From Browser to Gallery (and Back): The Commodification of Net Art 1990-2011

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Introduction

Since its beginnings in the late 90s, internet art has had a fickle relationship with the museum. While commissions and granting initiatives have been established for media arts in Europe and America, the relationship between internet art and its fluctuating appearance in institutions demonstrates that it has not yet been wholly embraced by mainstream contemporary art.

Due to its variable reproducibility, the curation and collection of net art has presented challenges and transformations to the traditional operations of art distