]

This outsourcing of the host-function is not merely a result of an open-minded philosophy in terms of exclusivity, but in some cases has more to do with practical issues in the development of the Internet art pieces. As Jemima Rellie explains:

> With *agoraXchange*, we took the decision to host it elsewhere because we weren't able to provide the developers with the level of access to the server they required in order to develop the site. A similar situation occurred with *Blessed Bandwidth* and *borderXings Guide*.[124]

In terms of financial retribution for the Internet art commissions, an artist's fee of 1,000 British pounds, together with a production fee of 3,500 British pounds is awarded. In the decision of these amounts, Tate looked first and foremost at the amounts artists in the contemporary art strand of Tate Britain were receiving:

> Tate is always keen to insure that artists are properly reimbursed for their efforts. For instance, for these net art commissions, when we first undertook them, we were very careful to insure that the artists would receive the same amount that the artists in the Art Now strand, the contemporary art strand at Tate Britain were receiving. We really wanted to insure that they were treated similarly and fairly.[125]

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[121] Verschooren, K. (April 10, 2007). *Interview with Jemima Rellie.* Telephone conversation.
[122] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.
[123] Verschooren, K. (April 10, 2007). *Interview with Jemima Rellie.* Telephone conversation.
[124] Verschooren, K. (April 10, 2007). *Interview with Jemima Rellie.* Telephone conversation.
[125] Verschooren, K. (April 10, 2007). *Interview with Jemima Rellie.* Telephone conversation.

Over the course of the past seven years, ten artists have been approached by Tate to create Internet artworks. Its kick off in 2000 was not without reason: 2000 was the year that Tate was re-branded. Instead of The Tate Gallery, it became known as Tate and each of the sites was branded: Tate Britain, Tate Liverpool, Tate St Ives, and the website became Tate Online. In addition, Tate Modern opened and to accompany the event, Tate's board felt the need to increase its digital content via amongst others the commissioning of some Internet art works. Sandy Nairne, director of National Programs thus asked Matthew Gansallo to select a number of artists to approach.[126] With a small group of advisors (Matthew Fuller, Lisa Haskel and Tom Bets), Gansallo compiled a list and finally selected Simon Patterson's *Le Match des Couleurs* and Harwood@Mongrel's *Uncomfortable Proximity* to be the first commissions of Tate's Internet art initiative. While, according to Sarah Cook, a theory exists saying that the pairing of Simon Patterson and Mongrel was a way of making Internet art easier to understand for the public, Gansallo rejects the idea that the selection was purely based on the familiarity of the artists to the public of Tate:

> My intentions were in trying to create some sort of balance, not create some sort of safety net, with having an artist who is famous and one who is not so. That wasn't it. Because Mongrel is incredibly well known (…), they are at the forefront of pushing the boundaries - the differences between web design and web art. Tate never, at any point, called me and said 'you have to play it safe, you have to find an artist we've shown before.' This pairing was my initiative.[127]

Whereas the responses from the public were largely positive, Tate itself was a bit more hesitant with regard to the Internet art commissions. The department of marketing was worried about losing audiences, the press and publicity department needed extra guidelines on how to create press releases for the Internet art pieces and the curatorial departments, largely overwhelmed by the opening of Tate Modern, just needed to know

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[126] Cook, S. (2000). *An interview with Matthew Gansallo*. Retrieved June 13, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk/crumb/phase3/nmc_intvw_gansallo.html
[127] Cook, S. (2000). *An interview with Matthew Gansallo*. Retrieved June 13, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk/crumb/phase3/nmc_intvw_gansallo.html

that Gansallo was not taking up any of *their* space.[128] The launch of Mongrel's *Uncomfortable Proximity*, a mock version of the existing Tate website, was even postponed[129], but with Nicholas   Serota evaluating the first commissions as "good, excellent"[130], Tate's engagement in Internet art continued and in 2002 Heath Bunting's *borderXings Guide* and Susan Collin's *Tate in Space* were commissioned. A year later, Tate commissioned two more Internet art pieces: Natalie Bookchin & Jacqueline Stevens *agoraXchange* and Shilpa Gupta's *Blessed Bandwidth.* Between 2003 and 2005, Tate stopped its online commissions, indicating its hesitation to engage with this latest art form. A new director of collections, Jan Debbaut, was appointed, and it was decided to commission research into Internet art and the development of a strategy for online commissions, rather than commissioning Internet artworks. However, after two years Debbaut left and the commissions being put on hold could restart, this time in collaboration with the Whitney Museum of American Art. Three new art pieces were thus commissioned in 2006: Golan Levin with Kamal Nigam and Jonathan Feinberg's *The Dumpster*, Marc Lafia and Fan-Yu Lin's *The Battle of Algiers*, and Andy Deck's *Screening Circle.*. Tate closed off its commissioning season 2006 for Internet art with Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries's *The Art of Sleep*. The first Internet art commission of 2007 went to the French artists group Qubo Gas who created *Watercouleur Park*, an interactive, graphic composition made of layers of drawings.[131]

As we have seen, most active in terms of commissions was without a doubt the Walker Art Center. The center, guided in its engagement with Internet art by Steve Dietz, who founded Gallery 9 and the New Media Initiatives Program, supported the Internet artists throughout the years, commissioning about twenty artworks between 1997 and 2003, often with the support or through a grant from the Jerome Foundation. In this way, both

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[128] Cook, S. (2000). *An interview with Matthew Gansallo*. Retrieved June 13, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk/crumb/phase3/nmc_intvw_gansallo.html
[129] Van Noort, M. (2000). *Has the TATE gone too far?* Retrieved June 13, 2006, from The Guardian Online: http://technology.guardian.co.uk/online/story/0,3605,265410,00.html
[130] Cook, S. (2000). *An interview with Matthew Gansallo*. Retrieved June 13, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk/crumb/phase3/nmc_intvw_gansallo.html
[131] All Internet art commissions can be found on: http://www.tate.org.uk/netart/
Tate Online (2007). *Net Art*. Retrieved March 28, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.tate.org.uk/netart/

established names such as Vivian Selbo, Mark Amerika, Auriea Harvey, 0100101110101101.ORG and Natalie Bookchin and Alexei Shulgin were spotlighted, but also less known names as radioqualia, Margaret Crane and Jon Winet, Diane Ludin and Piotr Szyhalski found an outlet within an institutional context. Important to mention, as it meant a significant enlargement of Walker's collection of Internet art, is the November 1998 acquisition of the complete archives of the äda'web[132], a pioneering exhibition space for original online artworks, founded and curated by Benjamin Weil. Meant to be the centerpiece of Walker Art's new digital art study collection, the donated site, previously published through Digital City Inc. counted about sixteen pieces among which were artworks from Julia Scher, Antonio Muntadas, Vivan Selbo, Jenny Holzer and Michael Samyn (who would later win SFMoMA's first Webby Award for excellence in online art cf. supra). The acquisition of the archive in turn instigated new creativity as Janet Cohen, Keith Frank and Jon Ippolito's 1998 commissioned piece, *The Unreliable Archive*, used äda'web's raw materials. In the acquisition contract of äda'web, Whitney committed to keeping äda'web's projects alive in perpetuity.

1.3.3. Exhibitions and Festivals

Whereas a number of the institutions under scrutiny stopped their engagement with Internet art at the symposia/lectures or commissions level, others commissioned over a number of years enough artworks to curate them into online and/or on-site exhibitions or invited artists to show their work in exhibitions and festivals (without commissioning it). Bear in mind that this does not include those Internet artworks commissioned as a side-project to accompany an on-site exhibition, as many of the projects in the MoMA collection, for example (cf. supra). Attention goes out primarily to those exhibitions featuring at least a considerable number of Internet art works if not focusing on the art form, whether they are presented solely online or on-site.

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[132] The term äda''web refers to Augusta Ada King (1815-1852), Countess of Lovelace and the daughter of Lord Byron, who wrote some of the first instruction routines for the engines designed by Charles Babbage (1792-1871), mathematics professor at Cambridge University and early visionary of the computer. Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., p.15

Going beyond the engagement strategies exercised by its West-European counterparts Centre Pompidou, MuHKA and SMAK, Tate has attempted to present Internet art in their physical gallery spaces between March – June 2001 with an exhibit called *Art Now: Art and Money Online,* curated by Julian Stallabrass. Sponsored by Reuters, the exhibition presented three installations by artists whose work referred to and made use of the Internet. Lise Autogena and Joshua Portway, Redundant Technology Initiative and Jon Thomson and Alison Craighead's works examined through different ways the rapid commercialization of the Internet, and the growing culture of e-commerce. The statement of *Art Now* indicates one of the underlying goals of the exhibit: to disseminate Internet art as an art form among a broader audience: "Most Internet art is difficult to accommodate within a gallery show, as it requires interaction with a single viewer, and is suited to display only on a small scale. Increasingly, however, artists are using the Internet in new ways, and to highlight this development, and to bring Internet art to a wider audience, *Art and Money Online* shows work that is immediately accessible to visitors who previously may have been put off by the computer interface."[133] An exhibit within an institution widely acknowledged as the authoritative voice within the UK served an important PR function for the Internet art world. However the show was deemed "problematic", as Jemima Rellie recalls:

> I think it was extremely timely and innovative and interesting, but somewhat problematic as well. Put it this way, off the back of it, Tate did not embark on a number of other similar initiatives, so the implication is that it wasn't a success.[134]

Completely different in goal and scope, SFMoMA staged in February 2001 a show incorporating Internet art projects: *010101: Art in Technological Times*. Presenting five online art projects, in conjunction with video work, sculpture, design, drawing and painting, this exhibition attempted to present the tremendous impact of technology on our daily lives. In *010101*, the Internet art works were presented solely online. Thoughts of

[133] Indepth Arts News (2001). *Art Now: Art and Money Online*. Retrieved May 15, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.absolutearts.com/artsnews/2001/03/06/28188.html

[134] Verschooren, K. (April 10, 2007). *Interview with Jemima Rellie*. Telephone conversation.

putting it into the museum were quickly abandoned when having the artworks in the museum meant that:

> the education department wanted to have the online discussion and the publications department wanted to have the online catalogue and the marketing department wanted to have this, and in the end, what made better sense is to say no, the artworks are to be experienced as the artworks without the strain, they should be kept separate.[135]

The quote introduces one of the practical exhibition problems faced by our pioneering curators in terms of exhibition methodologies, a topic I will discuss in further detail in chapter five.

Besides the tip-toe attempts from Tate and SFMoMA, it was primarily the exhibitions and festivals organized by the Whitney Museum of American Art and the Walker Art Center that were crucial for the development of an institutional involvement in Internet art.

In addition to its collection, commissions, GATE pages and resources, Whitney's "portal to net art"[136] ARTPORT indicates that the Whitney has also expressed its continuing engagement with Internet art through its exhibitions and biennials. Indeed, in 2000, Internet art made its entrance into the Whitney. Sponsored by France Telecom North America, works from Mark Amerika, Led Baldwin, Ben Benjamin, Fakeshop, Ken Goldberg, RTMark, John F. Simon, Jr., Darcey Steinke and Annette Weintraub made it into the selection. Two years later, the Biennial with the support of France Telecom again incorporated an Internet art collection with the explicit aim to "give an impression of the variety of forms that Internet art can take and of the multiple themes that have emerged over the years."[137] Artists in the selection were amongst others Mary Flanagan, Benjamin Fry, John Klima, Margot Lovejoy and Mark Napier.

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[135] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil.* New York.

[136] Whitney Museum of American Art (2002). *Whitney Artport.* Retrieved on April 9, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://artport.whitney.org/

[137] Whitney Museum of American Art (2002). *Whitney Artport. Past Exhibitions.* Retrieved on April 9, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.whitney.org/arport/exhibitions/past-exhibitions.shtml

In the year between the two Biennials, the Whitney museum did not turn its back on Internet art, on the contrary. In March 2001, it launched *Data Dynamics*, which focused on the data visualization subset of Internet art. Five artworks were featured, Mark Napier's *Point to Point*, Adrianne Wortzel's *Camouflage Town*, Marek Walczak and Martin Wattenberg's *Apartment*, Maciej Wisniewski's *netomat(TM)* and Beth Stryker and Sawad Brooks's *DissemiNET*. The projects were both exhibited as installations on the ground-floor project space of the Museum as well as in Whitney's online gallery. *Data Dynamics* was not an exhibit standing on its own. It was added to *BitStreams*, which incorporated another twenty-three artists working with digital technology and twenty-five works of sound art installed in a listening corridor. Together, *Data Dynamics* and *BitStreams* had to offer the visitor an overview of what was happening within the digital arts. Other exhibitions focusing on digital art and worth mentioning are the *CODeDOC* show, which launched in September 2002 and *Follow Through*, which ran more recently from December 1, 2005 – January 29, 2006.

The Whitney was joined by the Walker in paying considerable exhibition attention to Internet art. Under Steve Dietz's leadership the Walker's very first complete online exhibition kicked off on April 22, 1998. *Beyond Interface: net art and Art on the Net* organized and co-curated by Steve Dietz on the occasion of the 1998 Museums and the Web Conference was – in Dietz words - meant to "both educate myself and my colleagues about some of the best work being produced for the Web and to begin a critical engagement with Net practice beyond simply compiling a hotlist of links."[138] The exhibition featured twenty-four projects from more than thirty artists, all of which are available in the Gallery 9 database. Running through the list of present artists, one must notice the large number of artists, now generally accepted as Internet art pioneers: Olia Lialina, Alexei Shulgin, Mark Amerika, I/O/D, Simon Biggs, Natalie Bookchin, JODI, John F. Simon Jr., Ken Goldberg, etc. Having had a taste of it, Dietz organized, in collaboration with the Davis Museum and Cultural Center at Wellesley College, the San Jose Museum of Art, the Wexner Center for the Arts at The Ohio State University, and

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[138] Walker Art Center (1998). *Beyond Interface: net art and Art on the Net.* Retrieved September 14, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://gallery9.walkerart.org/

Rhizome, a second online exhibition only five months after *Beyond Interface*. *The Shock of the View: Artists, Audiences, and Museums in the Digital Age* was hosted by the Walker Art Center between September 21, 1998 and March 30, 1999 and paired works of art or events from the participating museums with digital works of art or events, exploring the ways digital media impacts artists, audiences, and museums. Besides the usage of a number of online projects already featured in *Beyond Interface* (*Memento Mori* – Ken Goldberg & co., *Own, be owned or Remain Invisible* – Heath Bunting) and other works contributed by the collaborators, the Walker commissioned a number of online projects especially for the *Shock of the View* exhibit: Carl DiSalvo's *An Essay on Space*, Natalie Bookchin's *Questions and Answers, Questions as Answers, Answers as Questions* and C5's *16 Sessions*. All three can be retrieved from Gallery 9. A little less than a year after *Shock of the View* and now with even more Internet artworks in the collection, Walker organized its third large online exhibition: *Art Entertainment Network.* Supported through Aveus, *Art Entertainment Network* opened on February 11, 2000 and showed web-based work by more than forty artists. Some of the works had been shown previous in *Beyond Interface* (*Technologies to the People* – Daniel Garcia Andujar), others had been taken out of the äda'web archive *(I Confess* – Michael Samyn, *Jackpot* – Maciej Wisniewski, *Please Change Beliefs* – Jenny Holzer) and yet others were specifically commissioned for the exhibit: *PHON:E:ME* from Mark Amerika, *Airworld* from Jennifer and Kevin McCoy, Auriea Harvey's *An Anatomy*, *Calender 2000* from Claude Closky, *Democracy – The Last Campaign* from Margaret Crane and Jon Winet, Vivian Selbo's *Open_Source* and *Universal Page* from Natalie Bookchin and Alexei Shulgin. From February 12 - April 30, 2000 *Art Entertainment Network* was presented in the Walker Art Center's exhibition *Let's Entertain* via a specially designed portal, a freestanding revolving door with an embedded computer screen. This seminal exhibition and especially its exhibition methodologies will be discussed to a greater extent in chapter five. By February 2001, Steve Dietz curated *Telematic Connections: The virtual embrace*, a traveling exhibition (February 7, 2001 – March 24, 2001), organized and circulated by Independent Curators International. Made possible in part through a grant of the Rockefeller Foundation, the show mixed installation works, past and recent film clips, online projects and 'a telematic timeline'. Through the use of various media, the

exhibition aimed at presenting the ways in which artists use technology - and the Internet-- to explore both the utopian desire for an expanded, global consciousness and the dystopian consequences of our collective embrace, willing or not, of computer-mediated human communications.[139] The online component to the exhibition was and still is co-presented by the Walker Art Center.

1.3.4. Awards

Not a very popular strategy, but one which deserves mentioning in this context, is the attempt of SFMoMA in 2000 to join the since 1996 existing Webby Awards - presented by the International Academy of Digital Arts & Sciences - by introducing a Webby Prize for Excellence in Online Art. SFMoMA-director Ross declared that the new award was designed to "call attention to the Internet as a medium for creative expression and to encourage artists to explore its aesthetic potential. The prize (…) was also meant to "spur additional thinking about what kind of activity takes place on the Web in an artistic framework."[140] SFMoMA's excursion into the realm of awards can also be read as an attempt to position itself as an expert in Internet art evaluation, developing the critical criteria and a hierarchy of value. The first Webby Prize for Excellence in Online Art – a $30,000 prize - was announced on May 11, 2000 and was awarded to *Entropy8Zuper!*, the Belgium-based team of Michael Samyn and Auriea Harvey. Three artists - Ichiro Aikawa, Young-hae Chang and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer - were recognized with honorable mentions and $6,500 apiece.[141] However, the Webby Awards were short-lived, as Benjamin Weil explains:

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[139] Walker Art Center (2004). *Gallery 9: Telematic connections: the virtual embrace.* Retrieved September 16, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://telematic.walkerart.org/ici/

[140] Mirapaul, M. (January 20, 2000). *San Francisco Museum creates $50,000 Internet Art Award.* Retrieved September 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://scout.wisc.edu/Projects/PastProjects/NH/00-01/00-01-20/0007.html

[141] Webby Awards (2006). *Articles. Stars turn out to honor the best web sites of the year at the Webby Awards 2000.* Retrieved September 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.webbyawards.com/press/press-release.php?id=33

A one shot deal. Private individual, very wealthy, interested in the Internet, wanted to see if there was a way that he could support a certain degree of achievement in art making that would be online and online specific and so he gave us 75,000 dollars or something (…). But that was that (…). The Webby awards continued for much longer than that, but we didn't really think that to be part of the Webby awards made much sense and we didn't think that we necessarily needed to do it that way and that is also why I introduced the idea saying, we're much better off commissioning artists to do new work, because that is the way to support artists, that is much more interesting than giving them a prize, so that's why we stopped.[142]

1.4. Marginal (?) institutional attention along geographical lines

Reading carefully through the paragraphs above, discussing the different modes of engagements and underlying intra-institutional relations, the attentive reader must have noticed a different level of engagement with Internet art between the museums on the North American continent and those on the West-European continent. Indeed, overall, the former have been more welcoming than the latter. Within our selection of museums and institutions, it is clear that both the Walker Art Center and the Whitney Museum of American Art seem to have been amongst the most eager ones to get a grasp on this new art form. Also efforts from the Dia Center for the Arts and the San Francisco Museum of American Art are worth mentioning. The Museum of Modern Art and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum have been more cautious to date. On the West-European continent, it is only Tate that becomes significant in terms of its relation to Internet art. Speaking to this difference in the engagement of North American museums versus West-European museums vis-à-vis Internet art, independent new media curator Isabelle Arvers states:

There is a difference, especially if I think about the Walker or the Whitney museums or the Variable Media Network. There is not such an attitude in Europe, I mean Western Europe! We are too much into preserving our patrimony and not enough into experimentation or new types of creations. We have blockbuster exhibitions and our institutions don't take too much risk. We invented the modern art concept and we are now stuck in its glue.[143]

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[142] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil*. New York.
[143] Arvers, I. (March 18, 2007). *Answers to email-questionnaire*. Own correspondence.

Besides this difference in geography between North American and West-European museums' engagement in Internet art, a temporal trend can be noticed as well. Focussing on the North American museums under scrutiny, we may indeed conclude that the museum's engagement with Internet art has fluctuated over time. This trend is lucidly visualized by the collage below, in which every image represents an Internet art piece that museums under scrutiny have supported in one way or another – through commissioning, incorporation into their collections, or exhibiting.[144] It thus visualizes the highs and lows of North American museum's commitment to Internet art, which peaked around 1998 – 2000.

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[144] A web version of the collage can be found at http://web.mit.edu/karen_v/www/www/internetart/

InterNETart through the window of the North-American Museum

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
DIA														
GUGGENHEIM														
MoMA														
SFMoMA														
WHITNEY														
WALKER														
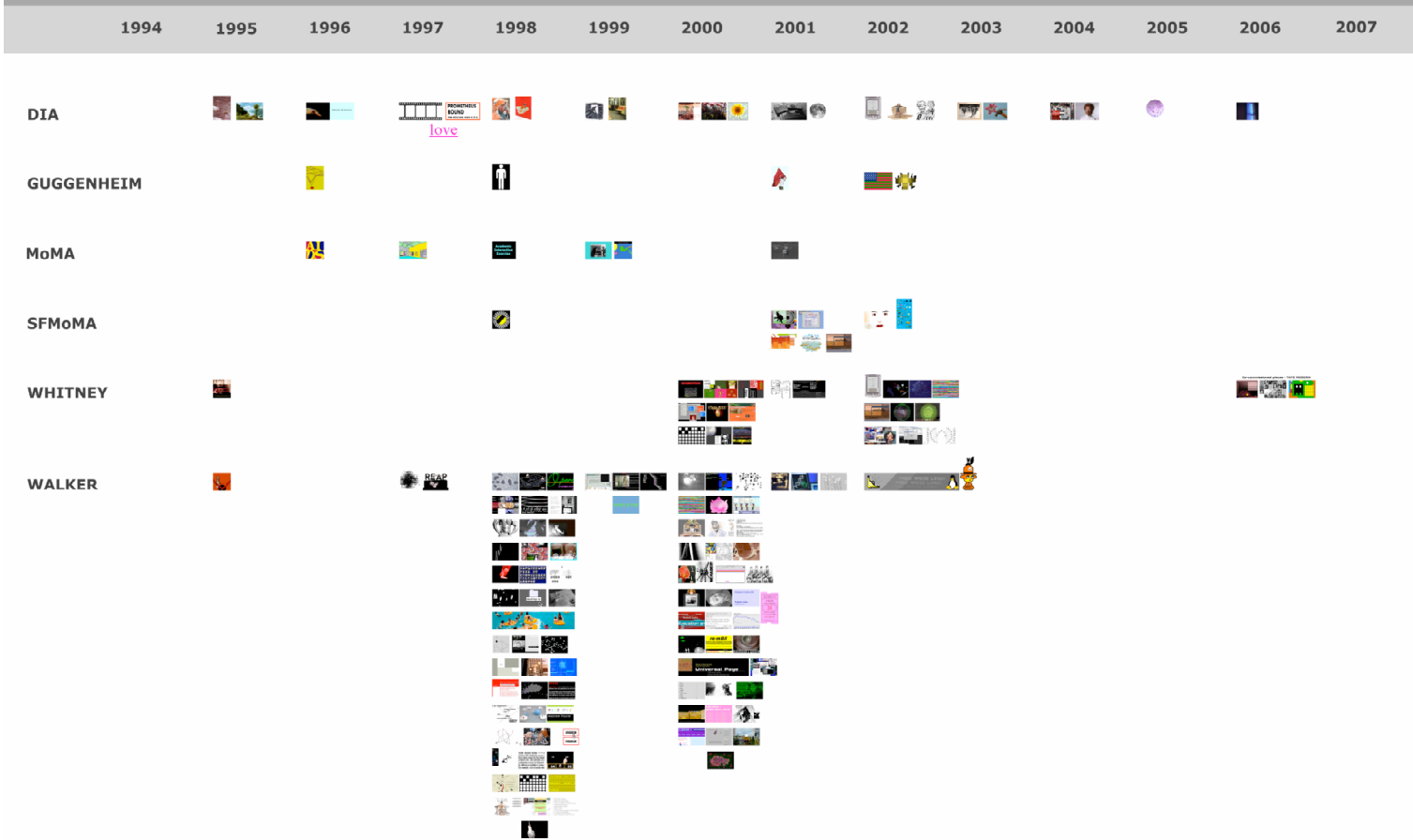
This wave, as visualized in the collage, has been noted by a number of key players in the field. While a number of factors can account for this fluctuating engagement, it must be clear that one cannot point towards artist production. Over the past decade, only more artists have been interested and engaged with practices of Internet art:

> I think [the production of Internet art] has been increasing pretty steadily. (…). If you look at who was doing this art twelve or thirteen years ago and who is doing things now, it has just exploded.[145]

Market driven factors of supply (artist-side) and demand (museum side) on this micro-economic level thus do not seem to account for the trend as visualized in the collage. What then can account for it? Rachel Greene, Dirk De Wit, as well as Lauren Cornell have in their writings as well as in their interviews referred to the dot.com boom and bust to explain American museum's fluctuating engagement with Internet art. Dirk De Wit, director of the online platform 'Initiatief Beeldende Kunst'[146] (IBK):

> Europeans who are skeptical about new media art and Internet art say: 'you see, it's just a hype, it'll go away, because in the US, they fired everyone [referring to the dismissal of Steve Dietz and five other members of the new media art department at the Walker Art Center in 2003].' But that is a misunderstanding, because in America, all American museums incorporated Internet art at the end of the 1990s, because they thought that it would yield a lot of sponsoring. All these new companies of the dot.com boom would find it wonderful. But with the crash, they all avoided Internet art; they didn't want to be connected with something that had crashed.[147]

This statement speaks as much to what characterized North American museum's engagement with Internet art in the early 1990s as it does about it abandoning it afterwards. In addition, it hints at why the Flemish museums have been very reluctant to include new media art until this very day. However, their reluctance to "just take the plunge" and insistence on a "steady, slow, sensible and reasonable approach" does not match up with the rapid pace at which new media art is changing. As Ippolito says: "While it is a nice countermeasure to the frenetic always hunting behind the ever

[145] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.
[146] "Initiative Visual Art"
[147] Verschooren, K. (July 12th, 2006). *Interview with Dirk De Wit.* Gent.

changing, it is not going to capture this stuff."[148] And indeed, North American museums or rather individuals within those institutions took the opposite strategy: The 'you kind of had to jump' philosophy characterized much of their involvement in the late 1990s and the endeavour was, as explained above, one of individual engagement with curatorial projects around new media art, largely at the fringes of their host institutions. Looking back, Christiane Paul reflects:

> Retrospectively I think it was a mistake that museums jumped on it so quickly around 2000 and the turn of the century, because they had no idea what they were getting into. I know that organizing a show like *Datadynamics* later, would have been almost impossible because at that point they understood what was entailed, how difficult it was, what all the problems with reception were, etc. So it probably would have been better, retrospectively, to take it slower, but then to sustain it more, because as you can see, a lot of it collapsed.[149]

Indeed, in the aftermath of the dot.com crash, museums abruptly stopped their dot.com activities. Institutional museum support structures for Internet art had been rare all over and where they had just surfaced, their words now seem cynical compared to their actions in the first years of the 21st century.[150] In short, "the early craze around the first wave of Net art faded around the same time as the dot-com era busted."[151] However, the effect of the dot.com crash played out in a much more indirect way than one would expect. Yes, North American museums had approached the tech industry for support and sponsorship of Internet art productions and exhibitions, but contrary to the expectations, interest stayed out.[152] As such, the dot.com bust did not dry out the tap of financial support because the resources had never come from that corner. Rather, the dot.com bust played out on a much more psychological level. Christiane Paul elaborates:

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[148] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Jon Ippolito.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[149] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.

[150] Remember The Guggenheim positioning itself as the leader in art and technology, 'bringing a particularly long-term vision to collecting online art (…).' Ippolito, J. (2002). Ten myths about Internet art. [Electronic Version] *Leonardo Vol 35 (5)*, 485-498.

[151] Laster, P. (2006). *Interview with Lauren Cornell.* Retrieved October 22, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://beta.artkrush.com/33189

[152] There were a number of incidences in which companies would ask artists to provide content for their software architectures, but apart from these few incidences, no major sponsorship of new media art by the new media industry took place, as Christiane Paul recalls.

I think it was much more a general psychological thing: 'Oh, here is this technology thing and it is all hype and just a bubble after all, there is nothing to it' and I think that perception reflected a bit on art using technologies.[153]

The impact of net based activity all of a sudden seemed immensely reduced, it was not going to change the world as drastically as thought before, it was not going to be the new photography, the new video, the new medium. Any art form relying on the medium was bound to become unimportant. As such, what the dot.com bust brought about in the museums was a fundamental doubt about the validity of an art form within that medium. In addition, one must note that the dot.com crash could have only had this impact on curatorial activities within new media art, because the latter were at the time still largely one-man or one-woman shows, without larger infrastructures supporting them. It was the voice of this one man or one woman within the institution, against the worldwide collapse 'proving' that after all, the Internet was just a fluke. As such, it was not just the external macro-economic factor, but rather the former in combination with the psychological impact and the internal political situation that can illuminate much of the trend as visualized in the collage.

Overall, one can say that Internet art producers and the traditional museum for contemporary art have in the past proven not to be on the same page. Rachel Greene formulates it clearly: "like the great works of art that decorated public areas and buildings in pre-nineteenth-century cultures, Internet art resides in a largely open zone – cyberspace – manifesting itself on computer desktops anywhere in the world but rarely in museum halls and white cube galleries, where the past two centuries have suggested we look for art."[154] However, does this mean that we can call the traditional institution for contemporary art's engagement with Internet art 'marginal'? When we look at the early histories of the inclusion of photography, film and video as an art form in the museum space, it seems that the Internet art as an artistic practice has found acknowledgement and respect form the traditional institutions in a very short period of time. Photography, as an art form for one only infiltrated the museum space some eighty years after the medium's

[153] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.
[154] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art.* New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., p.8.

inception. Video art only really gained the rights to exclusive shows in the majority of museum on the North American and West-European continent in the 1980s and it took another decade for museums for modern and contemporary art to put video art on the same level of artistic value as painting, sculpture and photography. Tate's Head of Digital Programmes, Jemima Rellie puts things in perspective:

> What it really requires in order to take it [Internet art's inclusion in the museum space] forward is the acquisition of one of these pieces by Tate: then the preservation policy would need to be written. And I am hopeful that that will happen in the not too distant future, baring in mind that Tate only established its acquisition policy for film, photography and video since I joined. I forget whether it was 2002 or 2001, but we used not to have a policy for that, so it is not too surprising that we haven't yet a policy for Internet art. At the end of the day, we are a museum and although we are certainly one of the most innovative of modern and contemporary art museums in the world, we are still actually pretty conservative.[155]

That said, and even though inclusion of Internet art practices has happened fairly quickly, for those inside and outside of the museum, convinced of the artistic and aesthetic value of Internet art, the *mode* of engagement of the traditional institution can still be called marginal. Internet art did find its way into the museum space, but on the fringes; presented in lectures and symposia, showcased in events, presented through commission series, but rarely acquired and incorporated into the collections and rarely presented in the museum spaces. Explanations are numerous and relate both to the specific challenges Internet art poses on museum practices, as well as the pressure large museum institutions experience in their role as voices of art form authorization within society. As MoMA's Media Art Curator Barbara London puts it:

> MoMA is a big institution. It moves slow – even though this is improving –
> as it is always being watched. It is a big responsibility to take on new
> things.[156]

Besides this general resilience to excursions into new and unknown art form territories – and the inherent risks in case it backfires – Internet art additionally challenges the

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[155] Verschooren, K. (April 10, 2007). *Interview with Jemima Rellie.* Telephone conversation.
[156] Verschooren, K. (March 28, 2007). *Interview with Barbara London.* Telephone conversation.

traditional institution's modes and practices in a number of specific areas. Steve Dietz indicates issues related to infrastructure and the lack of a general policy concerning questions of ownership, copyright and leasing of Internet art on the one hand, and responsibility for what is on display on the other.[157] Sarah Cook points towards the lack of a shared language or vocabulary of new media art and its categories and the changing role of the curator.[158] Natalie Bookchin adds the problems related to the economic value of Internet art, as it is always available and accessible anywhere with a net connection and in addition, cannot be depleted.[159] Finally, unanswered questions relating to conservation and display add to the problematic position of Internet art in the physical gallery space. A number of these barriers have already been hinted at in the paragraphs above and will be discussed throughout the following chapters. Key discourses dealing with aesthetics, economics and exhibition methodologies, will be tackled to a greater extent in chapters three, four and five, where historical references will clarify how similar problems with 'old new media' art forms like photography and video art, but also installation art and performance were handled.

Suffice to say for now that over the course of the past century, new media art forms have never stopped surfacing, and what is more, have often made it into the gallery space, in spite of all the hurdles they presented to the museum practices of their day. Yet, not all technological innovations developed into accepted new art forms; the stereoscopic and holographic imagery for instance, never succeeded in attaining an art status. The degree to which a new art form is able to infiltrate into the traditional art world and its venues strongly depends on the degree to which an adequate organizational support system is developed. As Becker explains:

> The history of art deals with innovators and innovations that won organizational victories, succeeding in creating around themselves the apparatus of an art world, mobilizing enough people to cooperate in regular

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[157] Dietz, S. (2003). Interfacing the digital. *Museums and the Web03 Papers.* Retrieved November 17, 2005, from http://www.archimuse.com/mw2003/papers/dietz/dietz.html

[158] Cook, S. (2006). Context-specific curating on the web (CSCW?). In T.Corby (Ed.) *Network Art: Practices and Positions (Innovations in Art and Design)*. New York: Routledge.

[159] Bookchin, N. (2006). Grave digging and net art: a proposal for the future. In T. Corby (Ed.) *Network Art: Practices and Positions (Innovations in Art and Design)*. New York: Routledge.

ways that sustained and furthered their idea. Only changes that succeed in capturing existing cooperative networks or developing new ones survive.[160]

As explained above, the extent to which Internet art as a novel art form succeeded in capturing existing cooperative networks – although impressive in comparison to the early years of photography and video art - can still be called marginal from an Internet art community perspective. Then which new cooperative networks were developed? Which alternative settings allowed for the growth and development of the art form over the past thirteen years, and what are their advantages and disadvantages. This and other questions will be discussed in chapter two.

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[160] Becker, H.S. (1982). *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 301

Chapter 2. The relation in context

> The effort to validate digital art deserves praise, and the speed with which new media have been confirmed is amazing. (…) However, the very way that art becomes art history may be entirely inappropriate in this case. Rather than putting digital art into an institutional box, maybe the institution should re-evaluate its own operating system.
> Barbara Pollack[161]

In the very first pages of this text, I defined the Internet and its creative proceedings as unruly objects, not easy to pinpoint, not easy to confine, and as such difficult to deal with from a museal perspective. Indeed, Internet art's ubiquitous, distributed and decentralized nature seems to be diametrically opposed to practices of selection and isolation that dominate art museum practices. As such, it is not hard to understand Internet art's troublesome relation to the traditional institution for contemporary art. As Becker says:

> When artists make what existing institutions cannot assimilate, whether the limits be physical or conventional, their works are not exhibited or performed. That is not because the managers of those organizations are conservative fuddy-duddies, either, but because their organizations are equipped to handle standard formats and their resources will not permit the substantial expenditures required to accommodate non-standard items, or to sustain the losses involved in presenting work audiences will not support.[162]

That said though, it must be noticed that even with marginal attention from the museum in the past thirteen years, Internet art has managed to survive and I would say even blossom. Indeed, largely deprived of traditional distribution channels (art galleries, dealers and museums), Internet artists have found alternative models of production and distribution, the necessary organizational support systems that allow for their creative practice to grow from the practice of a couple mavericks to an Internet art world in development. One of the settings in which Internet art has found support is the academic

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[161] Pollack, B. (September 2001). Back to the future with ' Bitstreams' [Electronic version]. *Art in America Vol 89 (9),* 61-63.
    Barbara Pollack is a New York City-based photographer and arts journalist.
[162] Becker, H.S. (1982). *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press, p.28

institution, but the most logical space in which it has survived and grown is on the Internet itself and within its networked communities. A number of email lists have documented Internet artist's activities, even more online-art exhibitions were organized by Internet artists themselves and Internet art sites such as Turbulence have commissioned online artworks for over a decade. A third venue that has paid attention to Internet art is the new media art center. As Freeland notices in her 2001 publication *But is it art?*, minority groups of all kinds have begun to create art institutions of their own. Whereas she focuses in her fifth chapter on women – "not a minority in the population, but a definite minority in standard histories of art"[163], I would turn attention to new media artists and Internet artists, not a minority in the contemporary art world, but a definite minority in the traditional institution for contemporary art and contemporary art histories. The most famous of these new media art centers, is the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) in Karlsruhe, Germany. Howard Becker states that:

> By using other than the conventional means of distribution or no channel of distribution at all, artists suffer some disadvantages, and their work takes a different form than it might have if regular distribution had been available.[164]

What disadvantages do these alternative settings then entail? How well have they been able to take on museal functions of public outreach, education, documentation, exhibiting and preservation? What are the advantages of these alternative settings in comparison to the traditional institution for contemporary art and how do they behave vis-à-vis each other? Let's take a look at what academic institutions, the Internet and its networked communities, and new media art centers have been able to do and continue to do for the development of an Internet art world.

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[163] Freeland, C. (2002). *But is it art?* Oxford: University Press, p.122.
[164] Becker, H.S. (1982). *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 6

2.1. Academic institution

The academic institution's involvement in the development and evolution of Internet art focuses in the first place on the functions of documentation and study. Its products in the form of essays and books can help create an understanding of the art form within the broader public. It is in this context that we must understand Assistant Professor of Modern Culture and Media Studies at Brown University, Mark Tribe and BusinessWeek.com innovation and design writer, Reena Jana's latest work: *New Media Art*, published in 2006 by one of the largest coffee table art book companies Taschen. While criticized for its choices and incompleteness – hardly expectable from a 100p publication, – its value lies in the message it implicitly entails, as made explicit by art critic and curator, Domenico Quaranta:

> The best way to judge this book is to look not only at what it says, but also at what it is. It has been published by Taschen (…) as part of a series of books on the greatest art movements of the 20th century. It is for the public and for the contemporary art system, not (only) for the media art practitioners. It has a few things to say, and it says them clearly and loudly:
> - New Media Art exists even if you don't find it in Art Basel anymore,
> - New Media Art is one of the most important artistic phenomena of the 20th century
> - New Media Art is interesting, difficult to sell, but sellable, difficult to collect, but collectable, difficult to show, but show-able.
> In this way, this book can be a good bridge between new media art and the contemporary art system. It is not just a theory, but also a cultural strategy.[165]

In the establishment of an art world, the products of academic endeavors – whether in its academic form, or popularized in large coffee table art books - can thus play an important role in communicating an understanding of the art form. It is clear that in its own right, academia can perform the museum's functions of study and documentation and can reach a wide audience with its popularized publications.

In addition, academic art institutions are more successful in the function of education than the traditional museum for contemporary art; they can train new media and Internet

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[165] Quaranta, D. (November 6, 2006). *Response to the CRUMB emaillist thread: The Last Avant-Garde. Interview with Mark Tribe and Reena Jana.* Retrieved November 7, 2006, from inbox.

artists. Indeed, whereas training of artists was one explicit goal of the public museums as they emerged in the late 18th and early 19th century, artists are now encouraged to seek their education in BFA and MFA programs. Although, as stated in chapter one, the number of education programs in digital art and new media is rising[166], new media artists still have to search carefully. BFA and MFA programs in new media art are still limited and the number of new media art courses in the curriculum is scarce. However, an increasing amount of new media artists are trained outside Fine Arts programs; they are majors or minors, masters or professors in computer science or engineering. In that regard, we might understand the statement of Jon Maeda, visual artist, computer scientist, Professor of Media Arts and Sciences and Director of the Physical Language Workshop at MIT's MediaLab:

> I used to believe that some needs might be better served elsewhere. Now, however, I feel differently. Recent events have led me to strongly believe that MIT has the potential to rise as one of the most important art schools in the world. All naysayers beware.[167]

Also on the level of presenting, academia seems a fruitful or at least more inviting setting for new media artists. Conferences allow students and professors alike to not only lay out their theories but often host workshops, presentations and performances. In addition, university museums seem to more readily welcome research oriented, process based artwork, and lots of new media art and Internet art fall into this category. Remember Steve Dietz's words, mentioned in chapter one, but worth repeating:

> Two of the earliest pioneers, it is interesting to note, are both university museums with a strong connection to photography and to artist-run programming. The California Museum of Photography at UC Riverside has been presenting Web-specific artist projects as well as encouraging installation exhibitions that have significant Web components for several years. (…). @art, one of whose founders, Joseph Squier, is a photographer, is an electronic art gallery affiliated with the School of Art and Design, the

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[166] For an extensive list compiled through the list of the Institute for Distributed Creativity (IDC), moderated by Trebor Scholz, visit: http://www.collectivate.net/journalisms/2006/12/16/a-survey-of-new-media-programs.html and also John Hopkins has compiled a nice collection on his website: http://www.neoscenes.net/links/bookmarks.php [March 24, 2007].

[167] Maeda, J. (2004). *Creative Code: Aesthetics and Computation*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 209.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. @art's projects include works
by Peter Campus, Carol Flax, Barbara DeGenevieve, and others.[168]

However, it is on the level of preservation and archiving that academia does not have the resources to take on responsibility in the same way that a traditional museum for contemporary art ought to do. Academics study, document and write about Internet art, nourish the skills of future Internet artists and allow for settings in which their work can be shown, but the institution does not take further care of the projects its pupils create. It is in the care-taking department academia is indebted to the traditional museum space. In addition, even though popularized academic publications in theory are accessible to everyone, the sale numbers indicate a limited reach within the public. Academia indeed lacks the direct impact a museum for contemporary art can have on a larger public.

The academic institution, as an organizational support system for the development of Internet art as an art world, is of great importance. Its potential to educate digital artists, critics and writers, as well as its encouragement of free exploration is indispensable. Yet, on its own, it cannot encompass all functions performed by the traditional museum for contemporary art, and its power to fully develop Internet art practices into an art world is limited. A second, more obvious venue in which Internet art practitioners have found a base is of course the Internet and its networked communities.

2.2. The Internet and networked communities

In their 2006 publication: *At the Edge of Art*, Jon Ippolito and Joline Blais argue: "A decade ago, the idea that art could flourish outside the art world's protective walls seemed a utopian fantasy. But now, such a circulatory system – the Internet – exists, and art is swimming through this bloodstream unimpeded."[169] Indeed, why can't the Internet, as a host of the Internet artwork, perform all the functions the museum for contemporary

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[168] Dietz, S. (1998). Curating (on) the web. *Museums and the Web98 Papers*. Retrieved November 17, 2005, from http://www.archimuse.com/mw98/papers/dietz/dietz_curatingtheweb.html
[169] Blais, J. & Ippolito, J. (2006). *At the edge of art*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 11.

art performs? This statement seems attractive, yet it misinterprets the meaning of host for both sides. The Internet is not just hosting Internet art, it is an integral part of Internet art, which exists between encoded algorithms and linked servers. Internet is indeed at the same time Internet art's tool as it is its medium, a notion that has been emphasized most recently by Laura Costello in her Master thesis *Internet art in Museum Displays* for the Art History Department at Tufts University.[170] However, the Internet only carries out a limited number of functions the museum performs as a 'host' for its collection, the most visible one being the exhibition. Granted, the Internet as an exhibition space works better for Internet art than for any other art form: Internet art is the only art form that is 'as good online' as it is in the physical gallery space; the means to create Internet art and the medium to exhibit it are intimately linked. In contrast, other forms of art, when put online in a virtual museum space for instance, go through a process of transformation (pictures are taken from the artifact and put online, a film is digitized, a video-installation loses its spatial features, etcetera). However, in providing an outlet for Internet art, these online exhibitions have not succeeded in making the role of offline exhibiting obsolete. On the contrary:

> While in theory this development has the potential to affect the relationships between cities and the galleries that inhabit them, so far the impact on offline art spaces has been limited. Instead, a slew of net-based organizations and projects with missions to map online art have formed, enlarging the function of museums or galleries as filters and promoters of art.[171]

Rachel Greene thus indicates the utopia behind a statement such as "art is swimming through this bloodstream *unimpeded*,"[172] in which the notion *unimpeded* points to the author's belief in an open and unmonitored Internet space for Internet art (this in contrast to the museal practices of selection and categorization). Even if the Internet is truly an open place without barriers – a statement readily disputed – then the question arises of whether the art swimming around unimpeded would be recognized as art. The possibility of anyone buying some server space and uploading his/her project has only underlined

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[170] Costello, L. (2005). *Internet art in Museum Displays*. Massachusetts: Tufts University
[171] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., p.81.
[172] Blais, J. & Ippolito, J. (2006). *At the edge of art*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 11. (italics mine).

the need for institutional practices of selection and curation. Jon Ippolito also acknowledges this when mentioning problems of recognizability for art in the Internet age.[173] That said however, online exhibits have succeeded in presenting Internet art rather well. Yet, other functions of the museum seem to go beyond the capabilities of the Internet today, although attempts have been made and models are being suggested. In a recent interview for example, Jon Ippolito points towards the power of networked communities for documentation and preservation purposes:

> Look at early games. Those have been preserved not by museums, not by curators, but by game enthusiasts and no one gave them a huge grant. They are preserved because they have a fan base and some combination of geeks mod together an emulator. Now, we can't do that for digital arts. Why? We say because we don't have enough money. But isn't it also because we don't have a big enough fan base for works of the 1960s, 70s and 80s?[174]

Although it is valuable to look at the power of network communities for functions of documentation and preservation, its current precondition – the fanbase, one might assert seems problematic and too volatile to bear the responsibilities for something as important as preserving culture for future generations. Another initiative worth considering in terms of its preservation potential is Internet Archive, a non-profit organization founded "to build an Internet library, with the purpose of offering permanent access for researchers, historians, and scholars to historical collections that exist in digital format."[175] The organization has since 1996 consistently been collecting snapshots of the Internet, copying entire HTML pages. Although an amazing resource for looking at 'old' websites, its potential in terms of Internet art preservation is limited. DIA's IT developer and Internet art co-curator Sara Tucker explains:

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[173] Blais, J. & Ippolito, J. (2006). *At the edge of art*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 12.

[174] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Jon Ippolito.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[175] Internet Archive (2007). *About the Internet Archive.* Retrieved February 21, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.archive.org/about/about.php

It is not the best method of preservation because it is very HTML based. The project *Stadium*[176], for instance, was written with an application called Tango, which went out of existence in the year 2000 and now, once that server dies – for which I just had to buy a new fan – it would have to be reprogrammed from scratch entirely, that kind of thing wouldn't work here [archive.org].[177]

As technological knowledge among Internet artists increases, more and more are venturing beyond the use or appropriation of HTML language. As such, the relevance of Internet Archive for preservation is diminishing. Even those projects that solely make use of HTML language but allow for interaction such as Michael Samyn's *LOVE* piece (1997) break down as an attempt to inscribe you and your loved one's name into the piece results in a 'Not in Archive' message. In addition - and this idea can rightly be credited to the Variable Media Network (chapter one) – the focus in preservation should not 'merely' be on the product realized, but on the artist's intent. As Benjamin Weil put it:

You cannot really start thinking about conserving something, which is by nature instable and what never was really meant to be conserved to start with, if you don't address it from the standpoint of artistic intent. And this is beyond the scope of what is archive.org's mission.[178]

Internet art preservation does as such entail more than keeping the work alive, it means keeping the spirit of the work, the artist's intent, alive and this in turn requires more extensive documentation.

The Internet not only hosts a gathering of individuals and networked communities interested in new media arts and Internet art, it also hosts a number of non-profit organizations, such as Turbulence.org and Rhizome.org. Let me just elaborate a bit on both organizations. Rhizome.org was founded in 1966 as a platform for the global new media art community and initiated its relation with New York City in 1998, when it was relocated and incorporated as a non-profit organization. As mentioned before, Rhizome

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[176] Stadium (1995-1998). *Stadium@dia.* Retrieved April 12, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.stadiumweb.com/

[177] Verschooren, K. (February 15, 2007). *Interview with Sara Tucker*. New York.

[178] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil*. New York.

became an affiliate of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in September 2003. Its programs currently support the creation, presentation, discussion and preservation of contemporary art that uses new technologies in significant ways. Supported by a member base as well as a number of foundations which include the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Jerome Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts and the Verizon Foundation, its four head permanent staff and a group of editors offer the media arts community a number of mailing list services, online publications, a commissioning and exhibiting program, and a variety of resources.[179]
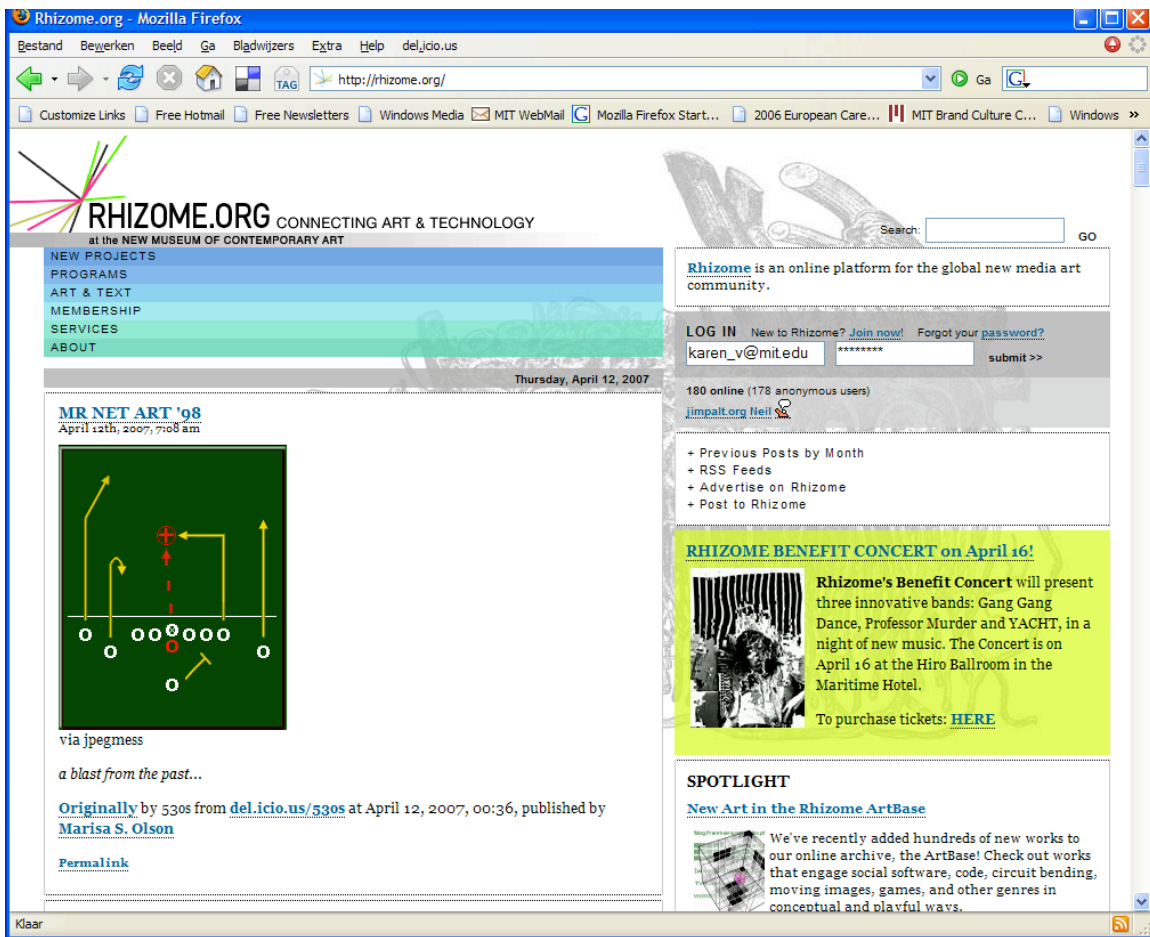
Rhizome.org[180]

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[179] Rhizome.org (2007). *General Information.* Retrieved April 1, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://rhizome.org/info/

[180] Rhizome.org (2007). *Rhizome.org. Connecting Art & Technology.* Screenshot retrieved April 12, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.rhizome.org

Turbulence.org is a project of New Radio and Performing Arts, Inc., which in turn was founded in New York City in 1981 to foster the development of new and experimental work for radio and sound arts. In 1996, this mission statement was expanded to include Internet art activities and the web site Turbulence was created. Through its activities of commissioning, exhibiting and archiving the new hybrid networked art forms that emerged, Turbulence.org is committed to staying at the forefront of the field of new media arts. Support for the site was provided by a number of foundations, including the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, the Jerome Foundation, the LEF Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, and The Greenwall Foundation.[181]

It is worth taking a look at their position as entities in between networked communities and new media art centers. Indeed, organizations such as Turbulence and Rhizome resemble new media art centers in their mission and institutional practices and show therefore the same strengths and weaknesses in performing functions of study, documentation, preservation, exhibition and public outreach as new media art centers. On the plus side, they have taken on a designated responsibility to document and archive works of new media art, they commission new art works and fund related projects, they curate art projects into online exhibitions, etc. On the minus side however, they also lack, just like the new media art centers, the art historical links to which new media art and Internet art often refer, as we will elaborate below. Different from the new media art centers, Turbulence and Rhizome are no brick-and-mortar institutions, although both have administrative offices. It is in this regard and more importantly in their emphasis on the community aspect that they resemble the online networked communities. And as if balancing this community focus with the institutional practices is not enough, organizations such as Turbulence and Rhizome clearly feel the need to link their practices to a third component: the traditional museum for contemporary art and the art world at large. Lauren Cornell, director of Rhizome, spoke about this bridging function:

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[181] Turbulence (2007). *Turbulence. Commissioning and supporting net art for 11 years: 1996-2007.* Retrieved April 1, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://turbulence.org/

We play the role of fostering this new kind of practice and also ushering it, letting people in the art world know: 'look, this is happening.'[182]

Even though these online not-for-profit organizations succeed, to a larger extent, in performing the functions of the traditional museum for contemporary art vis-à-vis new media art and Internet art, they still fail – as does the Internet at large and the networked communities - in their outreach to the public. This seems contradictory: most of the Internet artworks are freely available for anyone with an Internet connection, which makes it - at least in North America and West-Europe where a high percentage of the population has an Internet connection - the most democratic form of art. Why would people want to pay for transportation and entrance tickets to experience what they can experience from their homes and work offices? This argument appears to hold on first sight. But who will do a web search on Internet art if they never heard the term? As Barbara London, Associate Curator for the Department of Film and Video at MoMA put it: "if you have a website and you don't know how to put keywords in, how will someone find it? How are you going to find out about it if you don't do PR through emails? Sure it's out there but you've got to get the word out."[183] It is also in this way that Internet art communities, with or without an institutional component, have limited power; they can perform functions of documentation and study, but are performing them for a limited audience, those who are already engaged with the art form. This obviously may change in the future, with an increasing proportion of the population finding its way online, and Internet art communities expanding their promotion endeavors. However, today, it is in their outreach to a larger and more diversified audience that they simply do not have the same power as the museum institutions. Illustrative in this regard is again a comment from Lauren Cornell:

In a way, I do think it is important that museums show Internet art because when we had the Rhizome Artbase 101 show in the New Museum, it brought in a tremendous general audience who looked at this work and was incredibly excited about it and I think that that form of value is real and important.[184]

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[182] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Lauren Cornell.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[183] Cook, S. (March, 2001) *Multi-Multi-Media: an interview with Barbara London.* Retrieved December 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk/crumb/phase3/ilondon.html

[184] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Lauren Cornell.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Consistent documentation, study and preservation thus seem difficult in a technologically ever-changing environment as the Internet and its networked communities. Even institutionalized online not-for-profit organizations, although succeeding to a greater extent in performing these functions, are confronted with limited power in creating art historical tie-ins and public outreach, problems the new media art centers are facing as well.

That said however, the Internet and its networked communities also present the Internet artist with a number of possibilities and opportunities which none of the other settings can offer, for example the ability to exist outside of an institutional context. This desire lays at the foundations of Internet art in the mid 1990s, and is still present in a number of Internet artists today. Indeed, a number of art practices within the category of Internet art are not and will never be suited for an institutional setting, and are not intended as such. Lauren Cornell clarifies:

> For Rhizome Artbase 101, Rachel [Greene] and I selected 40 works from the archive and people from the community were malcontent that a selection process had been applied to an archive of Internet art. People thought that Internet art, or at least net.art – the classical 90s phenomenon – had a strong anti-institutional philosophy and I think people still really subscribe to that, they still think that this is the kind of art that cannot be in an institution.[185]

Rhizome, as described above finds itself caught between two worlds, the world of open networked communities and the world of closed institutions. Rhizome's online platform and the archive invite a networked community to gather in free and open discussion and foster community generated content. At the same time its institutional ties to the New Museum for Contemporary Art and its commission and exhibition activities links Rhizome to traditional art practices of selection and curation. Walking this line between community and institution and catering to two different publics results in real and contested tensions. Although these tensions exist, Dirk De Wit, director of the online

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[185] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Lauren Cornell.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.

platform "Initiatief Beeldende Kunst"[186] (IBK), believes that the desire for exclusion is largely a thing of the past:

> Internet art is born because artists wanted to be autonomous. The Internet is indeed a place for production and distribution. But, at the same time, one can see that a lot of artists suffer from it. One can make something public through the net, but at the same time, one misses the link with the visual arts. I think that the optimism about the autonomy is very relative. I noticed that no matter how autonomous they wish to present themselves, a lot of them want to be in the museum. This might have to do with prestige, but it has much more to do with connections. I think that a lot of artists want to be connected with their contemporaries who are doing other stuff and are included in the museum galleries. A written text or publication, also the Internet artist wants that.[187]

In the words of Internet artist Marisa Olson:

> I think most of Internet artists want to be exhibited, I think some hold on to that outsider status, but I think most of the artist would say, my work is no less important than work in a more traditional medium and they would want it to be shown.[188]

Then again, a number of the artists affiliated with Furtherfield.org, an "online platform for the creation, promotion, and criticism of adventurous digital/net artwork for public viewing, experience and interaction"[189], still express strong anti-institutional feelings. And although, Marc Garrett, co-founder and co-director of Furtherfield.org stated in a recent email interview that "Furtherfield is proud to be deeply involved in a project called NODE.London [Networked, Open, Distributed, Events. London, an open organization using consensus decision-making and pooling ideas, resources and even people with the aim to fortify existing media arts networks and to encourage production and experimentation, whilst assisting in the articulation of the practice to a wider audience.[190]] (…) [and] NODE.London has successfully made strong connections with institutions

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[186] "Initiative Visual Art"
[187] Verschooren, K. (July 12th, 2006). *Interview with Dirk De Wit*. Gent.
[188] Verschooren, K. (February 25th, 2006). *Interview with Marisa Olson*. CAA Conference, Boston.
[189] Furtherfield (2007). *About Furtherfield*. Retrieved April 11, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.furtherfield.org/about.php
[190] NODE.London (2006). *Home*. Retrieved April 11, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.nodel.org/

such as Tate Gallery, The Science Museum, ICA and many other venues across London and internationally,"[191] Furtherfield's mission statement on the website at the same time still expresses the desire to shy away from traditional art institutional settings. Indeed, the "About Furtherfield" section is concluded as follows: "Furtherfield now receives interim core funding from Arts Council of England (since April 2005) to consolidate and develop the sustainability of its activities. *We can make our own World …*"[192] One starts to wonder in what way the notions of 'institutional' and 'anti-institutional' are used in these debates. Does the anti-institutional ideology as used in these discourses pertain to any organizational affiliation or does it merely apply to the traditional art institution and its practices? If anything can be concluded from this, it must be that the tension between the desire to let Internet art practice roam around freely on the Internet and the desire for it to be recognized as art amongst other contemporary practices through linkage with traditional settings is real.

Besides this possibility for continued art practice outside of the realm of the art institutions, Internet artist Natalie Bookchin points out that, "the utopian aspect of net art still has an important role to play in forging new approaches and contexts for contemporary art production."[193] Indeed, the potential to explore new modes of practices is nowhere as great as within the Internet and its networked communities. The Massive Multiplayer Online games are in that sense just one example of the creation of an open architecture to realize hypothetical proposals, sketches and prototypes (not just for Internet art but for all art projects in general). That artists are making use of these virtual spaces is obvious when looking at the numerous virtual conferences and gatherings organized in the last couple of months. In addition, a multitude of art shows have been organized; *Exhibit A* – contemporary art within the Second Life online virtual world, a group show curated by Beavis Palowakski and Sugar Seville for the Odyssey simulator (March 8 – April 8, 2007) is just one of the most recent examples, and Ars Virtua – a

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[191] Garret, M. (April 1, 2007). *Answers to email-questionnaire*. Own correspondence.
[192] Furtherfield (2007). *About Furtherfield.* Retrieved April 11, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.furtherfield.org/about.php (italics mine).
[193] Corby, T. [Ed.]. (2006). *Network Art: Practices and Positions (Innovations in Art and Design).* New York: Routledge, p.6

nonprofit art space in Second Life – is currently exploring what a virtual artists residency would entail.[194]

Finally, the last group of venues proven to be crucial for the development of an Internet art world is the new media art center. Having paid attention to new media art and Internet art from its early days, these centers have over the course of the years built up expertise in terms of supporting, documenting, preserving and exhibiting the art forms. Probably the most famous center in this regard is the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM), but a number of others perform similar functions worldwide.

2.3. New media art centers

In terms of functions performed, new media art centers like the ZKM seem to offer a valid alternative to the traditional museum of contemporary art. They are more publicly accessible than academic institutions and more organized than an individual's home or office space computer with Internet access. In what follows, I will first focus on the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) - the oldest or at least most influential in the world of new media art – to then move to a number of its successors. We will look at the functions these centers perform vis-à-vis Internet art and end with a critical assessment of their limitations.

In 1997, the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM) opened its doors to the public. Although the founding of the Center for Art and Media-technology can be traced back to the year 1980, it took the project group, local government and architects Schweger & Partner seventeen more years to finalize their concepts and ideas. In the years before the opening, however, ZKM organized events such as ZKM in the Factory and the media art festival Multimediale with the Siemens Media Arts Award.

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[194] Moreno, A. (November 13, 2006). *Virtually Unheard of Opportunity*. Received in Inbox from Rhizome News mailing list on November 13, 2006.

Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie (ZKM)[195]

The ZKM building then is based on what the MIT Media Lab did not become. The conception of the Media Lab goes back to 1976, when MIT's Council for the Arts brought up the idea that all the different art-related activities should be brought together in one building: the "Arts and Media Technology Building." However, failing to consult the Center for Advanced Visual Studies (CAVS) in the design of the building caused the withdrawal of what was to be a major occupant of the new building. CAVS Director Otto Piene turned towards Germany and became one of the original advisers for what became the Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie.[196] The ZKM, under the direction of Prof. Peter Weibel since 1999, presents itself today as an institution combining production and research, exhibitions and events, coordination and documentation. Functions of research, documentation and production find their place in the Institute for Visual Media, the Institute for Music and Acoustics, the Institute for Media, Education, and Economics and the Filminstitute. Their focus on research, in combination with the artist-in-residence

[195] Karlsruhe: Bilderbogen (2004). *ZKM bei Tag.* Screenshot retrieved April 12, 2007, from the World Wide Web:
http://www1.karlsruhe.de/Magazin/Bilderbogen/Impressionen/slides/zkm%20bei%20tag.html
[196] Naimark, M. (1997). *Interval Trip Report. ZKM Opening, Karlsruhe.* Retrieved April 13, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.naimark.net/writing/trips/zkmopenstrip.html

programs, lean strongly towards what can be found in academic institutions. Finished projects are exhibited in spaces within the ZKM Museum for Contemporary Art and the ZKM Media Museum. Whereas the former largely presents work curated from private collections together with work from the ZKM Collection from 1960 onwards, the latter enjoys the title of the world's first museum entirely devoted to interactive art, with the largest collection of interactive artworks. The public can also enjoy ZKM's video and audio collection in the Media Library. The ZKM thus wishes to position itself as a "global mecca of media art."[197]

With regard to Internet art, ZKM's director Peter Weibel expressed his belief in the value of the art form in 1999 in the introduction text for *Net_Condition*, the first large show to explore the possibilities of presenting Internet art on-site: "At present, net art is the driving force, which is the most radical in transforming the closed system of the aesthetic object of modern art into the open system of post-modern (or second modern) fields of action."[198] The *Net_Condition* exhibition and its impact on European museums for contemporary art will be discussed to a greater extent in chapter five.

ZKM is not the only institution within the West-European continent that is dedicated to the documentation, study, preservation, and exhibiting of Internet art as a category of new media art. Indeed, a number of other new media art centers emerged within West-Europe, starting with Hull Time Based Arts (HTBA) in 1984 and The Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (FACT), then named Moviola, in late 1990s Liverpool.[199] Manchester is home to Cornerhouse since 1984[200] and London welcomed Backspace in 1996 but had to close it down again in 1999.[201] Since March 2007, London has a new

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[197] Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe (2006). *Institute und Abteilungen*. Retrieved November 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://on1.zkm.de/zkm/uebersicht

[198] Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe (2006). *Net_Condition*. Retrieved November 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://on1.zkm.de/netcondition/start/language/default_e

[199] Foundation for Art and Creative Technology (2006). *THIS IS FACT*. Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.fact.co.uk/?group=1

[200] Cornerhouse (2006). *Cornerhouse. Artfilmbooksfooddrink*. Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.cornerhouse.org/today/
Although more focused on contemporary visual art and film, rather than new media art.

[201] Backspace (1999). *Backspace.org*. Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://bak.spc.org/

exhibition space for artists' film, video and new media in the British Film Institute's Southbank.[202] Austria has housed Ars Electronica[203] Center since 1996, The Netherlands is home to V2_Institute for the Unstable Media[204] in Rotterdam since 1981 and the   Waag Society[205] in Amsterdam since 1994 and Spain opened   LABoral, a new exhibition center devoted to the intersection between art, science, technology and creative industries on April 2nd, 2007.[206] The North-American continent holds a number of new media art institutions worth mentioning as well: Eyebeam, NY[207] was founded in 1996 as an art and technology center, the 911 Media Arts Center[208] in Washington came into being in 1984 and Electronic Arts Intermix, NY has been working with new media art since 1971, to name just a few. All these institutions perform similar functions as the ZKM, though in a less elaborate way.

The activities of these organizations are generally supported by private, corporate as well as public funding institutions. Whereas on the West-European continent, the contributions from municipal, national and often European public support make up the largest portion of the funding pool, the institutions in North America depend to a larger extent on private and corporate contributions as well as a membership base.

The fact that these art and technology centers continue to pop up like mushrooms indicates the perceived necessity for a dedicated space for new media art practices, at a time that traditional art institutions are not yet fully attuned to incorporating these artistic practices. As these centers do seem to perform a large number of the functions fulfilled by the traditional museum for contemporary art, and are specifically geared towards new

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[202] BFI Southbank (2007). *About the Gallery.* Retrieved April 1, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.bfi.org.uk/whatson/southbank/gallery/about

[203] Ars Electronica (2006). *Welcome to Ars Electronica.* Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.aec.at/en/

[204] V2 (2006). *V2.* Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.v2.nl/

[205] Waag Society (2006). *Waag Society.* Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.waag.org/

[206] Amado, M. (March 30, 2007). *An Art Lab Grows in Spain.* Received in Inbox from Rhizome News mailinglist on March 30, 2007.

[207] Eyebeam (2006) *Eyebeam.* Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.eyebeam.org/

[208] 911 Media Arts Center (2006). *911 Media Arts Center.* Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.911media.org/

media, they might be a more appropriate spot for Internet art. And indeed, their existence is applauded by every player in the Internet art field. However, some voices fear the threat of ghettoization. Steve Dietz:

> On the one hand, it can be valuable to provide a focus on a particular set of practices, whether they are photography or performance or digital art. It is easier in such focused contexts to meaningfully differentiate between, say, documentary, fashion, abstract, and conceptual photography, each of which has its own distinct – but intermingled – histories, methods, presentational contexts, etc. At the same time, it doesn't make sense to completely divorce photography from the visual arts; to not include it in a thematic show, whether about modernist art in America or America in the modern age.[209]

Although the ZKM encompasses a Museum for Contemporary art and a Media Museum, precisely the separation of both buildings illustrates this critique. Critics from this side suggest that incorporation of Internet art into the traditional museum space can prevent this emerging danger.

In conclusion, we can note that the new media art centers definitely come the closest to providing all functions of the traditional museum for contemporary art, and thus can function as a source of inspiration and information to those traditional art institutions looking for modes and practices of exhibiting new media art. However, their status as great collaborative partners does not mean that traditional institutions have taken this opportunity. Consequently, new media art center's close-to-isolated focus on new media art has rather reinforced the already existing and very present divide between the new media art world and the art world at large. As such, their presence stimulates the existence of a new media art history alongside the Jansen art history, rather than a rewriting of the latter with inclusion of art practices making use of emerging technologies.

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[209] Dietz, S. (2003). Interfacing the digital. *Museums and the Web 03 Papers.* Retrieved November 17, 2005, from http://www.archimuse.com/mw2003/papers/dietz/dietz.html

2.4. Conclusion

Each distribution channel has particular characteristics and offers distinctive qualities to Internet art practices and practitioners. With the investigation of the relation between the traditional institution for contemporary art and Internet art on the table, one must not forget, in the words of co-founder and co-director of Furtherfield.org, Marc Garret:

> the role played by important, culturally dynamic, passionate groups out there who have been actively promoting this emerging field of Media Art practice, supporting research and development of new processes and making the work accessible to a wider public for a while now.[210]

Indeed, these alternative venues in academics, the Internet and new media art centers have brought Internet art where it stands now, beyond a mere innovation, but not yet incorporated in the art world at large. They have over the past thirteen years developed key components of definition and discourse, a series of reputed Internet artists and Internet artworks, a body of criticism, etc. They continue to play an important role in the development of the Internet art world, and manage increasingly to instigate collaboration with the traditional art institutions, which offer the Internet artists a set of services not always readily available through the alternative channels.

Having contextualized the relation between Internet art and the traditional institution for contemporary art, let us move back to the discussion of the relation itself, which is characterized by a number of discourses, ranging from debates about the aesthetic and economic value of the art form, to practical issues in terms of exhibition methodologies and preservation strategies. These discourses will be the focus of the following chapters.

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[210] Garret, M. (April 1, 2007). *Answers to email-questionnaire*. Own correspondence.

Chapter 3. Explicit Aesthetic system for Internet art

> … the art form still requires a lot of understanding and that is one of the big obstacles. We tend to forget that we have looked at paintings for centuries, so everybody has kind of a basic knowledge of what to make of the medium of painting and 'read' it, and that is not the case for net art unfortunately. So there is still a lot of work to do on that front, at least within a traditional art context.
> Christiane Paul[211]

One of the main difficulties members of the new media art world, be they artists or curators, experience, is the lack of an understanding of the art form from the public, in which public refers to the average man in the street, but also museum and gallery directors and the traditional art world at large. This is not surprising, nor is it a hopeless situation. Art history is bound with examples of art forms struggling to establish their aesthetic worth and communicating it to the public. One must only remember the difficulties photography, certain graphic arts like posters, and film and video experienced in their attempt to be recognized as art and included in the museum. Particularly illustrative and interesting in its comparison to the Internet, is the history of photography's inclusion in the museum.

When photographs entered the museum space, as soon as the inception of the medium in 1835, it was "either through the back door of documentation or into science museums."[212] This had everything to do with the way people understood photography. Indeed, the photograph was in first instance considered the product of an ever-improving technology and as such belonged in a science museum. In addition, in its potential for meticulous recording, it proved extremely useful for documentation purposes - especially in the late 1850s, when the process became instantaneous. As such, it found its place in archives, libraries and conservatories. With the exception of the South Kensington Museum (now

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[211] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation. Christiane Paul is the Adjunct Curator of New Media Arts at the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

[212] Lenman, R. [Ed.] (2005). *The Oxford Companion to the Photograph.* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 429

known under the name of the Victoria and Albert Museum) and Sir Henry Cole's interest in the aesthetic qualities of the new medium, the art-ness of photography was doubted and strongly debated, as Alan Trachtenberg suggests in his 1989 prologue of '*Reading American Photographs*': "The automatic, unflinching, and remorselessly unselective mirror-like character of the camera image seemed to sever the link to art, to set photography free from traditional practices of picturing – fatally so, it seemed to many skeptics and denigrators."[213] Indeed, the perceived objectivity of the mechanical process seemingly excluded any artistic engagement and as such precluded the possibility of being considered a creative practice. Only a few disagreed: "the common suffix 'type' signified that photographs were pictures impressed upon a surface, as in printing. Their difference is a difference of means, not substance – not an ontological but an instrumental difference."[214] Photography thus kept its status as scientific object and primarily documentary material until the 1890s, when the success of the art photography movement propelled the idea that photographs can reflect the personal vision of a creator. The burgeoning amateur photography movement, exemplified in the photographic societies emerging across Europe; the Photo-Club de Paris (1888), the Linked Ring in London (1891), das Kleeblatt in Vienna and numerous other ones in Hamburg, Munich and Brussels[215] thus were responsible for the growing demands for the inclusion of photographs in European art museums. In the US, it was Alfred Stieglitz, more than anyone else, who devoted his energy to ensuring that photography was recognized as its own art, like painting and sculpture. Having been editor of the magazine of Society of American Photographers between 1893 and 1896, vice president of the Camera Club and editor in chief of Camera Notes, and founder of The Photo Secession and editor of Camera Work in the early 20th century, he had to conclude that no matter what he did, establishing the artistic role of photography as part of the NY scene seemed difficult.[216] However, two decades later, he did succeed in encouraging museum support through a

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[213] Trachtenberg, A. (1989). *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans.* New York: Hill and Wang, pp.14-15.

[214] Trachtenberg, A. (1989). *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Matthew Brady to Walker Evans.* New York: Hill and Wang, pp.14-15.

[215] Govignon , B. (Ed.) (2004). *The Abrams Encyclopedia of Photography.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, p.54.

[216] Govignon , B. (Ed.) (2004). *The Abrams Encyclopedia of Photography.* New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc, p.55.

donation of hundreds of photographs to the Department of Prints of the New York Metropolitan Museum in 1928 and 1933. As such, through the efforts of key individuals, and the creation of organizational support structures (photographic societies and dedicated press) and their activities, photographs modestly began to gain access to the museum as an autonomous artistic medium.

This history of inclusion of a new medium seemed indeed to repeat itself in the late 20th century when computers became widely available and affordable. Just as photography had been understood to facilitate tasks of documentation and archiving for years, computers were at first deployed for their database functionalities. The Internet is the most recent example in this regard; widely welcomed for its capacity to present the museum to a growing public, but overall still shunned as a medium for artistic expression. Another resemblance must be pointed to in this regard: Just as photographs have been used to enhance the museum's corporate identity (printing on t-shirts, cups, etc.), the online presentation of the museum can be understood in the same way. The following quote from Philippe de Montebello, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art at the convocation of CAA's 1997 Annual Conference in New York, is just one example of how the combination of photography and the Internet is understood as *the* ultimate marketing tool for the museum in the 21st century:

> I am convinced that just as art books with handsome color plates encourage trips to the museum, so will the downloaded image; with this major difference: that the universe of people who are online, including educated people, statistically those with the greatest predisposition to visit art museums, is vast. Clearly this is the most compelling argument for museums to be on the Internet.[217]

With only occupying a position at the fringes, if at all, in today's museums with authorative voices in the field of contemporary art, it is clear that from a museum perspective, Internet is largely understood as a vehicle for everything but creative expression, as with photography for its first 80 years of inclusion in the museum space. However today, photography as an art form has been fully incorporated within the

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[217] De Montebello, P. (1997). Musing on Museums. *CAA News, Vol 22.*

mainstream museum spaces[218], and credit goes not only to the photography movement of the 1890s, but also to numerous pioneers and outstanding curators who took the effort to explicate the aesthetic value of the photographic medium. History indicates that indeed, defining and promulgating the 'art part' of a new practice is crucial for a successful inclusion in the art world at large.

In what follows, I will in a first movement attempt to explicate the general aesthetics at play within Internet art, or at least locate where one must aim one's attention in exploring the aesthetic value within Internet art. In a second movement, I take a step back and reconsider the value or the need of an explicit aesthetic system for Internet art. Suffice to say for now that explicating the aesthetic system at play in any new art form is vital for its development as an art world and its relation to the public and the traditional institution for contemporary art. The chapter will conclude with a comparison between the Internet art aesthetic and the aesthetic at play within artworks working with 'traditional' media, to pinpoint the challenges Internet art lays upon the traditional art world in this regard.

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[218] Photography's inclusion as an art form has not taken away its initial function of documentation. On the contrary, photographs are even more widely used to document the museum's collection, to perform research into the authenticity of art objects, to gloss up exhibition catalogues, to present the museum's activities and its collections within the space of the world wide web and – not to be forgotten – to contribute to the corporate identity of museums as postcards or printed on t-shirts, napkins, cups, etc.

3.1. The 'art' in Internet art

> The question is not so much whether they are Internet art, but whether they are art. What distinguishes their status as art at a certain point and this I think is a question that is actually part of the strength of Internet art. It is this space where this question kind of pops up and that is its force in a way, that's what makes it interesting.
> Charlie Gere[219]

Defining the aesthetic system at play within Internet art is not an easy endeavor and, whereas previous philosophies of art can be useful to other art forms, a general theory of the critique of Internet art still needs to be written. Although without a doubt interesting, the elaborate art theories - from David Hume and Immanuel Kant through Friedrich Nietzsche, John Dewey and Arthur Danto to Michel Foucault and Jean Baudrillard - dedicated to answering the question 'what is art?' will not be discussed in this text. It is indeed not the goal of this thesis to give an elaborate overview of their standpoints and, as Cynthia Freeland so rightly put it in her publication *But is it art?,* taking you through all the different art theories, one by one, would be as "tedious for me to write as for you to read."[220] I thus will not dive into the task of selecting art theories and submitting Internet art practices to their evaluation. Rather I will work the other way around, starting from Internet art practices and players, looking for what they say constitutes 'art' within their practices. This is not to say that Internet art has no ties to art history, but "as important as these historical connections are, net artists have also developed and created new methods for production, consumption and exchange. Not only do net art practices extend the arena, capability, and reach of artistic production, they have also offered ways to remix and revitalize categories often reified in the art world and beyond."[221]

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[219] Verschooren, K. (May 31st, 2006). *Interview with Charlie Gere.* London.
   Charlie Gere is currently Reader in New Media Research at the institute for Cultural Research,
   Lancaster University.
[220] Freeland, C. (2002). *But is it art?* Oxford: University Press, p.xvii.
[221] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., p. 31.

Internet artists and/or any of the participants within the Internet art world who have taken the time to write down their thoughts provide a primary source. Interesting to note is that within the Internet art world a large number of artists perform at the same time the roles of curators, critics and professors alike. This taking on of multiple roles is characteristic of any art world in its developmental stage.[222] Placed at the margins of the established art world, the practitioners of the emerging art form have not yet found a way to make their practice financially viable, which leads them to take on other positions. With regard to Internet art practices, the question arises whether Internet artists will ever make their practice economically viable. This and related questions will be addressed to a greater extent in the next chapter. Having pointed towards the historic commonality of the fact, Internet artist Mark Tribe suggest another, more Internet art specific explanation for the Internet artist's tendency to take on multiple roles:

> More than any other art discipline (painting, sculpture, video, performance, etc.), digital artists are writing out their poetics as part of their practice. They also go to more conferences, participate on more panels, and give more public demonstrations of their work than artists of any other discipline. (…) [This is] because they are part of this (…) internetworked intelligence that consists of all of the linked data being distributed in cyberspace at any given time, and that is powered by artistic and intellectual agents remixing the flow of contemporary thought. That is, they feel compelled to keep the network alive, and as such, will not easily drift into conventional roles like the ones we associate with artists as individual genius. (…) *they are signatories to a collaboratively generated network of linked data that is intimately integrated into their simultaneous and continuous online art performance, the one that happens in asynchronous real time.*[223]

Whatever the reason, one can say that within the art world today, Internet artists are probably more reflective and outspoken about their practice than any other kind of contemporary artist. Many develop their critical and rhetorical abilities in academia:

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[222] Video art pioneer David Hall for example participated in forming the Artist Placement Group with Jon Latham in 1966, was co-organizer of *The Video Show* (the first major international show of artist's video in the UK) at the Serpentine Gallery, London in 1975; and was co-curator of the first video installations exhibition at the Tate Gallery, London in 1976. At the same time, he engaged in teaching activities at numerous universities and created the first time-based art degree option with emphasis on video at Maidstone College of Art, Kent in 1972.
Hall, D. (2003). *David Hall*. Retrieved April 13, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.davidhallart.com/

[223] Amerika, M. (2006). Digital bop poetics. In T. Corby (Ed.), *Network Art: Practices and Positions (Innovations in Art and Design)*. (p. 131). New York: Routledge. (Italics mine).

Marisa Olson is finishing her PhD program at the University of Berkeley, Alexander Galloway – part of the Radical Software Group – is holding an Assistant Professorship in the Department of Culture and Communication at New York University, and Jon Ippolito is Assistant Professor of new media at the University of Maine, to name just a few. All of them create Internet art, and write extensively about their practice.

Before we look at different modes of the aesthetic over the course of the past thirteen years, it is important to note that, as in any other art form, the aesthetic qualities of Internet art are played out on two levels; an immediate sensory level and an indirect protocological level, in which the latter informs the former. Responding to the sensory stimuli an Internet artwork brings to one (and might I say these stimuli often go beyond the realm of the visual) can offer some aesthetic pleasure. However, an understanding of the material with which Internet art is created, the protocols, no doubt increases the participant's consciousness of the heuristic richness of the work. The degree of increase in aesthetic pleasure largely depends on the degree to which the Internet artwork reflects upon its materiality; its protocols. This classic avant-garde strategy is very apparent when looking at Internet art's early days or the so-called net.art period. As such a given work of jodi.org (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans), will be less aesthetically pleasing to those without any programming knowledge, since its visuals, although compelling, are not what the artwork is about.

Fortunately, for those without a computer science background, not all Internet art works rely heavily on a play with the *technological* protocols of the WWW. As Cory Arcangel put it: "It is important to know that every era of the web has an aesthetic." And he goes on:

> Now it's the web 2.0. Well, now it is a combination of web 2.0. and something, a year ago it would have been live journal, mood, sad and two or three years ago it was Flash, everything was Flash, flying around and then before that, it was the kind of dot.com thing and before that was like star under construction, etc.
> What will the next aesthetic be? I don't know, If I knew it, I would be a millionaire. Without a doubt, If I knew web 2.0. was coming three years

ago, I would have built Flick'r, but I think MySpace is going to have a handle on it for at least two or three years, because MySpace is *so* popular.[224]

Although a bit chaotic in his description of the different aesthetics at play within Internet art, Arcangel's assessment together with Marisa Olson's statement:

> Getting back to the aesthetics, I think right now it is more trend driven and I think a lot of people are very cynical about that. It is nostalgia-kind of driven as well, nostalgia for early Internet days, nostalgia for a certain generation, people of our age looking back on pop forms, because, I mean, Internet art is communication art about communication forms.[225]

and the phases discerned in the writings of Alexander Galloway[226] and Jon Ippolito[227], we can without a doubt conclude that different aesthetics were pushed to the forefront at different times and that the rapid pace in which the dominant Internet art aesthetic evolves is remarkable. In the early days, the days of net.art (1994-1997), named as such by Alex Galloway and Cory Arcangel among others, most Internet art played with the *technological* protocols of the Internet and one must add, most often took this play to be the subject of the Internet art piece itself. In a second phase, an engagement with *economic* protocols surfaced more explicitly; one could call it the corporate or commercial phase in Galloway's terms or the Flash phase in Arcangel's wordings. Today, emphasis has shifted towards a play with the *social-cultural* protocols that guide and structure Internet use. It is what Arcangel has called the Flickr', MySpace, FaceBook phase, what Olson points at when she says "internet art is communication art"[228] and what Ippolito forefronted as the aesthetics of relationship.

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[224] Verschooren, K. (March 11, 2006). *Interview with Cory Arcangel.* Eyebeam Ateliers, New York.

[225] Verschooren, K. (February 25, 2006) *Interview with Marisa Olsen.* CAA Conference, Boston, Massachusetts.

[226] Alexander Galloway comes to a two-part categorization in looking for an Internet art aesthetic: "Early Internet art – the highly conceptual phase known as net.art – is concerned primarily with the network, while later Internet art – what can be called the corporate or commercial phase – has been concerned primarily with software." (Galloway, A.R. (2004). *Protocol. How control exists after decentralization.* Cambridge, pp. 218-219)

[227] Jon Ippolito deliberately defines Internet art hinting towards the aesthetic underlying it: "Internet art is art which leverages the Internet to form new relationships among people or to expose hidden aspects of the Internet itself." (Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Jon Ippolito.* Cambridge, Massachusetts). The aesthetic thus becomes an aesthetic of relationship.

[228] Verschooren, K. (February 25, 2006) *Interview with Marisa Olsen.* CAA Conference, Boston, Massachusetts.

Let me illustrate the aesthetics at play within a number of Internet artworks. The discussed artworks reach over a number of different Internet art genres, without claiming to offer a complete overview of the forms Internet art can take.[229]

JODI's 1995 piece http://wwwwwwwww.jodi.org, referred to above, is one of these early Internet art pieces playing with the technological protocols structuring the web, and taking this play as its subject. Upon entering the piece, one sees a computer screen converted into a black background upon which flickering green symbols appear.

http://wwwwwwwww.jodi.org (1995) – JODI (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans)[230]

The work is completely illegible for the average computer user; nowhere it is indicated that the art 'image' is really hidden in the 'source code'. Indeed, 'source code' remains between parentheses, as I would argue that even this term is unfamiliar to the majority of today's Internet users.[231] Looking at the source code, one finds hidden behind its

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[229] For an anthology on Internet art forms, genres and themes, Rachel Greene's 2004 publication is recommended: Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art.* London: Thames & Hudson.

[230] JODI (1995). *wwwwwwwww.jodi.org.* Screenshot retrieved March 9, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://wwwwwwwww.jodi.org./

[231] The 'source code' button can be found when opening the category 'View' in the top bar of your browser window.

terrifying interface a number of images that Rachel Greene calls "scientific or astrological"[232] and that Adelle Caravanos, assistant editor of Science & the City, identifies as a diagram of a hydrogen bomb.[233]

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view-source: - Bron van: http://wwwwwwwww.jodi.org/ - Mozilla Firefox
Bestand  Bewerken  Beeld

<html><title> %Location | http://wwwwwwwww.jodi.org </title>

<BODY BGCOLOR="#000000"
TEXT="#00ff00" LINK="#00ff00" VLINK="#00ff00" ALINK="#ffffff">
<font size=5><CENTER><blink><b>
<A HREF="100cc/index.html">

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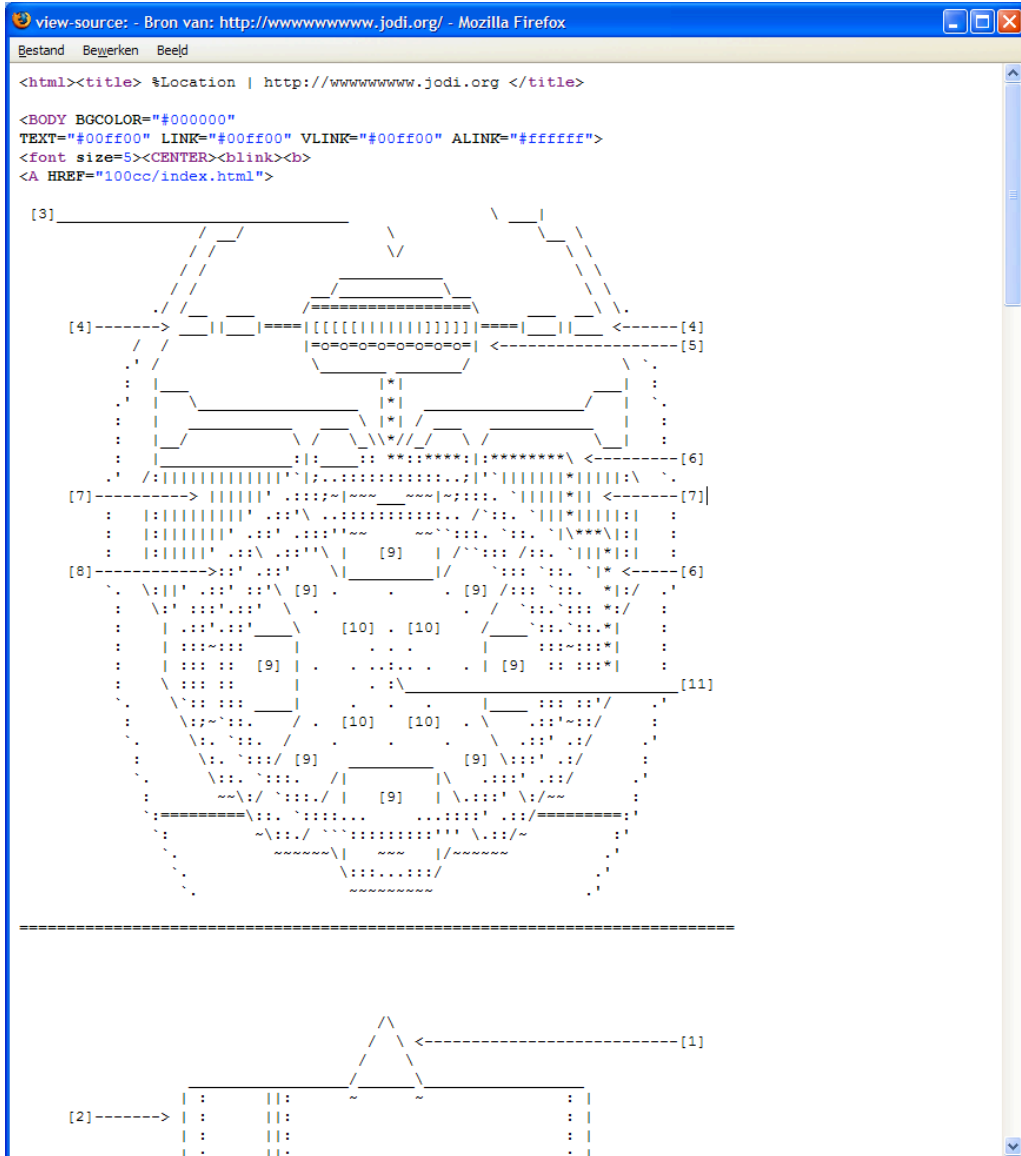
http://wwwwwwwww.jodi.org (1995) – JODI (Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans)[234]

It is in the interplay between the interface and what lies beneath, in the separation of the instructions (the HTML) from the completed task (the front page), that for me, as a non-

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[232] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art.* London: Thames & Hudson, p.40.

[233] Caravanos, A. (2006). *Artists of the World, Log On!.* Retrieved April 13, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.nyas.org/snc/update.asp?UpdateID=43#reporter

[234] JODI (1995). *wwwwwwwww.jodi.org.* Screenshot retrieved March 9, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://wwwwwwwww.jodi.org./

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computer scientist, with only a basic knowledge of its functioning, the aesthetics of this work plays out.

For those with a more elaborate knowledge, the same artwork's aesthetics goes beyond my 'simple' understanding. Talking about the work of jodi.org, Internet artist Cory Arcangel sees it as follows:

> I just remember clicking on it and in the end, all of a sudden it was like … the thing about it was that for the first time it felt like people were in my computer, do you know what I mean. I didn't even have a computer at that time, but still a desktop is something I am in control of right now. Somehow, the artist all of a sudden sat down in front of me and started mocking things up and it was this completely new way, it was totally new to me, you just lost control, and it was the closest experience I had ever had, and probably until this day, it's the closest an artist ever got to me personally. All of a sudden, they are right here, and I am trying to figure out, you know, stop… yeah, and that is what is great about Internet art, if you understand computers, which more and more people will, if you understand the language of it, people will start to understand that that's what is great about it, that's the thing, all of a sudden, these artists are sitting right next to them.[235]

It is thus clear that, depending on your knowledge of the system operations, a work like jodi.org's will have different meanings. What is certain is that without an awareness of the existence of the source code, or an understanding of the basic operations of website creation, it will be very hard to find and thus communicate *any* meaning or aesthetic value about this early net.art piece. Note again that this is nothing new: a Mondriaan, a Donald Judd or a Bruce Naumann will similarly lack meaningfulness to someone who does not have a basic understanding of painting, sculpture and video as a medium, and ideas of abstraction, minimalism, expressionism and conceptualization. With regard to Internet art however, the understanding of the basic operations of website creation might arguably be less a part of our common knowledge and are less readily communicated in art education contexts than the knowledge needed to be able to respond to abstract, minimal, expressionist or conceptual art in whichever other medium chosen.

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[235] Verschooren, K. (March 11, 2006). *Interview with Cory Arcangel.* Eyebeam Ateliers, New York.

A second example pointing towards the appropriation of a technological protocol is Vuc Cosic's *ASCII History of Moving Images* (1997 - …).[236] In his work, Cosic runs scenes from classical films through two coded players that convert the moving images into ASCII text and speech. While this is without a doubt intriguing as such, the work's full meaning relies on an understanding that ASCII (The American Standard Code for Information Interchange) is the standard computer code for representing English characters as numbers - with each letter assigned a number from 0 to 127 and that computers often use ASCII codes to represent text which makes it possible to transfer data from one computer to another. Cosic's most famous appropriation in the series is without a doubt his ASCII version of *Deep Throat*, in which he turns a legendary porn film into a large text file called *DeepASCII*.[237] Images can now literally be read as texts. A recent example in this genre, although probably more a joke, was James Moening's *Dead Ascii lambs on their way to heaven*.[238]
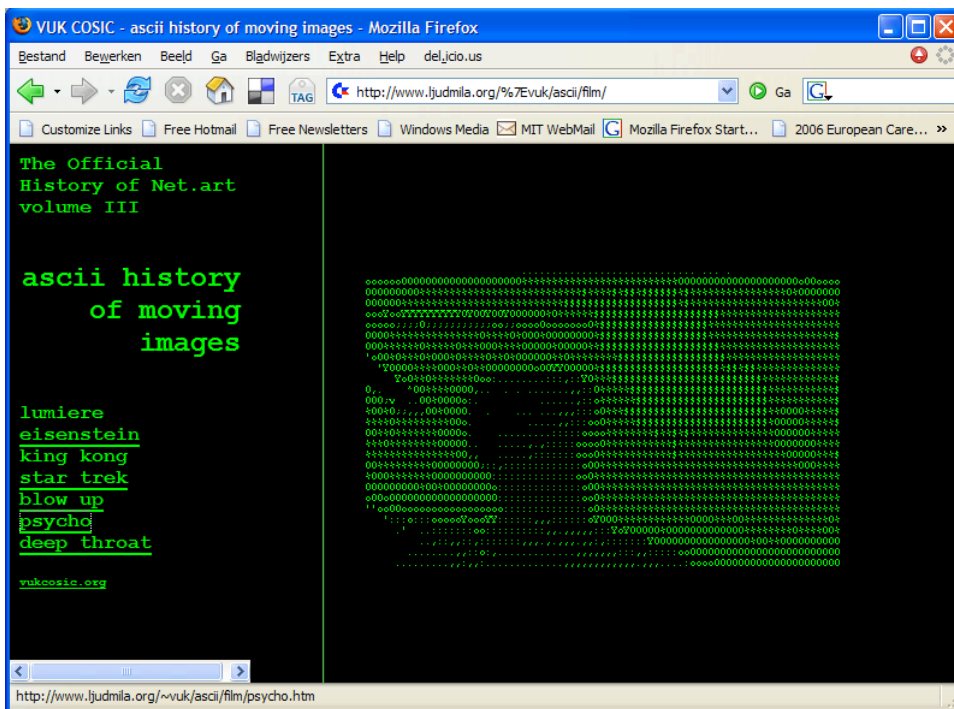
Vuc Cosic – Ascii history of moving images: Psycho[239]

[236] Cosic, V. (2007). *The official history of net.art. Volume III.* Retrieved March 8, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.ljudmila.org/%7Evuk/ascii/film/

[237] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., p. 88.

[238] The site can be found on http://one38.org

[239] Cosic, V. (2007). *The official history of net.art. Volume III.* Screenshot retrieved March 8, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.ljudmila.org/%7Evuk/ascii/film/

Around the turn of the century, Internet artworks foregrounding the technological elements of the World Wide Web gave way to Internet artworks addressing the *economic* protocols at play. These artworks deal in one way or another with the economic use of the Internet and often appropriate and remix an existing corporate site to parody the organization's mission and/or to send out a political message. Examples worth mentioning are amongst others Heath Bunting's American Express site, RTMark's projects, the Yes Men's WTO site and Kevin and Jennifer McCoy's – *Airworld*. Let's take a more elaborate look at the last one.

Upon entering the *Airworld*.net (1999) project, the web surfer is confronted with a seemingly standard commercial site. And this is what artists Jen and Kevin McCoy had intended: "The piece intentionally adopts a very designed look. For the non-art viewer who happens by, there will be little initially to suggest it is not a commercial site."[240]
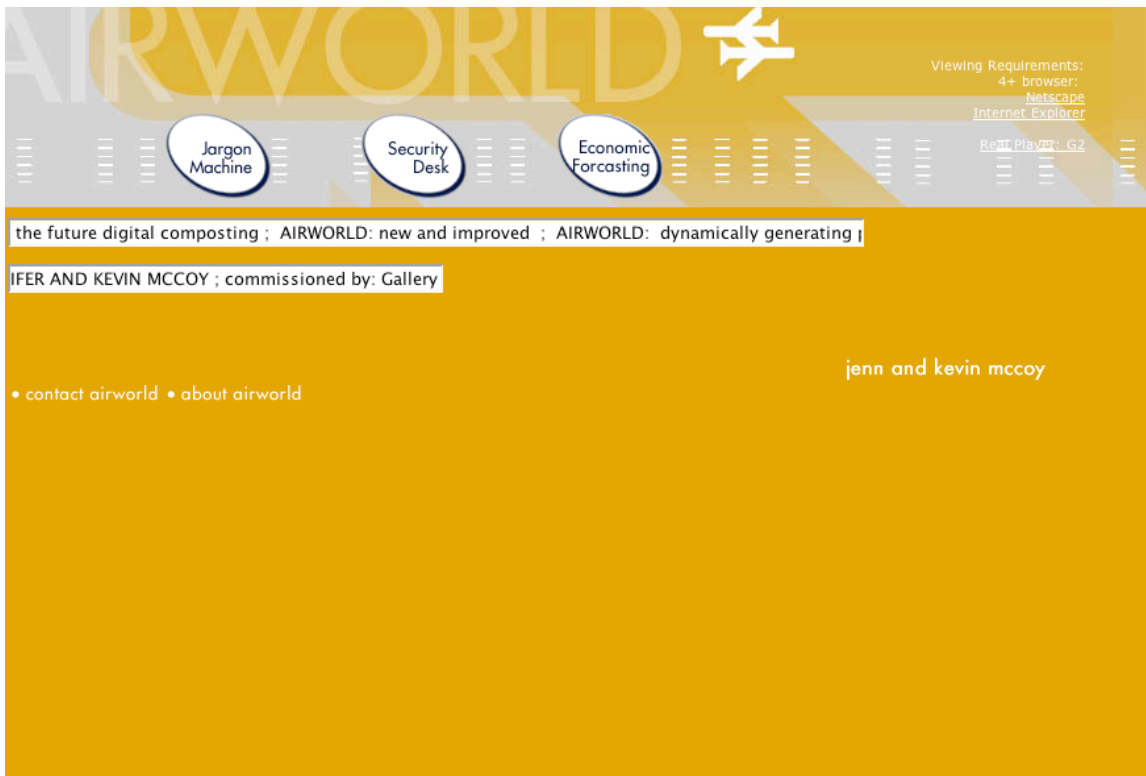
Airworld (1999) – Jen and Kevin McCoy[241]

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[240] Bosma, J. (1999). *Interview: Jennifer and Kevin McCoy.* Retrieved March 17, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.walkerart.org/archive/6/B373750F1934A3ED6169.htm

[241] McCoy, J. & McCoy, K. (1999). *Airworld.* Screenshot retrieved March 8, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.airworld.net

This is what the McCoys call part one of the project. It is the frame, the evocation of a corporate presence through language and graphic layout. However, what is most important in the eyes of the McCoys and what makes *Airworld* not a corporate site, but rather a meta-corporate site, are the texts/images/sounds that pass through that frame. Knowing how this content of the site is generated subsequently adds a whole other dimension to the project. Indeed, all content in the site derives from a database, which is fed by crawlers, looking for texts and images on the sites carrying the *Airworld* banner[242], and remixing them into random chunks of business lingo. As such, "the sites on which the *Airworld* ads appear serve both as promotional vehicles and as generators of raw data."[243] An automated voice, a text-to-speech conversion program, stoically reads the texts to the visitor. Felix Stalder concludes that: "What the project brings to the fore is the emergence of a commercial culture so homogenous, so interchangeable that we no longer know what is human and what is machine generated. It is the old dream of artificial intelligence, but upside down."[244] The point is that such interpretations could not have been generated through *Airworld* without any knowledge about how the artwork was created on a technological and socio-economic level.

In the early 21st century, a play with the *social and cultural* protocols that guide Internet use has been pushed to the forefront in projects such as Golan Levin's, Kamal Nigam's and Jonathan Feinberg's *The Dumpster*. The *Dumpster* is an interactive online visualization of American teenagers' romantic lives and break ups as reported by them on several blog sites.[245] Although definitely visually pleasing, it is crucial to understand that every dot refers to a 'real' blog posting and as such, all data visualized inside mirror the true blogging activities of young people worldwide. The piece thus says as much about

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[242] Airworld used the Doubleclick.com network (who sponsored the art project) to distribute 1 million of their banner ads incorporating slightly strange business-speak slogans such as "welcome, we are air." The sites hosting the banners were not informed about their participation in the project.
Stalder, F. (1999). *Internet Retrograde: The Rise of Infomercials.* Retrieved March 17, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.walkerart.org/archive/5/B873753595AF735C6169.htm

[243] Stalder, F. (1999). *Internet Retrograde: The Rise of Infomercials.* Retrieved March 17, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.walkerart.org/archive/5/B873753595AF735C6169.htm

[244] Stalder, F. (1999). *Internet Retrograde: The Rise of Infomercials.* Retrieved March 17, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.walkerart.org/archive/5/B873753595AF735C6169.htm

[245] Whitney Museum of American Art (2006). *The Dumpster.* Retrieved on Sept 13, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://artport.whitney.org/commissions/thedumpster/dumpster.shtml

stories of failed love, as it says about people's blogging activities and exhibitionist tendencies. Lev Manovich finds within *The Dumpster* a new genre emerging:

> Although [it] can be related to traditional genres such as portraiture or documentary, as well as established new media genres such as visualization and database art, it is something new and different. I would like to call it a 'social data browser'. It allows you to navigate between the intimate details of people's experiences and the larger social groupings. The particular and the general are presented simultaneously, without one being sacrificed to the other. (…) In short, the seemingly incompatible points of view of Tolstoy and Durkheim - the subjective experience and the social facts - are brought together via the particular information architecture and navigation design of *The Dumpster*.[246]

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[246] Manovich, L. (February 12th, 2006). *Social Data Browsing.* Retrieved June 15, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.tate.org.uk/netart/bvs/manovich.htm.
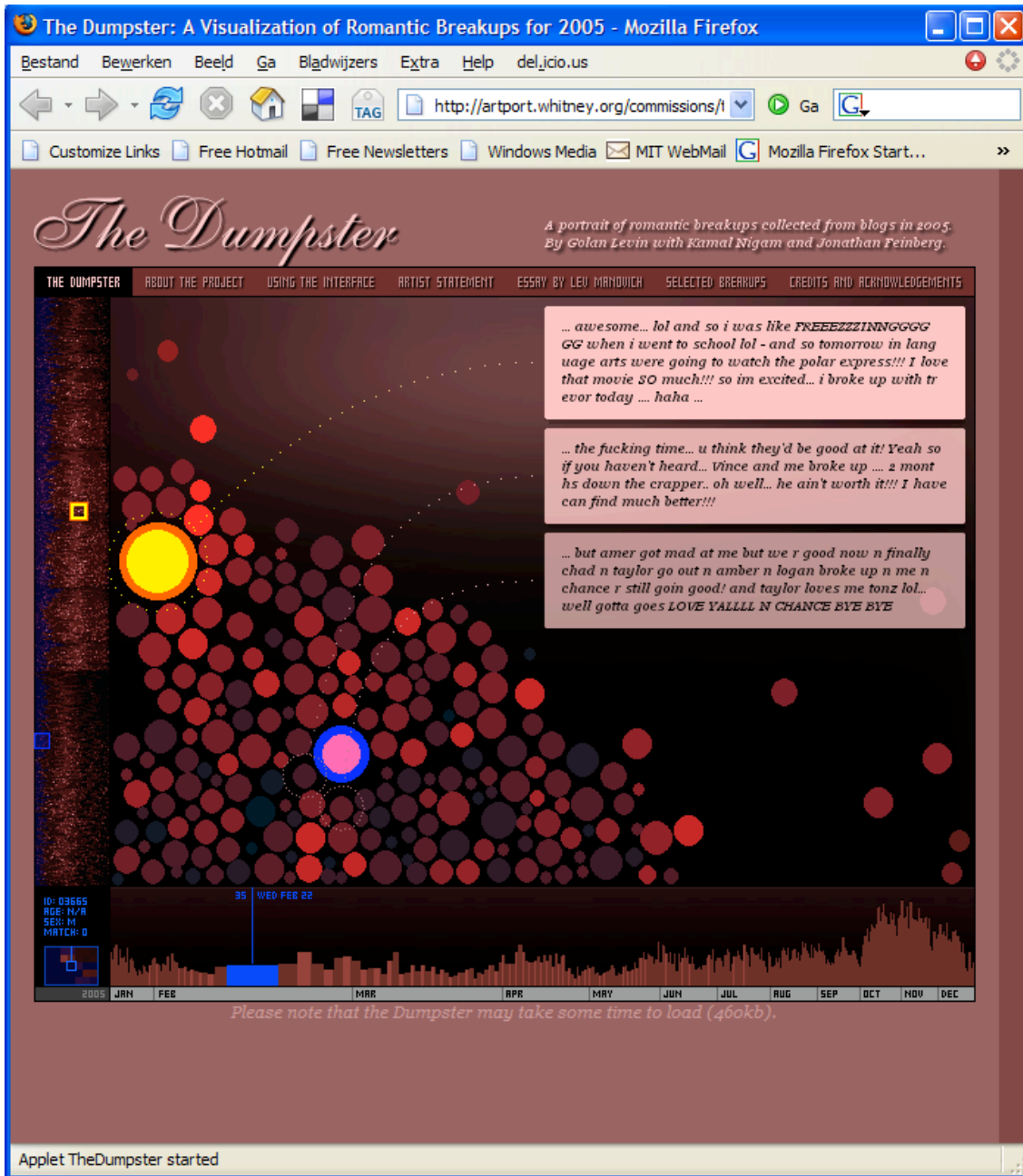
The Dumpster (2006 -…) – Golan Levin, Kamal Nigam and Jonathan Feinberg[247]

This shift towards a play with the social-cultural protocols and the aesthetics of relation is tied in with the larger social context and Internet history. As Ippolito put it:

> Pre-web, it was much more about people and whom you knew. (…) Email was the killer application and that was about social conversation. Then there

[247] Levin, G., Nigam, K. & Feinberg, J. (2007). *The Dumpster.* Screenshot retrieved March 8, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://artport.whitney.org/commissions/thedumpster/

was a while where the web seemed to create this big broadcast space, but now with the so-called web 2.0. revolution, you have a big re-introduction of community participation into the web. Meanwhile, it has still been going on all around outside of the web. Instant messaging and cell phones all point in the same direction and for the web, people kind of figured out socially and technically how to reintroduce it.[248]

Also Benjamin Weil hinted at this re-appearance of a focus on community within the WWW at large, which embraces the Internet artworks of today:

B: I think that interestingly enough, when I look at what the Web is today, I am not very surprised. It is not that anything extraordinary has happened that did not exist already in an embryo form ten years ago, even something like YouTube for instance.
K: Social networking tools?
B: Yes yes, these things existed in principal, not in practice – we didn't have the software to operate it – but what today is referred to as social networks existed as chat rooms (…) all these different things that have changed names and have become more sophisticated and mind you probably more integrated as well.[249]

The Internet artworks illustrated above, as stated before, do not exhaust the range of potential genres. Artists have made artistic use of the medium of the Internet, in a play with its technological, economic, social and cultural protocols, to simply convey narratives (fiction and non-fiction), to address issues of surveillance or copyright, to visualize large amounts of data, to integrate game culture etc. A number of themes have been taken on by Internet artists and it is this variety within the category of Internet art, combined with ever new genres emerging, that make it difficult to fully pinpoint all potential elements causing aesthetic pleasure for every Internet artwork, in which aesthetic pleasure can be understood not in terms of beauty, but in terms of the pleasure derived from the ability to respond on a sensory as well as a cognitive level to the multi-sensory stimuli offered. In the paragraphs above, I have - together with Greene, Stalder and Manovich –guided the reader to some elements responsible for potential aesthetic pleasure.

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[248] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Jon Ippolito.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.
[249] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil.* New York.

3.2. The importance of an explicit aesthetic system

> It is the role of artistic theories, these days as always, to make the artworld, and art, possible.
> Arthur Danto[250]

One can ask why we would bother going through this effort of trying to verbalize both what Internet artists construct through their daily practices as well as what Internet art aficionados surfing the web for its treasures appreciate without explicitation? In other words, why is the existence of an explicit aesthetic system necessary and/or important? And to whom?

With Arthur Danto and Howard Becker, we can say that the existence and dissemination of an aesthetic system is important, as it allows for the development of creative practices into an artistic field, an art world. As indicated before, in order to move innovative creative practice from the activities of a limited number of mavericks into the realm of art worlds, existing organizational support structures need to be addressed or alternative support structures need to be created. Either way, people need to be convinced of the value of the practice and recognize it as art. Indicating this need, yet in reference to Andy Warhol's Brillo box, Danto explains:

> What in the end makes the difference between a Brillo box and a work of art consisting of a Brillo Box is a certain theory of art. It is the theory that takes it up into the world of art, and keeps it from collapsing into the real object which it is (in a sense of *is* other than that of artistic identification). Of course, without the theory, one is unlikely to see it as art, and in order to see it as part of the artworld, one must have mastered a good deal of artistic theory as well as considerable amount of the history of recent New York painting.[251]

The creation of an explicit aesthetic system for Internet art thus allows for the communication of the value of Internet art practices to organizations and art institutions in order to gain their support for the further development of the art form. Looking back

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[250] Danto, A. (1964). The Artworld. *The Journal of Philosophy, Vol 61 (19)*, 581
[251] Danto, A. (1964). The Artworld. *The Journal of Philosophy, Vol 61 (19)*, 581

on the past thirteen years of Internet art's development, one must note that the creation and dissemination of an Internet art aesthetic has largely taken place within the communication channels of the Internet art community; on mailing lists such as Nettime[252], The Thing [253], IDC [254], CRUMB [255] and in magazines such as Artbyte[256], Ctheory[257], Mute / Metamute[258], Switch[259] and Leonardo[260]. Internet art pioneers have been very efficient in rapidly gaining support from academia, and new media art centers, and have succeeded to a great extent in establishing online not-for-profits and networked communities. However, only on few occasions – although much more in comparison to the early days of photography and video art – did their plea for support and their explication of the aesthetic value of Internet art cross the tangible line separating the Internet art world from the traditional art world. It thus does not seem illogical to link a curator's question "*Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?*"[261], posed in 1999, to the obscurity that characterized the Internet art aesthetic, at least for those out of the inner Internet art world circle. With this article title, Steve Dietz explicitly refers to Linda Nochlin's seminal essay *Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists*?, in which she addresses the utopia of art created by a free, autonomous individual, to point towards the social situation, mediated and determined by specific and definable social institutions, that embraces and determines the total situation of art making. In his appropriation of this essay, Dietz points towards the potential failure in "our ability to imagine great net art,

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[252] Nettime (2007). *Nettime mailing lists.* Retrieved April 10, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.nettime.org/

[253] The Thing (2007). *Thing.net.* Retrieved April 10, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.thing.net/

[254] IDC (2007). Institute for Distributed Creativity. Retrieved April 10, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://distributedcreativity.org/

[255] CRUMB (2007). *Curatorial resource for upstart media bliss. Discussion List.* Retrieved April 10, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://crumb.sunderland.ac.uk/%7Eadmin/beta/discussionMenu.php?id=9&showList=1&ts=11762382 09

[256] Out of publication since 2001.

[257] Ctheory (2007). *Ctheory.net.* Retrieved April 10, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.ctheory.net/

[258] Mute (2007). *Mutebeta. Culture and politics after the net.* Retrieved April 10, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.metamute.org/

[259] Switch (2007). *Switch 22.* Retrieved April 10, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://switch.sjsu.edu/mambo/switch22/switch_i22.html

[260] Leonardo (2007). *Leonardo online.* Retrieved April 10, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.leonardo.info/

[261] Dietz, S. (1999). *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?* Retrieved November 21st, 2005, from http://absoluteone.ljudmila.org/steve_dietz.php.

not in net art's ability to be imagined,"[262] which refers back to the lack of a dissemination of an explicit aesthetic system.

An explicit aesthetic system not only allows for the communication of the value of the art form to increase support from organizations and art institutions, it also facilitates the consistent passing of judgment and creation of reputations, and thus the creation of seminal artists. Indeed, incorporating some more of Howard Becker's wisdom, we can understand that the existence of an explicit aesthetic system also "ties participant's activities to the tradition of the art, justifying their demands for the resources and advantages ordinarily available to people who produce that kind of art."[263] In addition, "An aesthetic shows that, on general grounds successfully argued to be valid, what art world members do belong to the same class as other activities already enjoying the advantages of being 'art.'"[264] If Becker is right, and I believe he is, an aesthetic not only creates a distinction within the Internet art world, distinguishing the good from the bad Internet artists – and thus justifying the first category's demands for resources - it also creates a bridge between the Internet art world and the art world at large, creating the possibility for inclusion of the good Internet art creators into the broader category of artists.

Thirdly, via these organizational support structures, and through the presented artwork of a variety of artists, a public at large can be instructed to appreciate the art form on its own terms, with its own criteria, which – with regard to Internet art – seems to be less clear-cut than we might think. In contrast to paintings, a medium which has been around for centuries, and of which everyone has at least a certain understanding, Internet art's aesthetic is less straightforward, in both its reference to the medium's materials, the protocols, as well as the sensory results. Our knowledge of the WWW is for a majority of its users limited to the merely practical, namely to what we want to do, not how it is done. And while the group of Internet art aficionados is growing, the majority of users have yet

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[262] Dietz, S. (1999). *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?* Retrieved November 21st, 2005, from http://absoluteone.ljudmila.org/steve_dietz.php.

[263] Becker, H.S. (1982). *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 132.

[264] Becker, H.S. (1982). *Art worlds*. Berkeley: University of California Press. p. 133.

to encounter something on the Internet to look at with more than functionality in mind. Surfing the World Wide Web, we have indeed not yet learned to differentiate between looking at a painted wall and looking at a painting, between functional and artistic use of the protocols.

In the third chapter of her 2002 publication *But is it art?*, Cynthia Freeland discusses cultural crossings and art's diverse manifestations around the globe. She concludes with three main points: Taking John Dewey's definition of art as the expression of life of the community, Freeland deems his embrace of a direct experience of the art of another culture to be too simple. She emphasizes the need for knowing 'external facts' before trying to acquire the 'internal' attitude of appreciation for another community's art.[265] Second, she points to the impossibility of identifying one single viewpoint in a culture or its art. Last, though no less poignant, Freeland indicates that art from other places and times does not always meet our own contemporary criteria for art shown in galleries and expressing individual aims or 'genius'. Freeland finds shelter in Richard Anderson's definition who, according to her, succeeds in encompassing all forms cultures define as art. Anderson defines art as "…meaning, skillfully encoded in an affecting, sensuous medium."[266] Why is all this relevant to our undertaking? I would argue that, as Zen gardens and beads are culturally situated, so too do Internet artworks come from a specific culture: the networked culture. Yet, this culture is not geographically separated from the West, it is in fact found in its midst. Sneaking into our environment since the mid 1990s, it has taken over customs and habits in all sectors of society. Understanding Internet art as the expression of a culture, different from a culture underlying more traditional art forms, we can deduce that whatever was said about art forms from other times and places, might well be true with regard to art forms emerging from this 'new' culture. There is a need for knowing 'external facts' before trying to acquire the 'internal' attitude of appreciation for Internet artworks: interpretation and assessment of Internet artworks require an understanding of the Internet and networked culture. Just like any other culture and its art, Internet art does not present a single viewpoint: its influences -

[265] Freeland, C. (2002). *But is it art?* Oxford: University Press, p.64, 88.
[266] Freeland, C. (2002). *But is it art?* Oxford: University Press. p.89.

both artistic and technological - are numerous, creating an array of Internet art forms and contents. Adapting Freeland's last point, one could say that art from other places, times *and cultures*, require interpreters who, through their practice, create the criteria appropriate for the art form by identifying it within the culture, and communicating it to the art world.

As we have seen in chapter one and two, a number of actors and institutions - recognizing the need for an explicit aesthetic system for any innovation in the art world trying to establish itself - have attempted to explicate and disseminate the aesthetic at play within Internet art, using both the alternative as well as the conventional venues at their disposal. Even the artists, traditionally silent 'to let the artwork speak for itself,' are slowly realizing the value of explicating their aesthetic, as they let their artist voice blend together with their curator, critic and writer voices. In the end, as Jon Ippolito says: "the perversion of code [a common strategy within Internet art] is ineffectual as an artistic strategy if such misuse is concealed to all but the technological cognoscenti."[267]

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[267] Blais, J. & Ippolito, J. (2006). *At the edge of art*. Thames & Hudson, p. 25.

3.3. Internet art aesthetic within art history and art today: The same, yet different.

> Of course, we live in this networked information society and any kind of art reflects on that to some extent. (…). But there is still a big difference between the medium of paint or drawing or sculpture and the Internet. So yes, the aesthetics are different even if the topics and themes are often the same and the issues that net art addresses are addressed across media.
> Christiane Paul[268]

Having defined an Internet art aesthetic and assessed the importance of its development, we can look at how Internet art aesthetics relate to the aesthetic of past and current art forms. Although emphasis has often been placed on the differences in aesthetics – indeed Internet art cannot be understood through traditional criteria of harmony, disharmony, form, line and function – a number of similarities can be noticed as well, both in historical as well as in contemporary art practices.

There are indeed a number of art historical links one can make between Internet art aesthetics and earlier art aesthetics, particularly those from the 1920s and 30s and the 1960s and 70s. The idea of the connected individual brings Internet art back to Moholy-Nagy's 'telephone paintings', George Grosz's clipping services, and to the early days of mail art. The sense of ever-increasing mobility and greater freedom of movement surfacing at the turn of the century and expressed elsewhere in the works of the Italian Futurists, is present in today's Internet art as well. We recognize in Internet artist's practices the use, appropriation, optimism and critique of the respective new means of telecommunications of artists in the 1960s and 1970s. The aesthetic emerging out of process, interaction and the inseparableness of art and life brings us back to the art of the Fluxus Group and the Nouveaux Réalistes. And so on. It is thus not surprising that Rachel Greene sees aesthetic connections between Internet art on the one hand and networked art, television art and installation and video art on the other hand.[269] They reveal parallels on the level of individual power, connectivity, the use, appropriation and

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[268] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.
[269] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., pp. 19-30.

optimism/criticism of new technologies and interaction orientation. Jacob Lillemose added another point of overlap between computer based art, a network art aesthetic and other non-digital artworks when he spoke in June 2005 at Tate Modern for the *Curating, Immateriality, Systems: on curating digital media* conference. Drawing a parallel on the level of process orientation and thus object negation, he said:

> Seeing immateriality in the tradition of dematerialization is one way to break down the technological focus and media exclusivity surrounding too much computer based art, not in the least the part referred to as network art and by doing that realize a multitude of common aesthetic agendas with non computer based art, regarding both subject matters, tactics, production and concepts of art. (…) For the benefit of contemporary art at large, future exhibitions, whether computer based or not should not hesitate to explore and experiment with these connections.[270]

The goal is clear: in an attempt to build a bridge between the new media art world and the traditional art world, focusing on 'common aesthetic agendas' seems a valuable strategy. Lillemose added to his art historical links the concept of immateriality, suggesting exhibition methodologies, and a possibility to link Internet art to what has been present in the museum of contemporary art for years. Note however, that other art historical connections largely link back to art forms that at their time were not easily inserted into the museum space either.

The possible links of Internet art are not limited to art historical examples, but also within the larger category of contemporary art, and Internet art is not a completely odd element in the group. Indeed, Internet art is a part of contemporary art practices, and Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*, although never linked to any of 'new media art' practices, is illuminating in this regard.

In 1998, Bourriaud elaborated on aesthetics in terms of inter-human relations and concluded that the only way to judge artworks today is "on the basis of the inter-human

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[270] Lillemose, J. (2005). *Conceptualizing materiality – art from the dematerialization of the object to the condition of immateriality*. Retrieved February 20, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.digitaalplatform.be/php/cat_items3.php?cur_id=911&cur_cat=204&main_cat=183

relations which they represent, produce or prompt."[271] His book *Relational Aesthetics*, translated from French into English in 2002, was at first not taken too seriously, and until last year it was hardly mentioned. Early 2007, however, it seems to resurface, both on mailing lists as well as art conferences.[272]

If Bourriaud is correct, and a relational aesthetic is the overarching principle through which we can begin to understand contemporary art practices, then the aesthetic seems nowhere as obvious as in Internet art practices. From the early net.art practices, where a play with the technological protocols reigned, to the dominant practices of the 21st century – where human relations is not only the artworks form, but also its content.[273] In this framework, we could leverage Internet art to be the explicator of the aesthetic ruling contemporary art practices at large.

Pursuing this reasoning further also means that the perceived divide between new media and other forms of contemporary art is an illogical construct. Steve Dietz's writings of the last year have tried to make this argument through his concept of "'Just Art': Contemporary Art after the Art Formerly Known As New Media."[274]

This emphasis on the similarities between Internet art and contemporary art practices can be read – especially in S. Dietz's writings - as a conscious step in a strategy geared towards incorporation of the art form within the contemporary art museums and thus art history. Yet, as much as one can emphasize the similarities between Internet art and what is already presented within the museum, there are at least as many differences as continuities: not only the obscurity of an Internet art aesthetic, but also its characteristics as a medium and even its modes of production are different than what the art world has been accustomed to. Illustrative is the recent performance of the YES Men at the Guggenheim, in which they parodied modernism's emphasis on formalism and thus

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[271] Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational Aesthetics*. Dijon: Les presses du reel, p. 112

[272] In the 2007 CAA Conference in New York, more than half of the panels visited, referred to Bourriaud's writings. A year earlier, his name was, to my knowledge, not mentioned once.

[273] Internet artists and critics identify today's trend to be a play with the social-cultural protocols governing human interactions online and offline.

[274] Dietz, S. (2007). *"Just Art:: Contemporary Art After the Art Formerly Known As New Media.* Retrieved February 12, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.yproductions.com/writing/

discussed their work in terms of colors and form. The video clip of the YES Men's *BBC/Dow intervention*[275] as such became an example of a work from their 'black and white period.' Although meant to be just a joke that night, it clearly illustrates the different aesthetics at play.[276]

With regard to the modes of production, Internet art stages a thorough going critique of assumptions underlying the brick-and-mortar institutions: "The art world's bias toward the single-artist model of genius, and its time-honoured techniques for 'branding' such geniuses, fail to accommodate artists who work in collaboration or don't stick to a signature medium or style. Online creativity offers a confounding set of obstacles for the single artist model."[277] Indeed, collaboration can be called the 'default' setting by which Internet artworks are created, being mindful that collaboration is not limited to Internet art production, but can also be found in contemporary art practices at large. The myth of the solo artist has been brought up by a number of artists. Natascha Sadr-Haghighian for example addressed the issue in her Internet artwork *bioswop.net*. Rejecting the totalizing ideas of CVs, resumes, and bios, she insists that only biographies obtained from *bioswop.net* project be used in printed material regarding her work.[278] Addressing many of the same issues, her forthcoming project will focus on a company in Berlin dedicated to the production the artwork for Berlin's most famous artists, but whose name never appears on the wall labels in the museum space. That said however, I would still say that, whereas in contemporary art practice at large, individual production is the default, in Internet art production, the collaborative occupies this position. In Steve Dietz' words:

> On the net, collaboration is not the exception that proves the rule. Whether it
> is collectives or role differentiation - concept, programmer, designer, sound
> mixer, coder, digitizer, writer, fabricator, server administrator – it is even
> unusual to have a single artist who does everything on a given project. And
> even when she does, more often than not, the work is literally – not just
> figuratively – not complete without the participation of a … participant.[279]

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[275] More information about the project can be found on http://www.theyesmen.org/hijinks/dow/

[276] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Lauren Cornell.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.

[277] Blais, J. & Ippolito, J. (2006). *At the edge of art.* London: Thames & Hudson, p. 162.

[278] At the time of writing, the website www.bioswop.net was unavailable.

[279] Dietz, S. (1999). *Why Have There Been No Great Net Artists?* Retrieved November 21st, 2005, from
http://absoluteone.ljudmila.org/steve_dietz.php.

The Internet art aesthetic emerging out of these collaborations, as discussed above, foregrounds a set of characteristics, radically opposed to more traditional art aesthetics, which could be understood through line, form, function, colour, etc. pertaining to a certain object. Indeed, the Internet art aesthetic, informed by the play with technological, economic, social and cultural protocols and working through low bit aesthetics, flash, etc. presents a primary concern with connectivity and context creation rather than objecthood. These differences in aesthetics have far reaching consequences for the demands that Internet art places on preservation techniques, as we have seen in the previous chapters, as well as exhibition methodologies, which will be discussed to a greater extent in chapter five.

Having discussed the discourse surrounding the aesthetic value of Internet art, chapter four will turn its attention to another value component of Internet art measured in economic terms. In previous art forms, both value components were linked to a greater or lesser extent; the more an artwork was appreciated on an aesthetic and cultural level, the more it was worth in economic terms. Or cynically, the more the artwork was auctioned for, the greater the effort of aestheticians and critics to perceive and communicate the aesthetic and cultural value of the piece. However, the economic discourse surrounding Internet art in its relation to the traditional institution for contemporary art signals a disruption of this link, as any economic value for Internet art is perceived to be minimal or non-existent, at least in an art market where economic value is dependent upon tangibility and scarcity.

Chapter 4. Collecting and exhibiting, Internet art in an exchange economy

Although Internet art's cultural and aesthetic value might be thought to be primary in determining a museum's decision to include it in its collections and exhibitions, reality proves this to be utopian in belief. Indeed, one could say that the art world is a business, and that within, it is the art market – the dealers and collectors, auction houses and commercial galleries - that to a large extent makes the world go round. Museums have for their collection always depended more on donations from individual collectors than on purchases. One can thus understand the colloquial saying that museums collect collectors, rather than art works. With museum's power to buy directly on the art market decreasing, this is not likely to change. If one argues that the art market and the museum institution go hand in hand, it seems that the solution for Internet art may be warming up collector's hearts. Have there been attempts to do this? And how successful were they? Have Internet artists felt the need to play within the rules set out by this market matrix or have they circumvented the guidelines?

The questions of Internet art's economics have been subject to investigation since the very beginnings. Benjamin Weil, talking about one of the objectives behind founding äda'web in 1994, recalls:

> [one of the goals of äda'web was] to reflect upon a form of art making that *could not be monetized or commercialized* and the question that this raised in terms of what would be the economy that would function for this kind of work. We then started engaging in a serious reflection about whether it would be suitable to either let people subscribe to produce the work (…), or whether we should have a pay-per-view kind of model. We had a whole discussion about this and I think that the idea of the economy was very central to this discussion. We believed it was very important to assert a certain way of thinking about this; the economy is always an important factor in everything and because art is more about ideas than anything else, one tends to forget that if there is no money, there is no art.[280]

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[280] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil.* New York. (Italics mine).

In the end, äda'web decided not to work with a pay-per-view model:

> (…) there was always a stronger feeling that the way the web functions, as a hypermedia environment, it would make no sense to close it. Because if you close it, it means that the economy [here he means Internet economy as a necessarily open networked place] is completely challenged; it means you cannot go from one to the other, you cannot go from one part of a project to another project, you cannot go to a reference point that is interesting to consider the work you are looking at. It was thus deemed impossible to do pay-per-view.[281]

However, to carry out its model of providing expertise and money for artists to produce work for the web, äda'web did collaborate with corporations and for this, some considered them traitors. The story reveals a number of facts and ideologies, which make the task of thinking about economics in relation to Internet art difficult. Without money, there is no art. Internet artists, like other artists, need financial resources to create their artwork and to support themselves. But, the result of their artistic endeavor, due to its immateriality and ubiquitousness, does not necessarily speak to the collector's desires, and in an economy where value is created by scarcity, this seems to condemn Internet artists to being deprived from art market support, unless they succeed in creating tangible, own-able entities. However, this in turn creates an ideological problem: the artist is pushed outside of the medium he/she desires to work in, or the artists is forced to close down the network so as to create an opportunity for private viewing.

The perceived low economic value of Internet art thus forms a real and important barrier, seemingly excluding Internet art from the conventional paths to inclusion in the museum's collections and gallery spaces, via private or corporate collectors. The discourse surrounding the economics of the relation between Internet art and the traditional institution for contemporary art relate both to the issue of owning and collecting Internet art, as well as to the viability of exhibiting it. First, I will elaborate on artist's attempts to adhere to the rules set out by the art market, its possibility, given a mental switch with regard to the concepts of 'owning' and 'collecting', and alternative

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[281] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil.* New York.

models of support. Second, I will discuss the financial aspect of mounting an exhibition that includes Internet artworks.

4.1. 'Collecting' and 'owning' Internet art

> (…) Internet art has less to do with objects of social or financial prestige, and little, at least currently, to do with the cosmopolitan art businesses that thrive in New York, Cologne, London and other cultural capitals. It is generally a more marginal and oppositional form, often uniting parody, functionality and activism under a single umbrella, actively reclaiming public space and circumnavigating boundaries that seem entrenched in the world of galleries and museums.
> Rachel Greene[282]

Whereas traditional art forms (painting & sculpture) increase the value of the museum (both culturally as well as economically), because of their tangibility and uniqueness, digital media art forms, ubiquitous in nature and with unlimited copy-possibilities do not seem to have that characteristic. This perceived lack of economic value for Internet art was clearly illustrated in 1998, when äda'web, due to a loss of funding, approached the auction house Christie's to handle selling the site and they declined.[283] The äda'web archives were subsequently donated to the Walker Art Center and its director at the time - Kathy Halbreich - again illustrated the perceived low economic value attributed to Internet art in 1998 in a press statement: "Our delight in this acquisition has nothing to do with monetary value and everything to do with being able to shelter what I believe will be among the most important historical precedents for digital art. (…) So, for us, it was really the intellectual and artistic value that was delightful. It didn't matter to us if it had a high monetary value or no monetary value."[284] Although the new media art community

[282] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., pp.11-12.
[283] Rush, M. (1999). *New Media in Late 20th Century Art*. London: Thames & Hudson, Inc., p.201
[284] Mirapaul, M. (November 19, 1998). *New York Times: Putting a Price Tag on Digital Art*. Retrieved September 19, 2006, from the World Wide Web:
http://www.nytimes.com/library/tech/98/11/cyber/artsatlarge/19artsatlarge.html

could not but like the sound of this, especially when coming from an institution's director, it was and still is rather the exception than the rule. The alternative economies of attention; international web traffic, email forwards and downloads, Rachel Greene admits, remain supplemental to the conventional means of valuation; visits to a museum show, magazine reviews and monetary worth, than sufficient on their own.

If Internet art is thus dependent upon the art market – and thus art dealers and collectors – for its inclusion in the museum space, there doesn't seem to be much hope for Internet art in its development as part of the art world, at least according to Benjamin Weil:

> The market has to a certain extent an enormous affect upon institutional life, because what is now considered valuable to a certain extent, not always thank god, but what is now considered valuable very often is what is been sold for lots of money. Cultural relevance of a piece is sometimes monitored through the fact that it sells for large amounts of money at auction. Interestingly enough, that is the kind of thing that will never happen to networked media. For me, it is clear it will never happen. (…). To try and force an economy model predicated by the object onto a mode of production that is radically not about objects is completely non-sense by my standards.[285]

However, a number of things need to be said: For one, artists have already started their attempts to play within the rules set out by the art market and look for inspiration in art history. Two, artists are aware of the difficulties their preferred medium entails for collectors and dealers, and moreover, have in some cases made it the subject of their artwork. Three, Internet art *is being collected* by private collectors and is making its way onto the art market, albeit on a small scale. Last but not least, one must conclude, looking at the engagement strategies discussed in chapter one, that even without the art market, museums are finding ways to support the Internet artists by speaking to the entrepreneur-patron/sponsor, rather than depending on the entrepreneur-collector.

In the past, numerous artists working with media, now fully incorporated into the art world and valued for their aesthetic as well as monetary worth, faced the conundrum of creating economic worth for their own practice. Internet artists thus did not need to

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[285] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil.* New York.

reinvent the wheel. Photography, for example, struggled for a long time to merely establish its aesthetic worth (cf. supra) and even then, the possibility of infinitely reproducing the image without quality loss, made it difficult to assign the art form great economic value. Video art, performance art and the happenings of the 1960s faced the same questions, and also conceptual art was confronted with the need to create a financial worth to their practice. Although inclusion in the traditional art world today still varies for the above art forms, one must say that they did all find a path to economic validation. Documentation materials from performances and happenings were elevated to an art status and – as objects – were subject to the demand and supply mechanisms of the art market. The virtual ubiquitousness of the 'old' new media art forms of photography and video art were over the years solved through the creation of limited editions, certificates of authenticity and installations, making it suitable for patronage and museum collectors. Internet artists, clearly conscious of their art history, have appropriated some of these strategies in the past. Indeed, artists like Cory Arcangel have made their Internet artworks tangible through, for instance, the creation of derivatives of the artwork in the form of a poster or by artificially limiting the number of 'authentic' and signed DVD versions containing the archives of the Internet artwork. Also the creation of an installation piece has been an appropriated strategy for Internet artists[286], although in its early days in a rather unsuccessful way, largely due to ideological arguments. As Internet art pioneer Natalie Bookchin clarifies:

> Following video art, some net artists began making sculptural installations more suited to a traditional art environment, but in doing so, ideas of site-specificity that helped to shape and define much of the best net art had to be discarded.[287]

Today, the creation of Internet art installations is becoming more and more frequent, and one might say successful. The early utopian anti-institutional period has largely passed, at least for the majority of the Internet artists, and on another level, computer and network

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[286] Internet art installations expand on the standard computer screen and keyboard as the traditional hardware leading the Internet art viewer into the work, acknowledging the spatiality in which the artwork is presented.

[287] Bookchin, N. (2006). Grave digging and net art: a proposal for the future. In T. Corby (Ed). *Network Art: Practices and Positions (Innovations in Art and Design)*. New York: Routledge, p.70.

technology have become more and more ubiquitous, allowing for Internet access through a variety of smaller hardware.

However, not all artists went to their predecessors in search for guidance. Contemplating the same issues, Carlo Zanni, for instance, has attempted to create a "portable server-sculpture containing a network based artwork that can be sold."[288] *Altarboy – Cyrille* and *Altarboy – Oriana*, created in 2003 and 2004, present a sculpture of a suitcase containing a laptop running as a web server.

Carlo Zanni – *Oriana (Altarboy)* 2004[289]

[288] Zanni, C. (2006). *Oriana (altarboy) – 2004*. Retrieved February 20, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.zanni.org/html/works/altarboy-oriana/altarboyoriana.htm

[289] Zanni, C. (2004). *Oriana (altarboy) - 2004*. Screenshot retrieved February 20, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.zanni.org/html/works/altarboy-oriana/zanni-oriana.jpg

The sculpture creates a physical location for the code, which allows collectors and or institutions to perceive it as "any other more classic artwork."[290] The ubiquitousness of any Internet artwork is detoured, by granting authority to the owner of *Altarboy*, to plug it into the web or not, and as such, to monitor a general public's access to see and interact with the website. If the collector chooses to keep the artwork private, the server can simply be turned off, and the work can be seen privately using the data stored in its database.[291] In a 2004 interview Zanni commented on *Altarboy*'s statement about Internet art accessibility as follows: "Think about an abusive pipe. I acted as a plumber, opening a faucet for private use. Running it, *Altarboy* uses water from the main pipe (Google); when they close it or there are problems with the main pipe (or when the net will not exist anymore) it starts cycling stored waters. *Altarboy* follows its way; it doesn't care about nothing. It's a godfather in a splendid villa in Sicily, sunbathing and drinking clean water in champagne glasses."[292] Explicitly referring to *Altarboy*'s implications for collectors, dealers and galleries, Zanni states that:

> With *Altarboy*, the net artists's need to sell their work (as any other artist) merges with the collectors and dealers's need to buy net art works (as they usually do with more classic medium based works). In this way the typical ephemeral nature of net art works is preserved and at the same time *AltarBoy* offers a base for an upcoming new art market. Collectors will be able to decide when and where (even if 'where' is a floating concept in this case) to open the network, allowing people to see and above all to join the net art project. *AltarBoy* allows concepts such as Property and Sharing to merge without compromises.[293]

He adds: "Even if the Net will not exist anymore in a few years the work will still work in an OFF-line mode, witnessing its ON-line life. *Altarboy* is projected to run also offline, cycling the sessions stored in a database derived from its online life."[294] Although

[290] Zanni, C. (2006). *Oriana (altarboy) – 2004*. Retrieved February 20, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.zanni.org/html/works/altarboy-oriana/altarboyoriana.htm

[291] Zanni, C. (2006). *Oriana (altarboy) – 2004*. Retrieved February 20, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.zanni.org/html/works/altarboy-oriana/altarboyoriana.htm

[292] Zanni, C. (2004). *Carlo Zanni Interview by Domenico Quaranta.* Retrieved February 21, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.zanni.org/html/txtinterv/domenicointerv.htm

[293] Zanni, C. (2004). *Altarboy tech specs and docs.* Retrieved February 21, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.zanni.org/html/altarboyallinfo.htm

[294] Zanni, C. (2004). *Altarboy tech specs and docs.* Retrieved February 21, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.zanni.org/html/altarboyallinfo.htm

perceived as a solution functional to his mode of practices, Zanni believes his solution to be a flexible idea which can be applied to support and manage many different net projects: "… yes of course, I hope other artists will use it."[295], he comments. Zanni's method proved successful: *Altarboy* was bought by the Analix Forever Gallery in Switzerland. Director, Cyrille Polla commented: "When Analix Forever discovered Carlo Zanni and his innovative approaches to art, it was a revelation. *Altarboy* is the piece that most strongly combines the delicate beauty and the advanced net art developments that characterize Zanni's art. With the creation of *Altarboy*, people can now buy and sell netart, thus opening a new market. The ultimate proof of this: we bought this unique piece!"[296] Currently, Oriana.us is off line, indicating its unplugged status.

The above discussed examples all reflect attempts to play within the rules set out by the exchange economy in the hopes to adhere to collector's circles. However, not all Internet artworks benefit from these attempts to play within the rules set by an exchange economy and indeed all include some form of compromise. The artist is forced to create works in other media, for which his Internet artworks work as publication campaigns, or needs to artificially limit access, be it through storage of an Internet artworks archives on a DVD or restraining its online presence over time. The constructions, set up time and time again, to adapt artistic practice to the customs of the art world, in the end feel rather limiting. It might therefore be more interesting to look for a reconsideration of the concept of 'collecting' and 'owning' vis-à-vis Internet art, rather than the reconsideration of Internet art in itself. As Christiane Paul explains:

> It's more of a mental switch that needs to be made. Why couldn't you, wouldn't you own it? In the past, there was definitely the issue that many of the pieces were HTML based, so I simply could have downloaded that Olia Lialina piece to my machine and have it there forever. That is most of the time not the case anymore. So, having a source code on one's server really, I think, constitutes a form of ownership. Collecting the source code, having that on my server. The fact that it is visible to the world, does that really matter? There are many collectors who own, let's say a Picasso that is never

[295] Zanni, C. (2004). *Carlo Zanni Interview by Domenico Quaranta.* Retrieved February 21, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.zanni.org/html/txtinterv/domenicointerv.htm
[296] Zanni, C. (2004). *Carlo Zanni Interview by Domenico Quaranta.* Retrieved February 21, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.zanni.org/html/txtinterv/domenicointerv.htm

hanging in their living room because it is traveling from show to show. It's all about prestige, it has the label next to it, it is in their collection, but they do not necessarily have it in their home. And with net art, you would still have it on your server, does the fact that the world can see it at any given time really make that much of a difference?[297]

This reconsideration of the concept of 'owning' and 'collecting' is not as radical as it might seem at first. Conceptual artists in the 1960s have spoken much to the same ideas. Paul asks us: "Is owning a set of instructions [in reference to Sol LeWitt] so different from owning an Internet art piece's source-code on your server?"[298]

Although one could argue that in the case of Sol LeWitt's instructions, there is still a tangible object, whereas the source code lives on a server, I would respond that in both cases, the art is not to be found in the instructions – be they written down on a piece of paper, or typed in as a program – but rather in the idea and the possible realization of what is conceived. In the end, the question must be answered negatively: with an open mind as to what constitutes 'ownership', one must admit that whether the instructions are on a piece of paper or your server space makes no great difference.

Although few have made this mental shift, there are a number of collectors who have been attracted by the medium and its artistic practices. The Schwartz family (cf. supra), probably one of the very first collectors owning an Internet art piece, acquired Douglas Davis' *The World's First Collaborative Sentence*, in 1995 and donated it to the Whitney Museum of American Art. Already then, ownership did not imply the impossibility of others to enjoy the work as it was meant to exist. Quite the contrary, the Schwartz's received a signed disk that recorded the first days of the site, including the earliest contributions, as a token of gratitude towards their generosity.

From the Schwartz family to Doron Golan, we move from an incidental case of private sponsorship of a single Internet artwork's acquisition by a museum to the world's largest private collection of Internet art. As one of the early collectors of Internet art, Golan has,

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[297] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.
[298] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.

over the course of the past 6 years, collected over 150 projects from more than 80 Internet artists, ranging from MTAA, to Young Hae Chang Heavy Industries, Mark Amerika, Natalie Bookchin, Heath Bunting, Mark Daggett, Andy Deck, Lisa Jevbratt, Jon Klima, Tina Laporta, Golan Levin, Mark Lichty, Mouchette, Mark Napier, Andy Packer, Thomson & Craighead and Martin Wattenberg. Another 50 artists are set to join the collection. Responsible collecting of Internet artworks also means preserving them for future uses.[299] The Schwartz family's Douglas Davis work was maintained and further developed on the New York Lehman College Art Gallery website from 1994-2005 and afterwards within the Whitney Museum of American Art. Doron Golan's collection is presented and maintained on http://www.computerfinearts.com since 2001. Since 2003 an archiving agreement with The Cornell University Library ensures the cataloguing and preservation of the works as a permanent repository. Golan, as a collector, differs in significant ways from the 'traditional' entrepreneur-collector. For one, he is an artist, and conceives of his collection as an ever-growing social sculpture. In addition, the majority of the pieces in the collection were acquired through artists' donations, only the first pieces were paid for. Also the contract signed with the artists illustrates a different understanding of 'collecting' and 'owning' than most of his more traditional colleague-collectors; the terms of the acquisition contract are illustrative:

> There is an agreement that I write and sign with an artist, that says that me and the artist have the right to exhibit the piece anywhere we want, anytime we want, in a physical space, in a virtual space, there is no limitation for either of us to do whatever we want with the piece. But, the artist of course maintains full copyright of the piece, because he created it.[300]

However, in terms of collector-museum relations (which is the part of the collector's role we are interested in for the sake of this text), Golan performs the same functions and expresses the same desires as a number of his more traditional counterparts. His collection has been shown in the Digital Art Museum in Berlin in December 2006 and another exhibition is scheduled for September 2007 in the Haifa Museum, Israel. Like

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[299] It is in this primarily that artwork commissions differ from artwork acquisitions into a collection. It is also this which explains why Internet artworks are rarely found within an art institution's collection, even if this institution commissioned it.

[300] Verschooren, K. (March 6, 2007). *Interview with Doron Golan*. Telephone conversation, Boston – Tel Aviv.

many collectors, he wishes to, one day, donate his collection to a museum for further care taking.

That said, the art market for Internet art - like the art market for conceptual art – when fully developed, will most likely stay small. However, it does exist, the seeds are planted and it is for us to wait and see how well they will grow. We must in the end conclude that Internet art *can* function within the exchange economy – if concepts of 'owning' and 'collecting' are slightly rethought outside the realm of 'scarcity' and objecthood. Not an easy attempt, as Internet art pioneer Natalie Bookchin puts it rather eloquently: "There are strong economic incentives in the art world for keeping things as they are, and circumventing the production of exclusivity and scarcity threatens long established institutional and financial mechanisms. The art world has long been wary of peer review, taste being something one acquires through more visible and seemingly intangible means. An artwork's mass appeal tends to be more of a detriment than an asset to its status – a sign of its lack of sophistication, depth or criticality. Ideas such as timelessness, taste and genius remain firmly in place, despite repeated assaults by artists and theorists."[301]

Internet artists, however, more than any other artist community today have tried out different models of support, outside of the realms of the art world, looking for solutions within the medium they were working in and which they had co-developed to a certain extent. Indeed, in contrast to the story about artist's appropriation of television[302], Internet artists were there at the starting blocks of the WWW, eager to play a role in the development of the medium's vocabulary and uses. And they did: Although unmentioned in any history of early web advertising, Internet art pioneer Jenny Holzer, according to Benjamin Weil, deserves credit for the invention of the banner ad:

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[301] Bookchin, N. (2006). Grave digging and net art: a proposal for the future. In T. Corby (Ed.). *Network Art: Practices and Positions (Innovations in Art and Design)*. New York: Routledge, p.72.

[302] Artists only started to look at television in the mid 1960s, when the medium was already appropriated, encoded, industrialized. It was an economy that didn't enable artists to participate, aside from some limited opportunities with independent channels.
More information about artists and media activists' actions in the 1960s and 1970s to break open the closed circuit of the privatised public sphere of television can be found in Joselit, D. (2007). *Feedback. Television against Democracy*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Jenny Holzer was basically the first person, who invented what you could refer to as banner advertising. You clicked on one of her truisms in the middle of another page and then you find yourself in her site. (…). Before Jenny Holzer there was no such thing as banners online, there was nothing that looked remotely like advertisers or banners to link people back to your site. [303]

The working method of Olia Lialina then allows us to come full circle. The banner ad, invented by an Internet artist, appropriated by E-commerce, is brought back to its original artistic environment, be it transformed and explicit, as a statement of the Internet artist, wanting to make a living out of her Internet artwork. In *My Boyfriend came back from the war*, Lialina includes on the left side of the screen a column dedicated to 'Ads by Goooooogle' and a call to 'Advertise on this Site'.

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[303] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil*. New York.
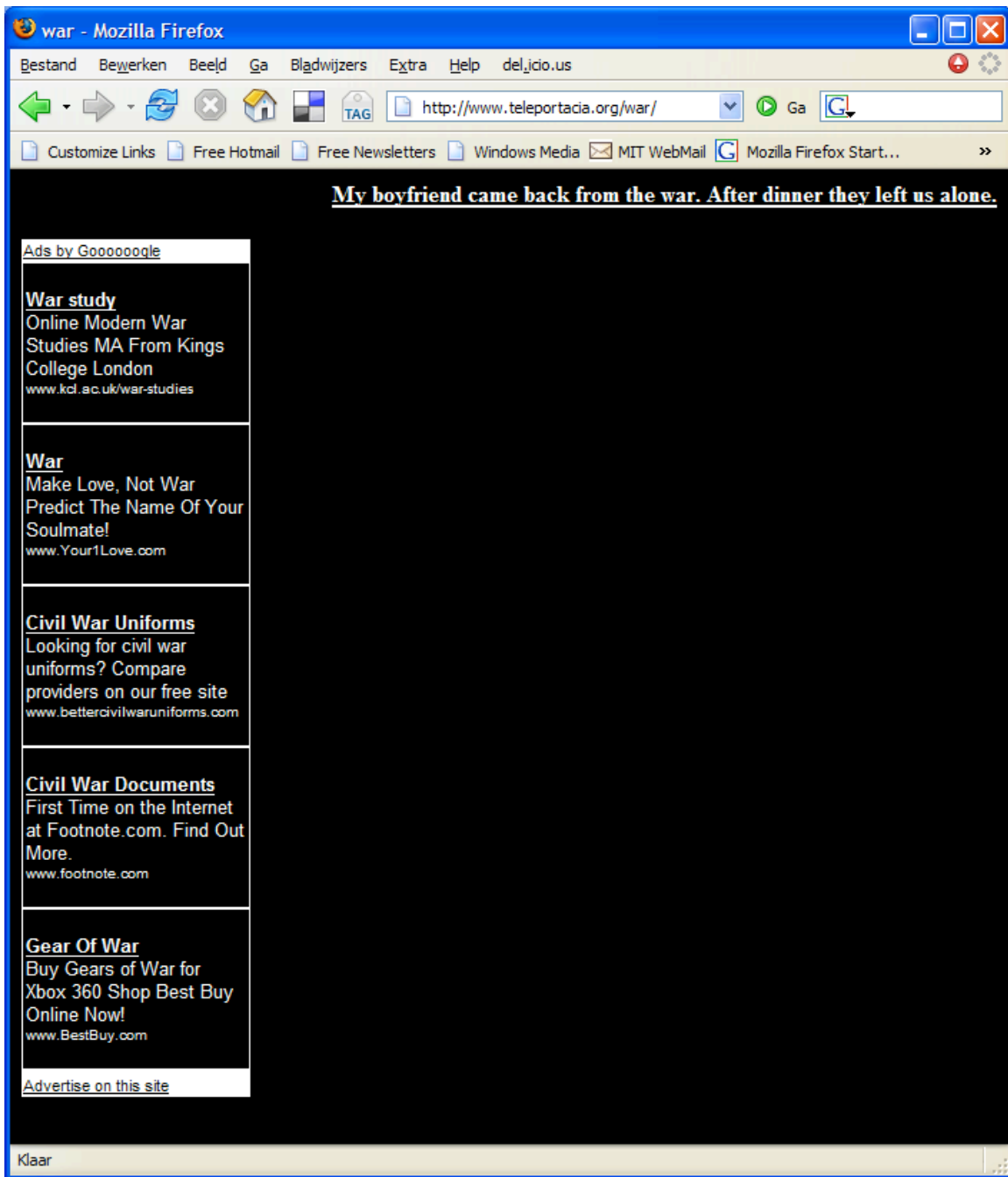
Olia Lialina – My boyfriend came back from the war (1996)[304]

[304] Lialina, O. (1996). *My boyfriend came back from the war.* Screenshot retrieved March 8, 2007, from the
World Wide Web: http://www.teleportacia.org/war/
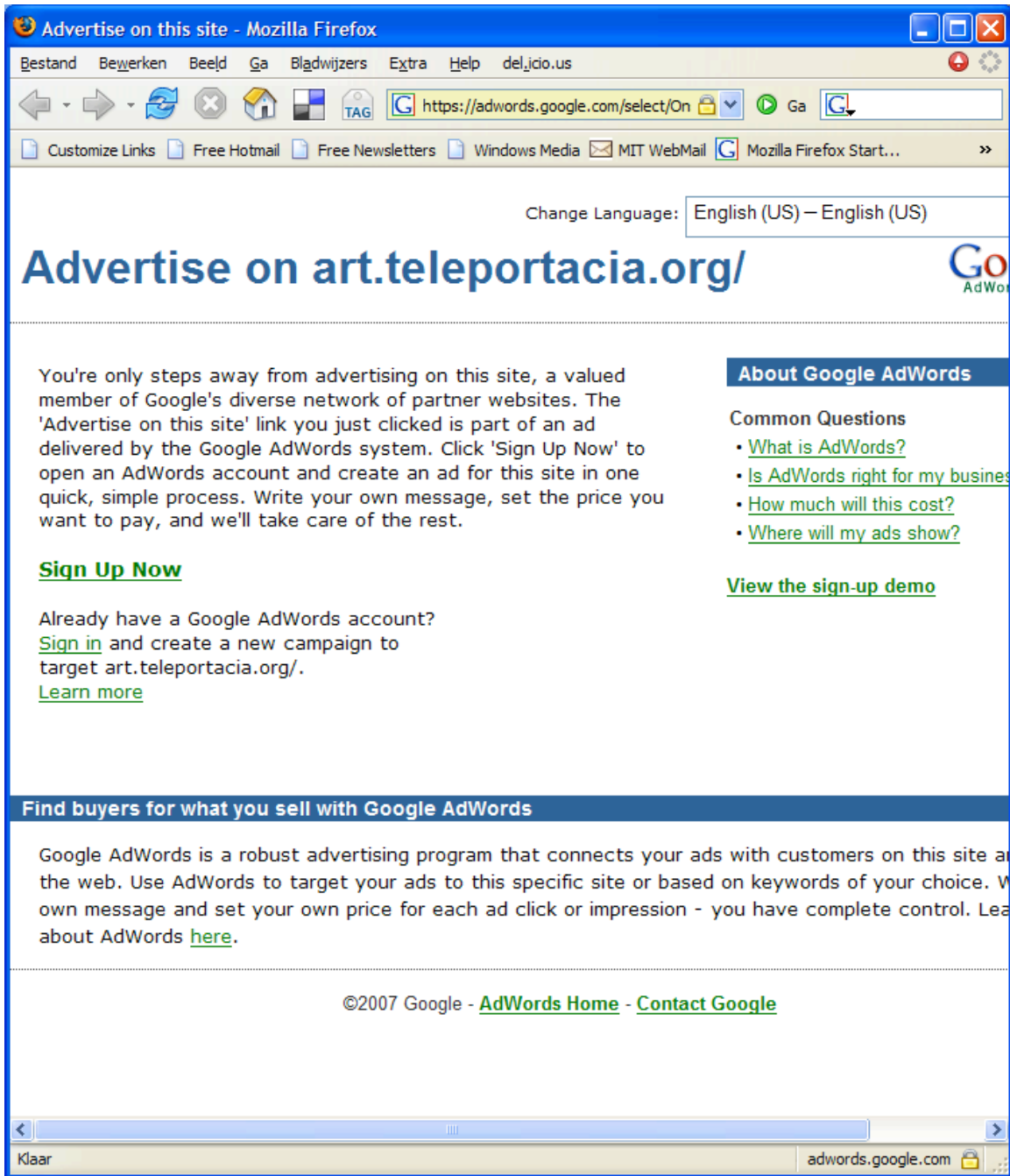
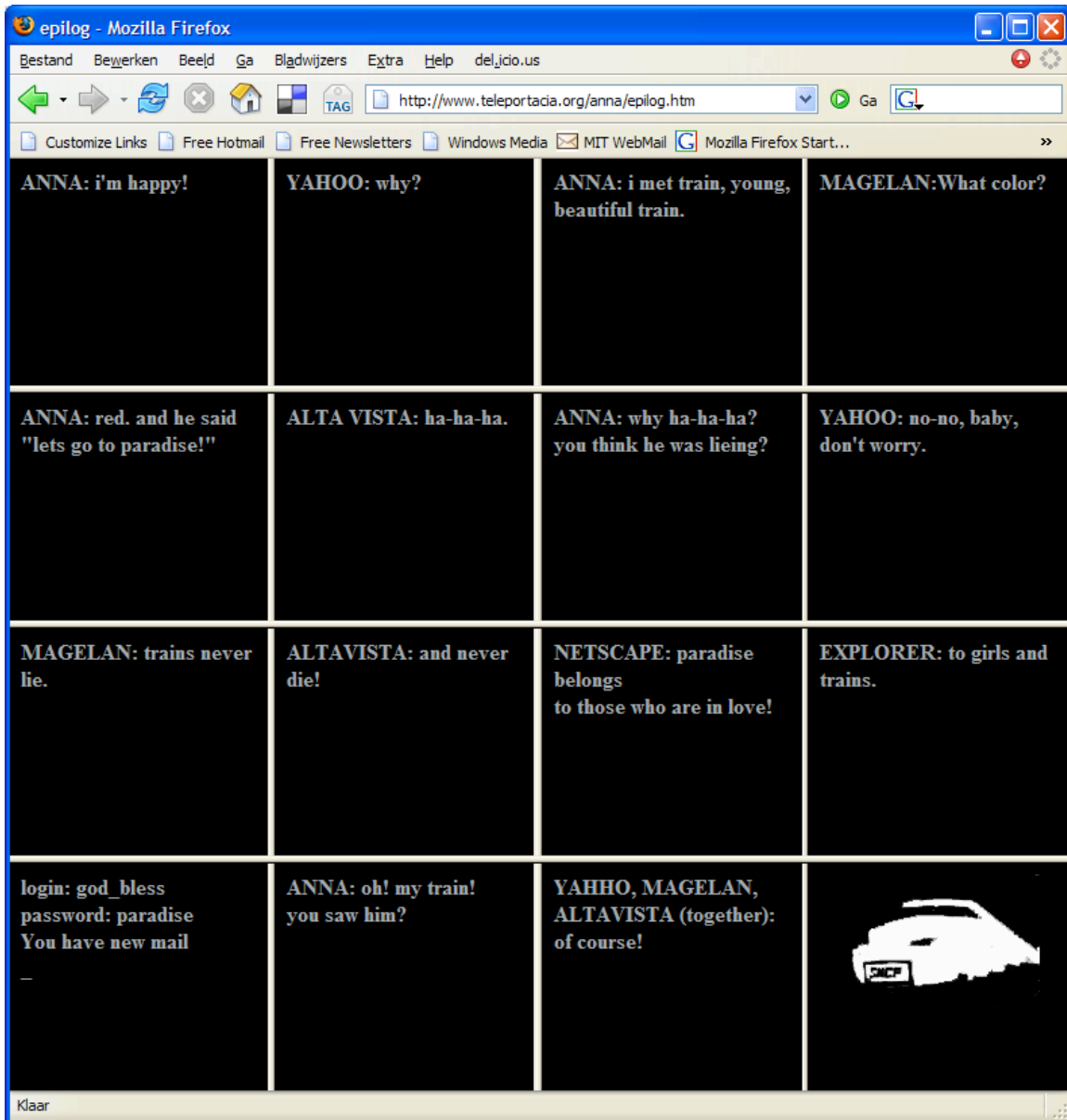Olia Lialina – My boyfriend came back from the war (1996)[305]

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[305] Lialina, O. (1996). *My boyfriend came back from the war. Advertise on art.teleportacia.org/* Screenshot
   retrieved March 8, 2007, from the World Wide Web:
   https://adwords.google.com/select/OnsiteSignupLandingPage?client=ca-pub-
   4903827711922619&referringUrl=http://www.teleportacia.org/war/&hl=en&gl=US

Her 1996 work *Anna Karenina goes to Paradise* contains banner ads for Magellan Internet Guide, Yahoo, Internet Explorer and AltaVista and the epilogue transforms each brand name into a chatter, conversing with Olia about girls, trains and paradise.
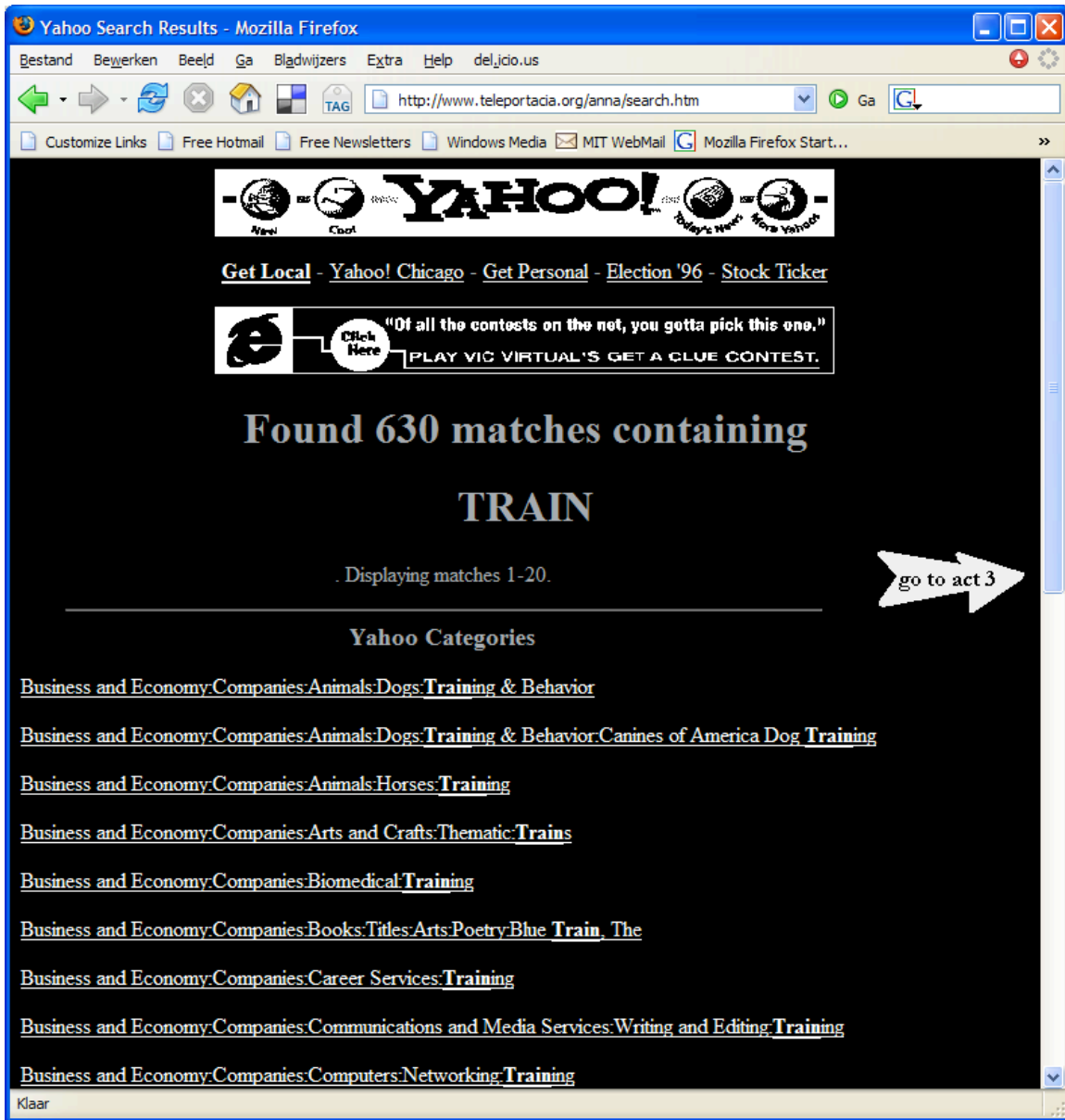
Olia Lialina- Anna Karenina goes to Paradise, Act 2 – Anna Looking for Train (1996)[306]

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[306] Lialina, O. (1996). *Anna Karenina goes to Paradise, Act 2*. Screenshot retrieved March 8, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.teleportacia.org/anna/search.htm

ANNA: i'm happy! | YAHOO: why? | ANNA: i met train, young, beautiful train. | MAGELAN:What color?

ANNA: red. and he said "lets go to paradise!" | ALTA VISTA: ha-ha-ha. | ANNA: why ha-ha-ha? you think he was lieing? | YAHOO: no-no, baby, don't worry.

MAGELAN: trains never lie. | ALTAVISTA: and never die! | NETSCAPE: paradise belongs to those who are in love! | EXPLORER: to girls and trains.

login: god_bless password: paradise You have new mail _ | ANNA: oh! my train! you saw him? | YAHHO, MAGELAN, ALTAVISTA (together): of course! |

Olia Lialina- Anna Karenina goes to Paradise, Epilogue (1996) [307]

Taking this one step further leads us to the example of UBERMORGEN.COM's *Amazon Noir* story, a story illustrating how Internet artists, even without altering their artistic practice, are not necessarily limited to support mechanisms within an artistic context, although I would doubt whether in this case the support-provider was interested in the artistic value of the art piece. Known for their 2005 Google attack (Google will Eat itself

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[307] Lialina, O. (1996). *Anna Karenina goes to Paradise, Epilogue.* Screenshot retrieved March 8, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.teleportacia.org/anna/epilog.htm

- 2005[308]), the UBERMORGEN.COM collective took on Amazon in 2006, and targeted their strongest and weakest spot: 'Search Inside the Book':

> We hacked the system, we built a malicious mechanism (Amazon Noir) able to stress the server software, getting back the entire books we wanted, at request. It was a question of creating a so-called 'foolingware'. We actually think that in the future we will be remembered as the predecessor of 'foolingware', and now we feel guilty about that. So we started to collect piece by piece the yearned body of culture with increasing excitement and without a pause.
> We wondered. What is the difference between digitally scanning the text of a book of yours, and obtaining it from Amazon Noir? There is no difference. It would be only discussed in terms of the amount of wasted time. We wanted to build our local Amazon, definitively avoiding the confusion of continuous purchasing stimuli. So we stole the loosing and amusing relation between thoughts. We stole the digital implementation of synapses connections between memory, built by an online giant to amuse and seduce, pushing the user to compulsively consume. We were thieves of memory (in a McLuhan sense), for the right to remember, to independently and freely construct our own physical memory. We thought we did not want to play forever under the peep-show unfavorable rules. But we failed. We failed and we were in the end corrupted, and we had to surrender to the copyright guardians. We failed breaking into the protectionist economy. We failed, because we wanted to share and give away.[309]

Indeed, the *Amazon Noir* crew (Paolo Cirio, Lizvlx, Alessandro Ludovico and Hans Bernhard – founder of etoy[310]) sold the technology for an undisclosed sum to Amazon and UBERMORGEN.COM as such spiced up their treasure funds for future projects.

With this story, I have thus made a movement from the entrepreneur-collector, to the entrepreneur-sponsor and finally the entrepreneur, from art projects deeply embedded within the art world and its support mechanisms, to art projects functioning largely outside of the institutional art context, surfing on the web economy itself.

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[308] UBERMORGEN.COM (). *Google will eat itself.* Retrieved March 7, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.gwei.org/index.php
In Google will eat itself, money was generated by serving Google text advertisement on a network of hidden Websites. That money was then used to automatically buy Google shares. As of December 1, 2006, however, GWEI is censored by Google Search. On March 24, 2007, Geert Lovink started a Solidarity Link Action through various mailing lists such as The Thing, IDC and Wired Blog.

[309] Ludovico, A. & Cirio, P. (December 16, 2006). *Thieves of the Invisible – Amazon Noir.* Thingist mailing list.

[310] Etoy.corporation (2007). Retrieved March 7, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.etoy.com

Moving back to the realm of the art institution and its operations, we must conclude that, with an Internet art market in its infancy and private and corporate collectors still hesitant, it is rather the sponsor than the collector who has provided the necessary support for the individual artist to create and the museum to exhibit. The following paragraph will thus deal with the financial viability of mounting an Internet art exhibition, and the support mechanisms at play.

4.2. Making exhibiting Internet art financially viable

Museums take a number of factors into consideration, when planning their next exhibition. One of these factors inevitably deals with the economic viability of the museum. Museums' annual income is compiled through the aggregation of government subsidies, non-government contributions, financial activities, commercial activities, and fees for admissions. Whereas government subsidies are the most important source of funding for the European museums, the non-government contributions take on that role with regard to their American counterparts. Each exhibition should thus favor the revenues generated from all sources. In practice, the question asked then is: Will the exhibition generate enough audience interest to boost ticket sales and to satisfy governmental, corporate and private sponsors? But should that really be the question museum critics wonder? Sponsors, governmental, corporate or private, should not and do not – as in the for-profit sector – expect a return on investment and catering to the audience wishes seems to belong more into the job description of the entertainment sector than the art world. Maxwell L. Anderson, former director of the Whitney Museum of American Art explained in a 2003 essay the dangers of this financial dependence on the choice of the art on exhibit: "Nationally, admissions income accounts for only 12 to 15% of art museums' revenue. Yet museum boards are increasingly seduced by the possibility of attracting a mass audience. This inevitably leads to varying degrees of self-censorship to maximize attendance. Boards also ask why particular programs are presented when

they are less likely to attract corporate support, which invariably invites another form of self-censorship."[311]

Although one could argue that Internet art shows can attract a "hip" new audience; the demographic needed to build the institution's membership for the future, an Internet art show, in the eyes of a majority of museum institutions, still belongs in the categories of 'less easy to digest for the public' and as such or also 'less likely to attract corporate support'. Yet, an exhibit of Internet art does not need to be costly. All depends on how the artworks are presented in the museum; online, in a lounge or integrated in the gallery spaces (cf. chapter 5). The cost of online presentation of artworks is virtually negligible and it thus comes to no surprise that online Internet art exhibitions arose at the same time the first Internet artworks were created. Also the cost of presenting Internet art works in a medialounge in the gallery space is not too high and becomes close to zero if that medialounge is already a permanent part of the museum as in the case of the Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston (cf. chapter 5). Indeed, besides the fixed costs of installing the medialounge, variable costs most often do not exceed the wage of a web designer and possibly some programming costs. More finances are needed when the Internet art works are presented, integrated within the gallery spaces, but also then the figures depend on the method of installation. In what follows, we will focus on the cost issues related to mounting Internet artworks integrated in the gallery spaces.

Overall, it seems that mounting an Internet art exhibition, even when using physical space and integrated within the galleries, is less costly than mounting any exhibition featuring artworks in more traditional media such as painting, sculpture or for that matter photography.[312] The cost of projectors for large-scale projections, interface designs for Internet art installations (often not a cost for the organizing institution but for the artist) and some technical assistance stay well under the cost of securing loans and art work's

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[311]Anderson, M. L. (2003). Some Connections between arts funding and museum programming. In C. Hawthorne, A. Szanto, M. Shapiro & J. Simon (Eds.). *The New Gate Keepers. Emerging Challenges to Free Expression in the Arts.* National Arts Journalism Program. Columbia University. New York, p.173.

[312] One must note one exception to this general rule: The *Net_Condition* show, organized at ZKM in 1999-2000 was a very costly endeavour, mostly because the exhibition organization invested in the installation designs created for the exhibition.

transportation. And yet, an Internet art exhibition, as Christiane Paul reminds us, is still a 'tough sell' both to sponsors as well as the audience. In addition, the audience attracted to making the trip to the museum to view it, is not particularly that segment of the population likely to spend a large amount of money in the museum gift shop or the – restaurant either.

As such, an Internet art exhibit is unlikely to be self-sustaining. Note that however, this is not necessarily specific to Internet art or new media art exhibits. A show of conceptual art is equally unlikely to be self-sustaining. One could even argue that today, no show is self-sustaining; even the blockbusters, which managed to get museum's finance sheets back in a healthy position in the late 1970s and 1980s, require extensive sponsorship today, both on the level of acquiring the artworks, as well as the organization of the exhibition.

Even if modest in comparison to any other exhibition, financial resources to mount an Internet art show are indispensable. Whereas traditional art shows rely both on the museum's network of collectors (donations or loans) and sponsors (securing loans, transportation, marketing), Internet art shows rely mostly on the organizing museum's (read curator's) network of Internet artists and sponsors (project installment, interface design, and technical assistance in mounting and maintaining the artworks during the show). With an Internet art exhibition (or a new media art exhibition, equally) relying on sponsorship, one can understand the difficulties of organizing one – and therefore the reluctance of museums to engage with it, because as Christiane Paul admits, fundraising for a new media art, networked art or Internet art show is still more difficult than the fundraising for any other type of art show:

> There are certain good matches, but in general [finding sponsors for a new media art show] is more problematic I think. At any company, a sponsor would be more inclined to put their name on a show of Picasso in America than on net art.[313]

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[313] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.

However, as Christiane Paul suggests, there are good matches, and the likelihood of finding them within R&D departments of technology-oriented companies is high. Indeed, the out-of-the-box thinking in which artists are typically strong can be of important influence to the development of novel uses of technology, and indeed commodifiable products. The framework an artist can offer the industry is as important as the framework the industries research and development department offers the artist. When the Whitney Museum of American Art mounted *Datadynamics* in 2001, support was received from the Rockefeller Foundation, but primary sponsor was France Telecom and it was the director of R&D who expressed particular interest. Christiane Paul elaborates: "they're very interested in this type of technology, and are pretty artist-focused in terms of their own R&D. They met all the artists and were discussing collaborations. It was ideal."[314]

That such collaborations can indeed be fruitful for both partners was recently again exemplified in a collaboration between Siemens Automation & Drivers and the artist Kris Vleeschouwer for the production of a networked piece titled *Glassworks*, a collaboration coordinated by the non-profit organization Arteconomy.[315] *Glassworks* connected five glass containers alongside the Brussels main road artery with an installation featuring metal racks full of empty glass bottles in the Brussels art centre Bozar. Every time someone threw a bottle in one of the glass containers, an empty glass bottle in the Bozar dropped to the floor. Although networked, this artwork does not classify as Internet art, yet the collaboration is illustrative and can be imagined for any Internet artwork production as well.

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[314] Cook, S. (March, 2001). *An interview with Christiane Paul.*. Retrieved December 15, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk/crumb/phase3/ipaul.htm
[315] Ruyters, M. (2006). *Kunstenaar & Ondernemers. Een nieuwe relatie.* Heverlee-Leuven: Lannoocampus
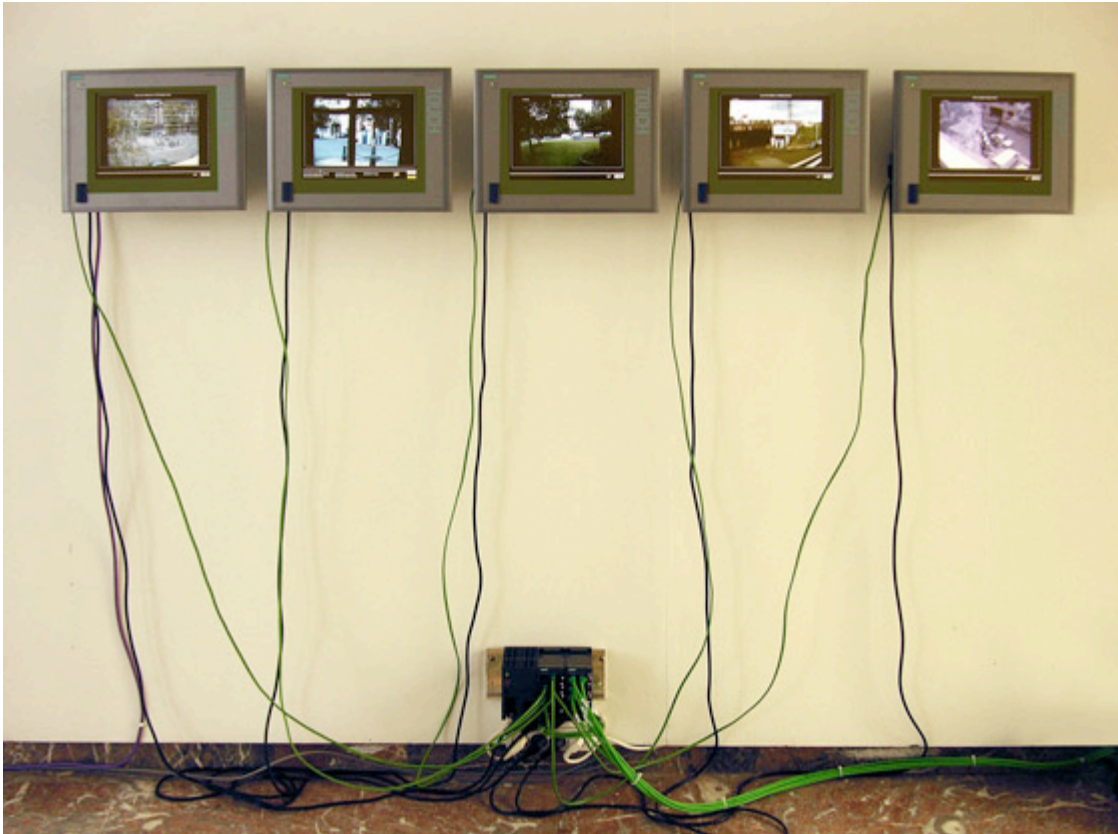
Kris Vleeschouwer – *Glassworks* – 2005 (Sonambiente Festival)

Both partners expressed the benefits experienced from the collaboration; at Siemens, the project instigated an 'out-of-the box-thinking' mentality and the artist received a new framework to work in and with. The size of the project, in addition, attracted interest from both the curatorial world as well as the public at large. As such, also on the traditional level of PR, the collaboration had positive effects, both for the company as well as for the artist. The fact that *Glasswork* received the Prix Jeune Peinture Belge 2005, and was selected for Arco 2006 in Madrid, the Sonambiente Festival 2006 in Berlin and the selection for Shangai 2007, only added to the goals and the positive outcome of the collaboration.[316]

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[316] Ruyters, M. (2006). *Kunstenaar & Ondernemers. Een nieuwe relatie.* Heverlee-Leuven: Lannoocampus, pp. 57-60.

Kris Vleeschouwer – *Glassworks* – 2005 (Sonambiente Festival)

Both examples above show that sponsorship can create mutual benefits for both partners, beyond the classic PR effect. In concordance with the waves of Internet art and new media art exhibitions as discussed and visualized in chapter one, Christiane Paul perceives a change in sponsorship:

> There certainly was [a link with] R&D [during the first wave] but (…) certain shifts have occurred. Perhaps it has become more obvious to the R&D sector how they can benefit from this area or how there can be a mutual supportive exchange and I think that may be more of a current realization. Also the whole perception of the Internet and the net has changed. If you look at social networking having become such a big term with YouTube and My Space and all of these things, that has basically changed – it hasn't changed the Internet, it has always been that – but it has changed the perception of it currently. (…) Also within the corporate or R&D sector, there are changes in the perception of what one can do (…). So I think there is definitely a second wave or a new wave of that. The France

Telecom wave was a different one from the current R&D sector and its interest.[317]

With the possibility for a fruitful collaboration between R&D departments of corporations and artists and art institutions emerging and a more explicit aesthetic system allowing for a better understanding of the art form within the public at large, Internet art shows, or shows incorporating a significant portion of Internet art, might possibly move from the category of 'less easy to digest for the public and as such or also less likely to attract corporate support' to interesting to and engaging for its sponsors as well as the museum visitor. However, the relation between Internet art and the traditional institution for contemporary art is not only colored by discourses on aesthetics and economics. A range of practical issues needs to be addressed, if Internet art is to move from the fringes of the art world into the traditional museum space. The most pressing questions surfacing in this intermediate stage of reflection relate to issues of preservation (cf. supra), as well as exhibition methodologies. It is the latter topic that will be addressed in the fifth and final chapter.

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[317] Verschooren, K. (February 26, 2007). *Interview with Christiane Paul.* Telephone conversation.

Chapter 5. Exhibition methodologies

> Making something accessible to the public doesn't mean making it look like art; it means encapsulating it in a form that can be experienced outside its original context without diminishing its impact.
> Joline Blais and Jon Ippolito[318]

5.1. An important debate

One of the main practical hurdles the Internet art world and traditional art world have to address if Internet art were to seek a more compatible relationship with the museum, deals with exhibition methodologies. These matter greatly, as the exhibition design influences to a great extent people's understanding of an art form and the overall experience. This influence is particularly strong when dealing with time-based art and/or interactive art forms. New media arts curator Sarah Cook illustrates: "Curator Kathy Rae Huffman, speaking of her experience of curating an exhibition of 3D screen and Web-based art, commented that gallery visitors – sitting on low seats at low terminals – talked to each other to figure out how to make the pieces work. The set-up of the exhibition supported a social exchange around the work – which (…) makes a point about how a technological network serves to help generate a corresponding social network."[319] When taken up by the museum, Internet art has largely been presented on the institution's web space with varying degrees of success. However, a number of factors indicate the intermingling of online and offline space both within today's society as a whole, and also within the art world and for Internet art. Whereas Steve Dietz might have been a bit visionary in his introduction to the exhibition *Global Embrace: Telematic Connections: Hybrid realities* at Walker Art Centre in 2001, stating - "In the art world, there has been a debate about 'net art' versus 'real' or physical art, but in the end, the dichotomy will prove false. Works will be physically present and utilize the network. Significant aspects

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[318] Blais, J. & Ippolito, J. (2006). *At the edge of art*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 241
[319] Cook, S. (2006). Context-specific curating on the web (CSCW?). In T. Corby (Ed.) *Network Art: Practices and Positions (Innovations in Art and Design)*. New York: Routledge, p.52.

of a work will be experienced primarily through and on the network. Interactions over distance and time will occur at a particular physical interface."[320] - his words definitely resonate today. The previous chapter discussed this coming together of online and offline space when talking about ubiquitous and mobile computer technologies allowing for a varied set of installations (cf. supra) and creating economic value for a particular Internet art piece. Also Stallabras referred to it when stating: "it is clear, that computer communication is expanding from personal computers to take in devices with embedded chips and wireless links (first mobile phones and security monitors but soon all manner of household appliances, clothing and consumer goods) further eroding the porous distinction between online and offline worlds."[321] As computer technology is expanding, platforms for experiencing Internet art are expanding as well, moving above and beyond the traditional monitor. This increased potential for Internet art installations inherently means a move from Internet art presentation solely in online space to both online as well as gallery spaces and thus requires consideration about its exhibition methodologies in both of these sites.

5.2. An ongoing debate

As long as there have been museums there have been questions about exhibition methodologies. The dominating white cube aesthetic presented itself as a strong party to the manifold challenges it was confronted with. The introduction of photography in gallery space went, in this regard, rather smoothly. In the end, a photograph resembles a painting in its requirements for presentation in an exhibition. However, the dadaist and surrealist movements of the 1930s were not that pleased with the contemporary presentation style in which artworks were traditionally presented in isolation, drained from any context, ready for pure object focused aesthetic contemplation. They reacted, for instance, rather fiercely against the 1936 exhibition *Fantastic Art, Dada and*

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[320] Cook, S. (2006). Context-specific curating on the web (CSCW?). In T. Corby (Ed.) *Network Art: Practices and Positions (Innovations in Art and Design)*. New York: Routledge, p.49.
[321] Stallabrass, J. (2003). *Internet art: the online clash of culture and commerce.* London: Tate Publishers, p.11.

Surrealism at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, and – under the direction of Marcel Duchamp - mounted an alternative exhibition in the Galerie des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Designed as a creative act in itself, *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, presented the dressed-up patrons with Salvador Dali's *Rainy Taxi* (an old taxi rigged to produce a steady drizzle of water down the inside of the windows, and a shark-headed creature in the driver's seat and a blond mannequin crawling with live snails in the back) at the entrance. The main hall was designed to look like a subterranean cave with 1,200 coal bags suspended from the ceiling over a coal brazier[322] with a single light bulb, which provided the only lighting, so patrons were given flashlights to view the art. The floor was carpeted with dead leaves, ferns and grasses and the aroma of roasting coffee filled the air. Much to the Surrealists' satisfaction the exhibition scandalized the viewers.[323] In the 1960s another moment of uproar by the Art Workers Coalition, who reacted against the drain of social relevance of artworks within the museum, shook up the art world and questioned the ideology of exhibition methodologies. Another challenge the white-cube aesthetics had to deal with in the past couple of decades, which – contrary to the previous challenges - fundamentally changed the interior design of today's museums for contemporary art with the introduction of the black box, was video art. Indeed, in video art's final turn towards the museum space, the main question to be solved did not relate to the ontology of the medium and the justification of its artistic and aesthetic qualities (photography), but rather to questions of exhibition methodologies. As Samuel R. Delany wrote in his *Introduction to Video Spaces, Eight Installations*, a show organized by the MoMA in 1995: "Beginning as an accommodation for art that erupted beyond the physical confines ordinarily associated with the picture frame and the pedestal, the video installation collapses the distinction between painting (images presented along a wall) and sculpture (images standing free of those walls and commanding space and air). Between interior and exterior, present and future."[324] The statement clearly illustrates that attempts to describe or understand a new art form often refer to previous art forms. As Robert Steams, then director of The Kitchen center for Video and Music put it in the

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[322] Elaine Sturtevant appropriated this seminal piece in "*Duchamp 1200 Coal Bags*", most recently installed at the Whitney Biennial 2006. The work comprises a room filled with exact copies of such revolutionary Duchamp works as "*Bicycle Wheel*," "*Fountain*," and "*Nude Descendant un Escalier*."

[323] Tomkins, C. (1996). *Duchamp: a biography.* New York: Henry Holt & Company, pp. 312-313.

[324] London, B. (1995). *Video Spaces. Eight Installations.* New York: The Museum of Modern Art, p.11

1970s: "Video as art, video as used by artists, is presented in formats reminiscent of painting and sculpture; it is offered in large-screen format with schedules similar to film showings; it is produced in multiples and marketed like objects as many of its early adherents thought, and hoped, it never would be. It is treated by some artists as a replacement for live performance."[325] Speaking to his own circle he adds: "Those of us who present it must look for ways to allow video to make its own qualities clear and clearly felt."[326] As such, doubts about how to exhibit certain art forms have proven not only to delay the full inclusion of an art form within the museum space, but also when included, to limit the variations of that art form to those understandable in terms of existing and already established art forms.

Art history thus shows that artists often created work that existing exhibition facilities could not readily accommodate. The practices discussed above were eventually, in spite of their difficulties, incorporated in the traditional museum space and thus included in our general understanding of the fine arts. However, other practices such as stereoscopic imagery and holography, as mentioned before, were less fortunate (or fortunate, depending on one's perspective). That Internet art forms another challenge to the existing exhibition facilities seems definitely true, as in its pure form, the Internet artwork does not acknowledge physical space. Some possible solutions can be found in the adaptation of the work by the artist, the expanding of formats and resources used by traditional art institutions or the search for alternative, non-standard distribution channels, adventurous entrepreneurs and audiences. While the Internet art world has primarily utilized the last strategy, relying on networked communities, online non-profit organizations, new media art centers, and daring galleries such as Bitforms and Postmasters, a combination of the first two strategies is not unimaginable. Indeed, working on exhibition methodologies can never be just the task of the museum curator or the artist, but should emerge as a result of collaboration between the two parties.

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[325] Schneider, I. & Korot, B. (1976). *Video art: an anthology.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, p.161
[326] Schneider, I. & Korot, B. (1976). *Video art: an anthology.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, p.161

The following sections discuss exhibition methodologies for three models of Internet art incorporation in the museum or institution's space, be it their online or offline space.

5.3. Three levels of incorporation

Inspired by a Christiane Paul's 2006 writing on *The Myth of Immateriality – Presenting and Preserving New Media*, we will distinguish three models of inclusion for Internet art in the traditional museum. Whereas Paul makes a distinction between 'integration' of new media in the galleries together with other art forms or its 'separation' in a specific new media space or lounge, I would suggest to re-appropriate the use of the term 'separation' and include a third category which we can call 'sepagration'. As such, 'Internet art integration' refers to the inclusion of Internet art in the galleries together with other art forms, 'Internet art sepagration' refers to the presentation of Internet art within the museum space, but in a separate media-room or -lounge and 'Internet art separation' indicates the inclusion of Internet artworks solely on the institution's or museum's website, in an online repository or archive. Note that this categorization, in first instance, is not intended to impose a value judgment on the different types of inclusion. In other words, Internet art integrated in the gallery space is not necessarily 'better' than Internet art presented solely online through the institution's or museum's website. Rather, every Internet artwork must be understood individually to determine the most appropriate form of presentation within the institution. Each model of inclusion has advantages and disadvantages and will as such, be more appropriate to one or another Internet art work. As with all new media art works, decisions have to be made on a case-by-case basis and should ultimately depend on the conceptual requirements of the artwork itself.

5.3.1. 'Separation'

Although the use of the term 'separation' tends to hold a negative connotation, especially in the context of talking about an art form's integration in the museum space, it should, in this text, at least in first instance merely be understood as the separation of the Internet artwork from the *physical* gallery space, the geographical site of the museum or institution. As chapter one revealed, the inclusion of Internet art on the websites of the museum or institution has so far been the most commonly used strategy to present Internet art in an institutional context.

Advantages of this strategy can be found primarily in the preservation of the original context of how the art - especially a lot of earlier Internet art - is supposed to be seen. In addition, it doesn't require the visitor to come to the museum space, to pay an entrance fee or to make a suggested donation. The web tourist can, in the comfort of his/her home, office, library, wherever he or she finds access to the web, enjoy the pleasures (and pains) of Internet art. However, it is also in this ephemeral, but existent connection with the institution or museum that we can find the first disadvantage of this strategy: the institution, although adding its name to the Internet artwork, has only limited control over the conditions in which the viewer experiences the artwork. Christiane Paul explains:

> Net art projects have numerous requirements, ranging from browser versions to plug-ins, minimum resolution, window size, etc. Some of these requirements can be accommodated on the museum's side, but most of them have to be fulfilled at the viewer's end. (…). Viewers may perceive their inability to view a work (because their computer, monitor, or connection does not support its technical requirements) as more annoying if they took the time to 'visit' an exhibition organized by a museum or arts organization, which they hold responsible for providing a certain quality of the experience of art.[327]

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[327] Paul, C. (2005). *Flexible contexts, democratic filtering and computer-aided curating: models for online curatorial practice.* Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.anti-thesis.net/texts/DB/DB03/Paul.pdf, p.93

In addition, one can question who the public is that visits these online art repositories on the museum's website. Do such sites really succeed in attracting a broad public or are they limited to those already informed about this latest new media art practice?

That said, a number of the institutions and museums discussed in chapter one, have, regardless of this disadvantage, curated online art on their web server. Some have been more successful at recreating a 'living', discursive environment' for their online art websites than others, who have stayed largely self-centered in their focus on the museum's or institution's operation; its exhibitions, programmes and collections. Christiane Paul points in the first place to Steve Dietz's work within the Walker Art Center's online exhibition space *Gallery 9* and the 1998 incorporated äda'web site of Benjamin Weil. Indeed, as discussed in chapter one, the Walker Art Center holds with this site one of the most extensive online repositories for Internet art, including commissions, interface experiments, exhibitions, community discussions, a study collection, hyperessays, filtered links and lectures. Also the Whitney museum's *ARTPORT*, created with *Gallery 9* in mind, deserves mentioning here, as one of the most extensive websites for online art within an institutional context. *ARTPORT*, just like *Gallery 9* takes great effort to filter and contextualize the artistic practice of Internet artists. Also Tate's Internet art site and SFMoMA's E-space provide context for the commissioned work with their respective incorporation of critical texts and artists' statements and links. The DIA center's web project's site would benefit from more context information and also MoMA, the Guggenheim, Centre Pompidou, MuHKA and SMAK have clearly more work to do.
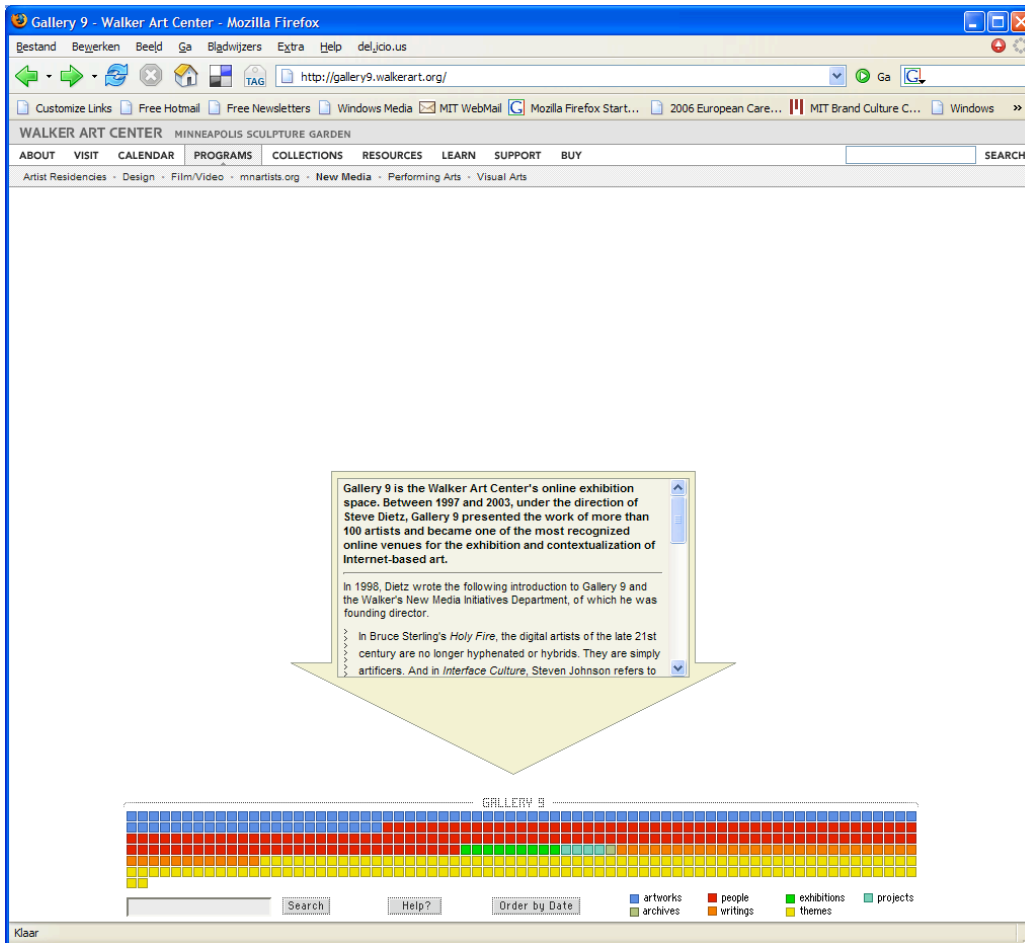
Screenshot: Walker Art Center – Gallery 9[328]

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[328] Walker Art Center (2007). *Gallery 9.* Screenshot retrieved February 7, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://gallery9.walkerart.org/
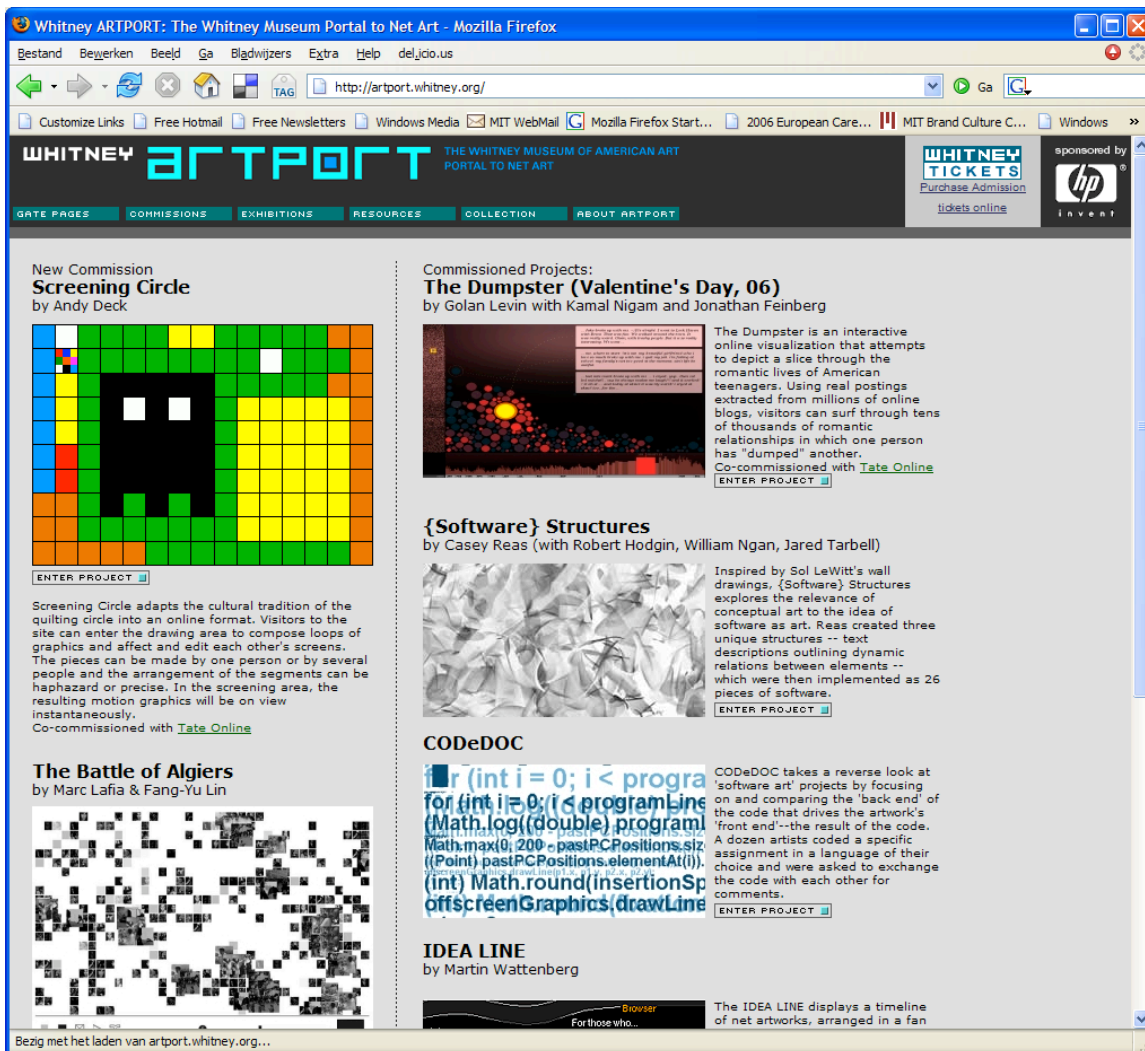
Screenshot: Whitney Museum of American Art – ARTPORT[329]

Passing from the descriptive to the evaluative, we might wonder - with more and more traditional institutions for contemporary art opening their web space and/or commissioning Internet art - what this involvement entails. Can the Internet art community cheer victory for the incorporation of Internet art into the museum space, be it on their website and in the more elaborate models of the Walker Art Center and the Whitney Museum of American Art or are these still forms of marginalized inclusion? Charlie Gere reverses the question in his essay *Network art and the Networked Gallery*, published on Tate's website. He questions not what the online inclusion means for

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[329] Whitney Museum of American Art (2007). *ARTPORT.* Screenshot retrieved February 7, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://artport.whitney.org/

Internet art as an art form, but how it impacts our understanding of the institution as a whole. He concludes:

> In fact, as far as Tate is concerned, the answer is straightforward (or at least appears to be). The website is the sixth Tate site, after Tate Britain, Modern, St Ives, Liverpool and Tate Store. (…). Rather than a marginal form of art practice shoved to the edges, they are central to the new conception of Tate as a networked virtual institution. (…). In becoming a network Tate ceased to be primarily a physical entity, a building, and became instead a sign or brand that could be applied to different places, processes and activities.[330]

However, this statement implies that indeed, the audience perceives the institution as a networked virtual institution. Whereas I agree with the statement that museums increasingly become branded entities, I doubt that the museum going public today positions a museum branded online site on an equal level as its offline sites. Even within an institution like Tate where the external communication clearly indicates the desire for Tate Online to be understood as the sixth site, this doubt receives support. Tate's Head of Digital Programmes, Jemima Rellie:

> Nick Serota thinks [Internet art] should be [integrated into the gallery spaces of Tate Modern]. I think what it reveals is that the physical spaces still continue to hold slightly more respect or something like that. Integrating [Internet artworks] into Tate Modern, I think, is really Tate wishing to state that it does consider this type of art to be as important as the material objects that are also on display within those walls.[331]

Agreeing with Ms. Rellie, I believe that in the end, even the most extensive online sites, curated within the institution, can be called marginal in the number and broadness of the public it attracts and the institution's commitment to the art form it communicates. Even though some Internet artworks require and thus benefit from a single screen, single participant situation, I believe its inclusion in the gallery space, if so in a separate

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[330] Gere, C. (2006). *Network Art and the Networked Gallery.* Retrieved May 13, 2006, from the World Wide Web: URL: http://www.tate.org.uk/netart/networkgallery.htm
[331] Verschooren, K. (April 10, 2007). *Interview with Jemima Rellie.* Telephone conversation.

medialounge, is desired. As such 'separation' might in the end be understood as a first – and necessary – step towards 'sepagration.'[332]

5.3.2. 'Sepagration'

In what I have called 'sepagration', the Internet artworks are integrated into the museum or institution's gallery space, yet separated from other art forms in a medialounge or 'dark' room. A prime and most recent example of this strategy can be found in the new building of the Institute for Contemporary Art in Boston, designed by architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro and overlooking the Boston Harbor.

The Poss Family Mediatheque – Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston[333]

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[332] Note that there are alternative models of online curation standing alongside sites such as *Gallery 9* or *Artport*, which still follow the traditional curatorial model of one curator exerting practices of selection and filtering within an institution. One must mention sites and online exhibitions organized by individual, independent curators (*äda''web* before its inclusion in *Gallery 9*) and sites curated by non-profit organization (*Turbulence.org*). Also the public or even software systems can become curating mechanisms for the creation of online exhibitions. One can find more information in Paul, C. (2005). *Flexible contexts, democratic filtering and computer-aided curating: models for online curatorial practice.* Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.anti-thesis.net/texts/DB/DB03/Paul.pdf

The Poss Family Mediatheque presents a cantilevered space with a view leaning out onto the water of Boston Harbor, and is equipped with computer stations through which one can access digital resources about artists, videos, and information about exhibitions and contemporary art, but also ICA's Artist Web Projects. What the latter will contain is 'coming soon.'[334]

In the ICA – in contrast to many other museums and institutions for modern art – the separation of the digital resources and Internet artworks in a media lounge is not so much a matter of logistics, but rather a matter of sponsoring which, with regard to the medialounge, was provided by the Poss Family.

"Sepagration" as an exhibition strategy allows first and foremost a broader audience for Internet art related projects. A broader audience, that – in coming to the museum – has prepared itself for aesthetic contemplation and intake. In other words, it is an audience that has time and is willing to "look at things." In addition, the institution and/or museum has more control over the conditions and circumstances in which the art work is seen, both on the level of hardware and software requirements for each Internet artwork, as well as the environmental components of the aesthetic experience. The presence of Internet artworks in the museum space, even if it is "just" on the museum's website in a designated mediatheque or medialounge, also communicates a more serious ongoing engagement with the art form and its acceptance as a valuable aesthetic practice.

The critique on this strategy has been inspired by the critique usually formulated towards new media art centers: It is understood as "contributing to the separation of the art form from more traditional media and epitomizing the uneasy relationship that institutions tend to have with the medium at this point in time."[335] While I understand that presenting Internet art in a room, separated from art forms working with other media entails some

[333] Karas Glass Company Inc (2007). *Institute of Contemporary Art*. Image retrieved April 13, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.karasglass.com/Web%20pages/ica.htm
[334] ICA (2007). Artist Web Projects. Retrieved February 7, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.icaboston.org/gofurther/artist-web-projects/
[335] Paul, C. (2007). The myth of immateriality – presenting & preserving new media. In O. Grau (Ed.). *MediaArtHistories*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

problems, I do think this critique is more justified vis-à-vis new media art centers, in which overall no other artworks are to be found and for which the separation includes many more miles than the few feet it involves in the museum space. What is more disturbing in my opinion is the juxtaposition of artist's web projects and the digital resources about artists, exhibitions, etc. It allows for the confusion of what constitutes an artwork and what is "mere" documentation. Note that this was the primary reason for Benjamin Weil not to include Internet art projects on-site in the *010101 Art in Technological Times* exhibit, as an internet station on-site would inevitably be appropriated by the education department, the publications department, the marketing department, etc. (cf. supra). However, within the "sepagration" strategy, the splitting up of a medialounge into, let's say, an Internet art lounge and a digital resources lounge - preferably in two rooms – can offer a solution. It would not only separate the documentation from the art, but also leverage the Internet artworks to the same level as video art, which is still often presented in black boxes spread throughout the museum. However, the reservation of a space for Internet artworks solely would require a continued engagement of the museum vis-à-vis Internet art, in terms of continuous programming. Maybe today, this is still too much to ask from the traditional museums and institutions.

The 'sepagration' strategy is realistic, valuable and for some Internet artworks probably the only plausible one within a museum setting. Just as some video artworks are preferably viewed in isolation from other pieces – not just because of the technical requirements, but also because of the artworks themselves – some Internet artworks are simply meant to be seen in a one-to-one setting; the first one to be understood as the viewer/participant, the second one to be understood as the monitor/artist. That said, the strategy finds itself still in its early years, with room for improvement. Reserving a set of separate stations for Internet art within the media lounge is a realistic step in that direction. Presenting Internet artworks in a separate 'black box' might be even better.

5.3.2. 'Integration'

Not all Internet artworks, however, require an isolated setting with an emphasis on their "netness"[336], allowing for an intimate relation between viewer/participant and computer screen/artist. Indeed, some Internet artworks require multiple viewers/participants, conceive a viewer's participation as a performance to be watched by others, address notions of space or beg to break out of the browser window. These artworks benefit from presentation through the 'integration' model, referring to all instances in which Internet artworks are found, between and betwixt art pieces working with different media. This inclusion model exceeds the limits the medium has posed upon the practicalities of exhibition design and works can be joined or separated based on their content, theme, historical connections or any other curatorial intent behind an exhibition. However it is also within this model that the uncertainty in terms of exhibition methodologies is greatest. In general, one can identify two levels upon which questions have surfaced; an exterior level or what the museum visitor would perceive as the installation or projection, and an interior level or which demands the installation puts upon the Internet artworks it embodies, as well as the scale of Internet connections retained.

Although not too frequent, Internet artworks have in the past been presented according to the 'integration' model and different strategies have been applied, some more, others less successful. Even though one is still looking for the most appropriate exhibition strategies, at least curators and artists agree about one thing: putting a computer in the gallery will not do the trick. As Cory Arcangel put it:

> You can't just put a computer with a browser that's pointing to a website. You have to somehow acknowledge that it is in a gallery, for good or bad. Video, I think started to do that. (…) We'll have to deal with the same things, well Internet art has a different series of concerns, but you'll have to start dealing with the question what does the gallery do to that work.[337]

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[336] Paul, C. (2007). The myth of immateriality – presenting & preserving new media. In O. Grau (Ed.). *MediaArtHistories*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
[337] Verschooren, K. (March 11th, 2006). *Interview with Cory Arcangel*. Eyebeam Ateliers, New York.

As Christiane Paul put it: "the basic arrangement of a laptop or computer / screen on a desk may provide the 'natural environment' in which people usually interact with computers or surf the Internet but this set-up usually seems out of context within a museum space and creates an undesirable office environment."[338] Unfortunately, a number of Internet art exhibitions were designed precisely like this. New York Postmasters Gallery was one of them. Sponsored by Sony Electronics Inc., Proxima, gallery owners Magdalena Sawon and Tamas Banovich mounted one of the very first Internet art exhibitions between March 16 and April 13, 1996 titled *Can You Digit*? Incorporated in every Internet art book for its pioneering role in on-site exhibitions of Internet art, this gallery still needed to invent the wheel in terms of exhibition methodologies for the emerging art form. In their attempt, they displayed the projects individually, one-per-monitor on twenty-five screens with more works stored and available for viewing on additional computer(s).[339] The visitor could literally walk his way through all the artworks 'on display', which featured amongst others Erik Adigard/M.A.D., Ken Feingold, Perry Hoberman, George Legrady, Stephen Linhart, Gerard Lynn, Mark Madel and Lev Manovich. Although praised for their courageous step in exhibiting these works as early as the 1996, the exhibition design was deemed unfortunate and as Postmaster experimented with methods of selling the (archives of the) works, burned on disk or CD-ROM, Internet artist, critic and writer Robbin Murphy stated in his review for Artnetweb[340]: "the overall environment isn't a great deal different from the Tower Record store a few blocks north where consumers can take a test listen of a CD before purchasing."[341]

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[338] Paul, C. (2007). The myth of immateriality – presenting & preserving new media. In O. Grau (Ed.). *MediaArtHistories*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

[339] The exhibit also included two larger installations: *"Variations on Cryptography"* - a project by a group i/o360 which explores some of cryptography's practical and non-practical manifestations and methods of encryption and *"The Dead Souls"* - an interactive, virtual reality game-adventure by Janine Cirincione and Michael Ferraro. However, the majority of the pieces were presented as described above.

[340] Artnetweb is "a network of people and projects investigating new media in the practice of art." Artnetweb (2007). *Index*. Retrieved April 17, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://artnetweb.com/index.htm

[341] Murphy, R. (1996). *Artnetweb. Announcements*. Retrieved April 17, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://artnetweb.com/announce/announce.html

"Can you Digit' – Postmasters Gallery, New York, 1996[342]

The prime example of how not to present Internet art followed merely a couple of months later, when the art form was included in the Documenta X in Kassel. In a separate pavilion, the Internet art works were presented in a recreated office environment, causing great disturbance within the then called 'net' artists community.

Internet art exhibits have since come a long way in terms of design methodologies for the presentation of Internet artworks. Designers, curators and artists alike have understood that indeed, one needs to acknowledge the physicality of the space the work is presented in, and lines of monitors and office spaces have given way to projected screens and Internet art installations. However, while the examples below present installation designs

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[342] Postmasters Gallery (1996). *Can You Digit?* Picture retrieved May 9, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.postmastersart.com/digit/id.html

that do make sense in the context of presenting Internet art works, their demands on the Internet artworks it encompassed or their loss of connection with the Internet as a primary context for the art piece, have been factors of dispute. In other words, while their 'exterior design' in general has been successful, their 'interior design' has varied enormously.

Probably one of the most contested exhibition designs with regard to Internet art was the 1999 show *Net_Condition*, curated by Peter Weibel at the ZKM. The exhibition featured 69 artists and medialabs, presented in a media lounge, as well as in different galleries through projections and installations, and openly reflected on the question "can net-art really be exhibited?"[343] They definitely tried. Combining all three models of inclusion, the ZKM featured Internet art works on their website, in a medialounge and in the gallery spaces. Some Internet artworks were accessible both online as well as onsite, while others could only be fully experienced on-site.

The Lounge (Archived webcam view) – Net_Condition ZKM 1999-2000[344]

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[343] Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe (2006). *Net_Condition.* Retrieved February 15, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://on1.zkm.de/netcondition/start/language/default_e
[344] Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe (2006). *Net_Condition: the lounge.* Picture retrieved May 6, 2006 from the World Wide Web: http://on1.zkm.de/netcondition/navigation/live/default_e

The medialounge, besides carrying all Internet artworks or at least their documentation (illustrating the disadvantage of possible confusion between artwork and documentation as described above), was also the site for lectures, performances and panel discussions, all of which were broadcast live on the Internet and recorded such that they are still available today.[345]

Less well documented are the installations and projections within the gallery. One of the works on display was Jeffrey Shaw's *Net.Art Browser*, curated by Benjamin Weil. This network installation was – according to Shaw – "a means of conjoining information space with the museum space and hybridizing the interactivity of surfing the Internet with the museum tradition of wall mounted images."[346] The *Net.Art Browser*'s web sites were thus displayed side by side along a white wall. A motorized large flat screen (linked to a cable less keyboard) allowed the viewer to move this display window linearly from one Internet-connected web site to another.[347] Making complete sense as a portal to Internet art, allowing for a different way of browsing, if you will, this installation did trouble the artworks it entailed on a technological level. As Benjamin Weil recalls:

> There was a lot of discussion, because a lot of money was spent on developing the web browser: the wall label said 'Jeffrey Shaw - web browser', and then it said 'containing the work of…' as if Jeffrey had appropriated the work of other people. The thing was encoded in such a way that rather than being open source, it was only compatible with Internet Explorer, which meant that all the artist's works had to be compatible with Internet Explorer, which in turn meant some of them had to recode their work so that it worked properly.[348]

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[345] Zentrum für Kunst und Medientechnologie Karlsruhe (2006). *Net_Condition: the lounge.* Retrieved February 15, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://on1.zkm.de/netcondition/thelounge/default_e

[346] Shaw, J. (1999). *The Net.Art Browser.* Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.jeffrey-shaw.net/html_main/show_work.php3?record_id=106

[347] Shaw, J. (1999). *The Net.Art Browser.* Retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.jeffrey-shaw.net/html_main/show_work.php3?record_id=106

[348] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil.* New York.

Net.Art Browser – Jeffrey Shaw – net_condition ZKM 1999-2000[349]

Net_Condition was the first large-scale exhibition of Internet artworks, mounted as one giant experiment and also understood that way by its curators:

> It was a really interesting idea, and the way that it was carried out, at the time, caused a lot of frustration; it was like 'guys do you really know what you are doing or are you completely out of your mind.' A whole number of really problematic things happened, but I think that if one doesn't take any risks, trying to address the really compelling issues at stake, there is no way of finding out whether it is a good or bad idea. I think that it was a really important show to make happen, whether it was a success or failure.[350]

Although Weil emphasizes the importance of the exhibit, the general assessment of the show was negative and this in turn had a considerable influence for future exhibition strategies, especially for new media art curators working within established institutions and looking at the experiences of new media art centers. Illustrative in this regard is the

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[349] Shaw, J. (1999). *The Net.Art Browser*. Picture retrieved November 7, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.jeffrey-shaw.net/html_main/show_work.php3?record_id=106

[350] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil*. New York.

story of Matthew Gansallo's decision to showcase Internet art online. As Tate's first curator, assigned by Sandy Nairne, director of National Programs, to commission artists to make works for Tate's brand new website anno 2000, he visited the *Net_Condition* show in preparation of his commissions. In an interview with Sarah Cook for the CRUMB platform he states: "What made me very sure about wanting to put it online was after seeing *Net_Condition*. We spoke to Peter Weibel, and I looked at it and I was more determined to have it more strictly online and not in a gallery space. It was good to go, and we read Alexei Shulgin's work created in response about museums, which was great. And at the time - with Tate Modern about to open - I had to think carefully about the space and ask myself, is it wise [to put this work in it]?"[351] Reading through this statement and other critiques uttered, however, they all seem to have more to do with failing technologies and ideological arguments against the inclusion of Internet art into museum spaces, rather than the particular *way* in which it was done at *Net_Condition*. *Net_Condition* showed that it was possible to create engaging installations, with interesting design elements, rich in heuristics, but pointed at the same time to the need for reflection on the 'interior design' element of the installations. Rather than further addressing the challenges posed by presenting Internet art in the physical gallery space, curators diverted to a large extent to the easier option proposed in the 'separation' model.

Fortunately, the ZKM evaluation did not have the same effect everywhere. In contrast to Tate, the Walker Art Center did venture into the challenge of incorporating Internet art in the museum space and it resulted in one of the most successful installations so far. Indeed, a little less than a year after *Shock of the View* and now with even more Internet artworks in the collection, Walker organized its third large online exhibition: *Art Entertainment Network*. However, this time, Walker took its engagement with Internet art one step further, from online to on-site. Having decided that they wanted to incorporate the Internet art pieces into the concurrent running on-site exhibition of visual arts and realizing that it would take more than a set of computers, the Walker commissioned a New York design team, Antenna Design, to create a physical interface. As such, from

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[351] Cook, S. (2000). *An interview with Matthew Gansallo*. Retrieved June 13, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.newmedia.sunderland.ac.uk/crumb/phase3/nmc_intvw_gansallo.html

February 12 - April 30, 2000 *Art Entertainment Network* was presented in the Walker Art Center's exhibition *Let's Entertain* via a specially designed portal, a freestanding revolving door with an embedded computer screen.

Art Entertainment Network in Let's Entertain – Walker Art Center 2000[352]

The freestanding revolving door, as such acted as a portal between the physical space of the exhibition and the virtual space of the online artworks. Pushing the door, allowed the visitor to call up the home page of each Internet art piece. Subsequent interaction was accounted for via a touch pad. The design allowed for a perfect inclusion with the other art works on display and adapted the Internet artworks to the physicality of the space. At the same time, it was deemed 'appropriate to the concept of the online interface – as a

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[352] Dietz, S. (2003). Interfacing the digital. *Museums and the Web03 Papers.* Picture retrieved November 17, 2005, from http://www.archimuse.com/mw2003/papers/dietz/dietz.html

portal.' Other factors mentioned in explaining the design of the portal were the goal of creating a casual browsing situation, in concordance with general gallery behavior, and the availability of printed bookmarks next to a didactic label, allowing visitors to log on to the site at their convenience and in their favorite viewing position."[353] These reflections about exhibition methodologies for Internet art, which resulted in the design of the revolving door, already hint at the requirements and challenges for Internet art presentation.

Also the Whitney Museum of American art sought to incorporate Internet art into its museum spaces. When the art form was included as a separate category in the Biennials of 2000 and 2002, the series of Internet art works were presented on-site in a separate gallery, where a computer station gave the visitor access to the homepage, allowing for browsing through the different art projects, which were subsequently projected on a large screen. In *Bitstreams* and *Datadynamics*, as described in chapter one, the Internet art works were primarily presented as installations. For *Data Dynamics*, a show launched in March 2001, focusing on the data visualization subset of Internet art, Whitney commissioned five artworks, amongst which were Mark Napier's *Point to Point*, Adrianne Wortzel's *Camouflage Town* and Martin Wattenberg's *Apartment*. The Internet art projects were both exhibited as installations on the ground-floor project space of the Museum as well as in Whitney's online gallery. Added to *BitStreams*, which incorporated another twenty-three artists working with digital technology and twenty-five works of sound art installed in a listening corridor, both exhibits had to offer the visitor an overview of what was happening within the digital arts.

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[353] Dietz, S. (2003). Interfacing the digital. *Museums and the Web03 Papers.* Picture retrieved November 17, 2005, from http://www.archimuse.com/mw2003/papers/dietz/dietz.html

Apartment – Martin Wattenberg – Datadynamics – Whitney Museum of American Art 2001[354]

In response to the Whitney's *BitStreams* exhibit, art critic Barbara Pollack acknowledged the difficulty in incorporating digital art into the traditional museum and praised the easy navigation through the exhibit, as well as the professionalism in preventing disruptions in transmissions and other meltdowns,[355] addressing important factors in creating an exhibition methodology for Internet art. Focusing on the Internet art show add on of *Bitstreams*, *Data Dynamics*, Pollack clearly agrees with Cory Arcangel's plea for not just

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[354] Whitney Museum of American Art (2001) *Apartment*. Picture retrieved February 13, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://artport.whitney.org/exhibitions/datadynamics/walczak.shtml

[355] Pollack, B. (September 2001). Back to the future with "Bitstreams" [Electronic Version]. *Art in America Vol 89 (9),* 61-63.

putting a computer in the gallery space: "In that exhibition [*Data Dynamics*] the most successful pieces were free from computer stations."[356]

Camouflage Town – Adrianne Wortzel - Datadynamics – Whitney Museum of American Art 2001[357]

Besides these installations, the most common presentation technique has been the large-scale projection. Especially for those institutions working with smaller budgets or staging short-term exhibitions, projections have been the easiest, fastest and most cost-effective way to present Internet art in space. DIA's web projects, for example, have all received a

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[356] Pollack, B. (September 2001). Back to the future with "Bitstreams" [Electronic Version]. *Art in America Vol 89 (9),* 61-63.

[357] Whitney Museum of American Art (2001) *Camouflage Town*. Picture retrieved February 13, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://artport.whitney.org/exhibitions/datadynamics/wortzel.shtml

launch event, in which large-scale projections present the artwork. Also Eyebeam has primarily used projection as its means of exhibiting Internet art. In its 2003 solo show of Jodi; *INSTALL.EXE*, artworks were shown through a combination of computer terminals inviting individual interaction and large projections, inviting collective contemplation.

INSTALL.EXE - Eyebeam 2003[358]

INSTALL.EXE - Eyebeam 2003[359]

Whether presented as an installation or projected onto the gallery wall, a crucial point of difficulty remains the scope of connectivity that is allowed. In the past, a lot of the

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[358] Jodi Install.exe at Eyebeam 2003 (2003) Picture retrieved May 9, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.mteww.com/jodi_installexe/index-Pages/Image12.html

[359] Jodi Install.exe at Eyebeam 2003 (2003) Picture retrieved May 9, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.mteww.com/jodi_installexe/index-Pages/Image12.html

exhibits showing Internet art on-site have limited the access provided to the Internet artworks and the links they require. As such, Internet artworks have mostly been separated from the primary context they live in. The reasoning is mainly inspired by a fear of inappropriate use of the network connection. Benjamin Weil explains:

> The moment you start putting people online, the fear is that people are going to want to check their email, and the fact of the matter is, yes they might, but my guess is they won't because it's projected onto a large screen and you don't necessarily want to show the world what your inbox looks like. Or some people - clearly provocation - would try to download porn pages, but I mean come on guys.[360]

Although Weil deems them rather irrational, these fears might be considered just when the artwork (in the medialounge or in the gallery space) allows for a one-on-one interaction and social pressure from fellow museumgoers and guards are less successful in reinforcing the closure of the Internet art. When presented as a large-scale projection though, learned museum behavior, social pressure and if necessary a word from the guard can indeed be sufficient to avoid the dissection of the Internet artwork from its primary context, at least on a technical level. One could argue however, that in the case no technical closure is arranged for, but where social pressure and guard reinforcement succeeds, the dissection of the Internet artwork from the Internet context at large - although imaginary – is still the result. One thus has to choose between allowing the Internet art participant to access the entire Internet, which might be possible in a one-on-one situation in a lounge setting, or accepting this trade-off as a sacrifice that needs to be made when Internet artworks are presented within the museum space.

It is thus clear that within this last inclusion model of 'integration', reflection about exhibition methodologies is most needed and, fortunately, a number of institutions are putting their heads and energy together. 'Electronic Arts Intermix' has recently uploaded an 'Online Resource Guide for Exhibiting, Collecting & Preserving Media art,'[361] a practice oriented guide for the new media art curator and exhibition designer including

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[360] Verschooren, K. (February 17, 2007). *Interview with Benjamin Weil.* New York.
[361] Electronic Arts Intermix (2007). *Online Resource Guide for Exhibiting, collecting & Preserving Media art.* Retrieved March 15, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://resourceguide.eai.org/

best practice suggestions, answers to basic questions, an outline of the planning process, and templates of agreements/contracts and budgets, and this for the categories of single-channel video, computer-based arts and installation. The guide's recommendations are supported by a number of interviews with people in the field, case studies and articles.[362] Also European institutions are teaming up for the research project 'Inside Installations: Mapping the Studio II', which focuses on the question of how do museums preserve and present installation art. The project is coordinated by the Netherlands Institute for Cultural Heritage (ICN) and co-organised by Tate, United Kingdom; Restaurierungzentrum Düsseldorf, Germany; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Spain; Stedelijk Museum voor Actuele Kunst (SMAK), Belgium; and the Foundation for the Conservation of Contemporary Art, The Netherlands.[363]

5.4. Requirements to present Internet art in the museum space

Internet artworks have some particular requirements in terms of their presentation and most arise from the possible characteristics of the artwork. An Internet artwork, because of the medium it works with, is context-oriented, time-based, dynamic and can, but does not necessarily have to be, interactive, participatory and variable. Each of these characteristics imposes its own requirements on the presentation of the artwork.

One of the primary concerns for the institution or museum space in presenting Internet art can be found in the provision of context information. And this should not surprise us: If we can understand Internet art as one of the creative products of a "foreign" culture (as argued in chapter 3), this demand for context information is as self-evident as the request

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[362] In terms of the advice giving for the preservation of computer-based artworks, it is clear that EAI's Online Resource Guide heavily draws on the research from the Variable Media Initiative (VMI), initiated by Jon Ippolito, Alain Depocas and Caitlin Jones in 2001. The sources used are all directly or indirectly linked to the VMI and explicit links to The Variable Media Network, but also Media Matters (the research group from New Art Trust, MoMA, SFMoMA and Tate, focusing on preservation strategies of time-based media works of art) are made.

[363] Tate Research (2007). *Research Projects: "Inside Installations: Mapping the Studio II".* Retrieved March 15, 2007, from the World Wide Web: http://www.tate.org.uk/research/tateresearch/majorprojects/inside_installations.htm

to show an African mask not isolated in a glass case, but together with the costume it belongs to and the ritual it is made for. To allow for each artwork to be appreciated on its own terms, the possibility of listening to an explicitation of the aesthetic at play seems needed. In addition, the visitor who wishes so, should be able to receive information about the cultural context out of which the art object sprouted, especially if that context is not part of the public's common knowledge. Even though the network society has been incredibly pervasive in society at large, not everyone might be as up to date about its technicalities and consequences to readily understand any process based artwork and Internet artworks in particular. At the same time though, visitors who do have this knowledge should not be bothered by instruction manuals, wall labels or anything that could divert their attention from the artwork itself. Context information should thus ideally be provided via a pull-medium rather than a push-medium, granting full decision right to the visitor. In this sense, audiotapes or customized (video-) iPods seem a better fit than object labels or wall labels. Also artists themselves can, in the design of their artwork, explicate the process at play, and some do realize this to be an important aspect of communication towards their audience. In a conversation with Kris Cohen, Jon Thomson and Alison Craighead discuss their methodology:

> krispy: Do you think it's obvious to people who see *Template Cinema* how they are made? That you are drawing live streams from the Web? Do you want it to be obvious?
> JonT: Yes we do, and to that end we try to make the process visible. In *Short films about flying*, we have the second screen that displays the status of each film. So on the wall you have the film and on the laptop you have information on where the visuals, sounds and inter-titles are being sources from as they appear.
> (…)
> JonT: I think it is our job as much as possible to make the processes transparent in online *Template Cinema*.[364]

Whereas Jon Thomson and Alison Craighead limit themselves to making the process visible, most contextual information is inherently interpretive and thus presents a story. To avoid conclusiveness, every narrative, whether provided via the artist or the museum,

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[364] Cohen, K. (2006). The Wrong Categories – Jon Thomson and Alison Craighead, in conversation with Kris Cohen In T. Corby (Ed.). *Network Art: Practices and Positions (Innovations in Art and Design)*. New York: Routledge, p. 152.

should emphasize its own constructiveness, clarifying the museum or artist's point of view as one amongst many - indicating the possibility of other interpretations.

Another issue institutions need to account for in presenting Internet art is its time-based nature. Also this characteristic is not new, indeed video art and performance introduced a number of difficulties related to time. However, Christiane Paul argues that: "the time-based nature of new media art [and thus of Internet artworks alike] is far more problematic than that of film or video due to the inherently non-linear qualities of the digital medium." Indeed, whereas film or video imposes an existing notion of time upon the viewer, as well as a required viewing time (which obviously the viewer can ignore), Internet art lays possibly multiple time-frames upon the viewer, depending on the media incorporated, while at the same time continuously being disrupted by the participant, who with a mouse click can disrupt presented time. Julian Stallabras puts it as follows: "With Internet art, time comes in first and starts. It imposes time on the user, while the user imposes time on the work in a discontinuous rhythm."[365] This interdependence of the participant and the Internet artwork in terms of time, requires meticulous consideration with regard to the choice of presentation as well as its position in the gallery space, as too allow for optimal engagement without giving up the museum visitor's general roaming behavior.

Although not required as a characteristic to classify an artwork as Internet art (for example, data visualization are often Internet artworks as well), most Internet artworks do present to a greater or lesser extent interactive or participatory features, beyond the interactive mental event of experiencing it, which of course is potentially present within every artwork. Interactivity poses one of the greatest challenges for the exhibition methodology at play. Not only does it go against the traditional 'please do not touch the art'-customs, it also requires a design which avoids long lines if the experience is meant to be an individual one, or on the contrary, allows for a collective experience if that is the intended purpose. In addition, interactive artworks (Internet art based or not) require

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[365] Stallabrass, J. (2003). *Internet art: the online clash of culture and commerce*. London: Tate Publishers, pp. 40-41

knowledge on the side of the participant about the interfaces and navigation systems and here again a call for context information is appropriate.

Lastly, the variability and modularity of digital arts in general and Internet artworks in particular allows for an ever-changing constellation of its presentation, often dependent on the exhibition space. Indeed, the same work can be presented with installation components, as a projection, on a screen or within a kiosk set-up. The example traditionally raised to illustrate this feature is Martin Wattenberg and Marek Walczak's *Apartment* where credit must go to the artists themselves, who have meticulously documented the various ways of installing the work in the gallery in numerous sketches. The work was shown as a single-user workstation at the Whitney Museum of American Art in the 2001 *Data Dynamics* exhibition, as a two input station, two projections and an 'archive' station at the Ars Electronica Festival in Linz (2001), Austria and as a projection at the Electrohype Festival in Sweden (2002). Another example is Wisniewski's *Netomat ™*, which was exhibited both at *Data Dynamics* as well as *Net_Condition* and *Telematic Connections*. For all Internet artworks presented onsite, a connection can be presented simultaneously on-site and online. If the latter is the case, a connection between virtual and physical space needs to be made.

Whether choosing for the 'separation', the 'sepagration' or the 'integration' strategy, the main requirements Internet art put upon the museum or institution deal with "the facilitation of audience engagement and the need for continuing educational programs in order to make the public more familiar with the still emerging art form."[366]

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[366] Paul, C. (2007). The myth of immateriality – presenting & preserving new media. In O. Grau (Ed.) *MediaArtHistories*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Towards an evolution in the art world

In the past five chapters, I have attempted to critically analyze the relation between Internet art practices and the traditional institution for contemporary art, in the context of Internet art's development as an art world. The still short history of Internet art's relation with the North American and Western European traditional institutions has been scrutinized, and the players within have been heard. In listening to their voices, and to those operating in Internet art's "alternative venues," three major discourses surrounding aesthetics, economics and exhibition methodologies surfaced and were subsequently addressed. In these last pages, I will take the liberty to move from critical analysis toward careful predictions and a subjective evaluation of these predictions.

Based on the results of this sociological dissection of the relation between Internet art and the traditional institution for contemporary art, and on historical precedents, I would present a carefully optimistic perspective on Internet art's future development as an art form, integrated in the traditional art world and its institutions, adapting its customs and practices. Internet art practitioners have succeeded in broadening their support base, both through the creation of new organizations like networked communities and non-profit online organizations and through their appeal to existing institutions of the academy and new media art centers. This support base has been crucial in Internet art's pleas for attention from the traditional institution for contemporary art and as the discussion of the discourses surrounding this relation has indicated, questions are being raised, and answers are being sought in the traditional art institutions as well as in Internet art's 'original' settings.

In the past thirteen years, the Internet art community and all affected have come far. The days of trial and error may not be over, but for those museum institutions that took the plunge early and for the new media art curators now experienced in dealing with the art form, the time of serious institutional engagement has come.

With caution, we might begin to speculate about a more sustained resurgence of museum's commitment to Internet art in the midst of the first decade of the 21st century, a more conscious and sustained 'second wave' in Christiane Paul's terms. Internet art commissions are beginning to increase again. Tate and the WHITNEY Museum of Modern art commissioned four works in 2006 and Tate again incorporated an Internet artwork in Tate Modern's gallery space, which encourages Jemima Rellie to believe that:

> there is great interest from Nick Serota down in somehow better integrating these works within the physical gallery spaces as well, the most obvious place being Tate Modern. Nick thinks it should be in the physical space as well.[367]

Christiane Paul is working on a new exhibition. MoMA, in turn, recently restructured its curatorial departments, adding a media department to deal with works using a wide range of modern technology, from video and digital imagery to Internet-based art and sound-only pieces, according to Klaus Biesenbach, chief curator of the new department.[368] Its effect might be noticeable sooner rather than later, with a first piece of networked art entering the galleries in June 2007. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston also has plans for a media art department. In addition, a growing number of galleries are turning their attention to Internet art, including the art form in contemporary art programs. *The Digital Aesthetic 2* exhibition at the Harris Museum and Art Gallery in Preston, Lancashire, is only one example. Also collectors seem to be jumping on the bandwagon and more and more artists are drawn to work with this new medium, which has become more familiar not only to them, but also to the public at large. Lauren Cornell, director of Rhizome.org confirms the idea of a resurgence of interest and the underlying explanatory factors:

> This sort of boom and bust and slowly creeping back is the trajectory I deal with everyday, because my job is to promote the importance and validity of Internet art and new media art and I come up against an art world that got a little burned on it. That said, I do think that there is a resurgence. I think it has to do with the fact that the Internet is a mass medium now. Online

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[367] Verschooren, K. (April 10, 2007). *Interview with Jemima Rellie.* Telephone conversation.
[368] MoMA (October 3, 2006). *The Museum of Modern Art creates new curatorial department.* Retrieved October 6, 2006, from the World Wide Web: http://www.moma.org/about_moma/press/2006/Klaus%20Media%20Dept.%20ReleaeMAINSITEpdf.pdf

culture and new media culture are so much more prevalent and part of people's life, so art around it is now making more sense.[369]

Indeed, the more prevalent these technologies and their use in daily life become, the better the understanding of art working within these technologies and in addition, the greater the demand for critical voices about these pervasive technologies that characterize the networked society of the 21st century – at least in North America and in Europe.

Note that this predicted integration in the traditional institution is not an integration without conditions, nor must it entail the death of alternative venues' involvement that have allowed Internet art to grow. The trade-offs faced by past art forms upon inclusion in the museum and the rhetoric of the museum as a mausoleum, might well be, and, I believe, will be, addressed in the process of Internet art's inclusion in the museum space.

A first disadvantage of an art form's inclusion traditionally deals with the potential unfortunate effect of the museum's filter function: Not all Internet art genres and forms will be included in the institution, only a limited slice of the Internet art pie will be deemed appropriate, one critiques. This critique often references the story of the inclusion of video art, of which only certain practices are now represented in the museum. However, even if this proves to be the case for Internet art, I believe this is not necessarily detrimental to the art form at large. Much depends on the approach museums take in their role as cultural filters and voices of art form authorization. Even if only a small portion of Internet art can enter the institution, that small portion can lead a broader and more varied public to alternative distribution channels carrying a multitude of Internet art genres. This obviously requires an acknowledgment by the museum institution of these alternative and legitimate distribution and authorization channels and preferably an explicit link to them. This demand for acknowledgement of alternative channels might be a first condition characterizing Internet art's inclusion in the museum space, and collaborative practices and affiliations such as the connection between Rhizome and the New Museum are encouraging.

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[369] Verschooren, K. (October 26, 2006). *Interview with Lauren Cornell.* Cambridge, Massachusetts.

In the museum's function as *a* voice of art form authorization - and for the public at large still *the* foremost voice of art form authorization - one can find a second argument against Internet art's inclusion in the museum space. The critique goes as follows: why would we want someone to tell us what is good (Internet) art? Why can't we all just be left free to decide? While there is something to be said for the freedom to decide for oneself what is art and what is not, I would argue that this freedom of choice can easily become a terror of choice when the pool of choices becomes too large and guidance is minimal. Freedom of choice in this scenario easily derails into no choices being made at all. A museum's potential to guide and reassure a public - in general lacking the confidence to pass aesthetic judgments, and largely content to follow the lead of professional curators and educators[370] - is a valuable factor in a society characterized by information overload.

Again, the problem arises when the museum institution today presents itself as the *only* voice of guidance and authorization, as this would disregard the efforts made in many alternative settings discussed above. There is guidance with regard to Internet art appreciation available from multiple channels, but only for those who already have found there way to these particular venues, those who actively sought out information about Internet art. The public at large still relies on the museum institution, and again, it can be the museum institution's task to broaden the public's understanding of legitimate authorization channels.

The critiques of museums pejorative effects are not limited to the filtering and art form authorization functions of the traditional museum of contemporary art. A third critique focuses on the institution's effect on critical art practices, a category to which much of Internet art belongs. What happens when critical practices are institutionalized? Stella Rollig spoke to this question in her paper for the 2003 *Beyond the Box: diverging curatorial practices* publication:

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[370] McClellan, A. (Ed.) (2006). *Art and its publics. Museum Studies at the Millenium*. Oxford UK: Blackwell Publishing.

Some think they necessarily lose their bite. In his essay *How to best serve the new global contemporary art matrix*, Gregory Sholette argues that museums, even former anti-institutionally oriented ones such as the New Museum in NY, have all become outposts for a global art market and that everything incorporated by the global players in this market tends to become just another commodity. Others, more optimistically, believe that because of greater visibility, more media attention and bigger audiences, the museum provides a better chance for critical voices to be heard than through self-established structures.[371]

I situate myself within the latter camp, especially when explicit links are made to the so-called 'self-established' structures. Thus the influence of museum inclusion on critical art strongly depends on how the art is presented within the museum space.

A fourth critique speaks to Internet art's context. Rachel Greene warns that Internet art might lose the connection with its primary location within a networked public field of vision and consumption:

As site-specific sculpture operates vis-à-vis the particular components and ideologies of a place, so do many works of Internet art derive in significant ways from their location within a networked public field of vision and consumption.[372]

The inclusion of all new media art forms, particularly Internet art, in the museum space - be it online, in a medialounge or in the gallery - always entails a certain recontextualisation. Indeed, experiencing Internet art within the virtual or real walls of the institution inevitably adds a layer of meaning and differs from experiencing that same Internet art piece elsewhere. However, even when an Internet art piece is experienced outside of the institution's walls, its context is never limited to the network itself. One is always experiencing the Internet artwork in a tangible context; be it one's office, one's home or one's favorite café with Internet access. As such, the recontextualisation is to be found on the level of an exchange of office space, home, library, cyber café for the museum institution, rather than a sacrificing of the network as primary context for the Internet artwork.

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[371] Rollig, S. (2003). Contemporary Art practices and the museum. To be reconciled at all?, p. 105, In M. Townsend (Ed.) *Beyond the box: Diverging curatorial practices*. Canada: Banff Centre Press.
[372] Greene, R. (2004). *Internet Art*. New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., p.40.

The final critique that I will discuss, focuses on the current Internet art audiences who, it is said, might be put off by inclusion in the museum space. Jon Ippolito:

> Ironically, online art's disconnection from the mainstream art world has actually contributed to its broad appeal and international following. The absence of a gallery shingle, a museum lintel, or even a 'dot-art' domain suffix to flag art Web sites means that many people who would never set foot in a gallery stumble across works of Internet art by following a fortuitous link.[373]

While this may be true, I doubt whether people "stumbling across works of Internet art by following a fortuitous link"[374] understand or are intrigued by what they experience and whether they would consciously avoid looking at anything if it were included in the museum. I would argue, on the contrary, that the potential to engage a broader and more varied public is greater for the art institution than for the Internet. But, more importantly, no choices need to be made. The two can act in tandem, and the negative influence of inclusion in one setting or the other will be minimal compared to the benefits.

In brief, the traditional trade-offs entailed by an art form's integration might not be as permanent as museum critics wish to believe. If we believe in the ability of the institution to respond to the challenges new art forms place upon its practices and customs, starting with the incorporation of some components of networked culture (decentralization of authority, strong and committed relations to a network of supportive institutions, etc), the inclusion of Internet art might present the art world with true change. While it might feel good to vent one's frustration with museum practices, depicting the institutions as 'lazy' and 'inert' and turning one's back in dismay, a more challenging and potentially successful strategy lies in attempting to change the institution from the inside out, starting by addressing the necessity of change and the challenges contemporary art practices entail. Vis-à-vis Internet art, I believe these challenges have currently become questions to which answers are being sought within the institutions. The future for Internet art's development as an art form in its relation to the traditional institution for contemporary art seems bright.

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[373] Blais, J. & Ippolito, J. (2006). *At the edge of art*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 8.
[374] Blais, J. & Ippolito, J. (2006). *At the edge of art*. London: Thames & Hudson, p. 8.

Appendix 1: List of interviewees

Arcangel, Cory

Arvers, Isabelle

Carels, Edwin

Cornell, Lauren

De Baere, Bart

De Wit, Dirk

Garrett, Marc

Gere, Charlie

Golan, Doron

Ippolito, Jon
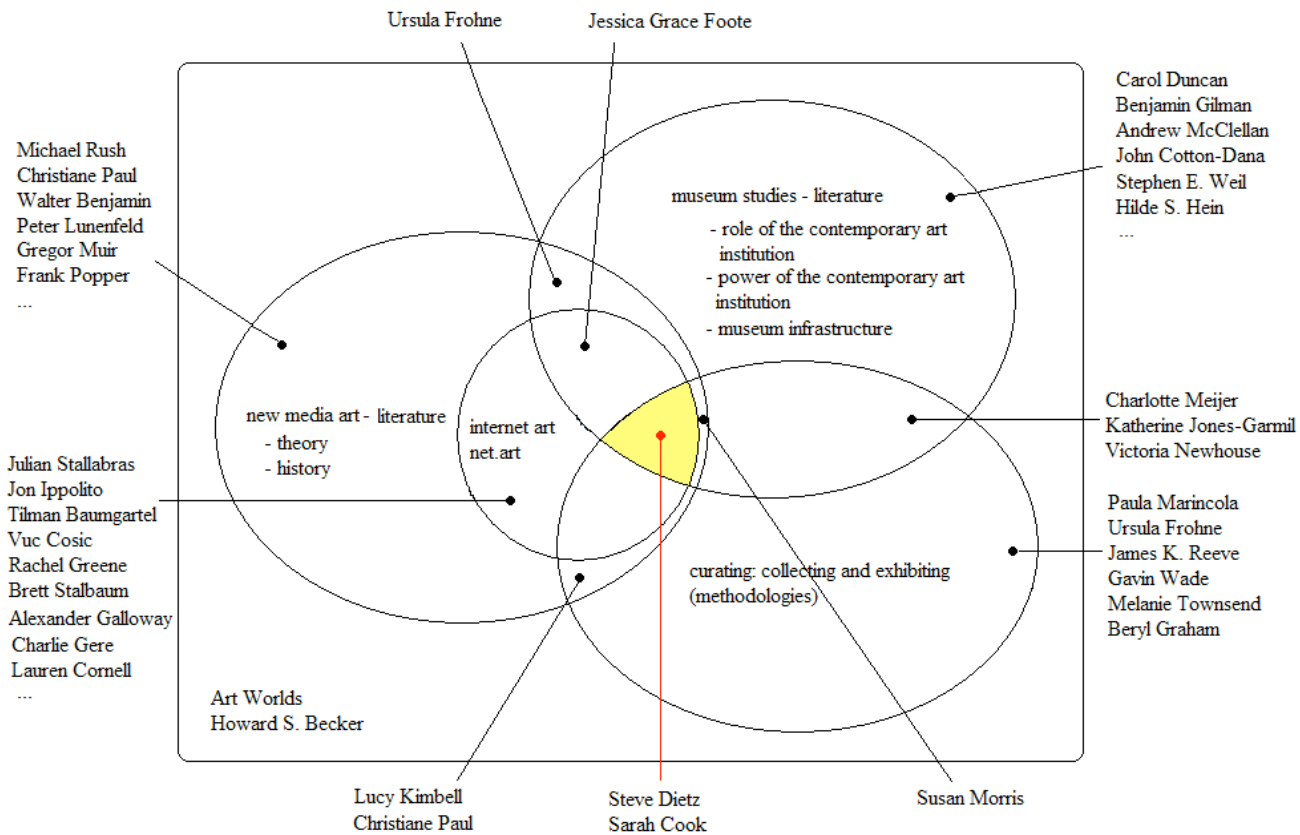
London, Barbara

Paul, Christiane

Olson, Marisa

Rellie, Jemima

Tucker, Sara

Weil, Benjamin

Appendix 2: Theoretical Grid

Ursula Frohne   Jessica Grace Foote

Carol Duncan
Benjamin Gilman
Andrew McClellan
John Cotton-Dana
Stephen E. Weil
Hilde S. Hein
...

Michael Rush
Christiane Paul
Walter Benjamin
Peter Lunenfeld
Gregor Muir
Frank Popper
...

museum studies - literature
  - role of the contemporary art institution
  - power of the contemporary art institution
  - museum infrastructure

Charlotte Meijer
Katherine Jones-Garmil
Victoria Newhouse

new media art - literature
  - theory
  - history

internet art
net.art

Julian Stallabras
Jon Ippolito
Tilman Baumgartel
Vuc Cosic
Rachel Greene
Brett Stalbaum
Alexander Galloway
Charlie Gere
Lauren Cornell
  ...

curating: collecting and exhibiting
(methodologies)

Paula Marincola
Ursula Frohne
James K. Reeve
Gavin Wade
Melanie Townsend
Beryl Graham

Art Worlds
Howard S. Becker

Lucy Kimbell
Christiane Paul

Steve Dietz
Sarah Cook

Susan Morris

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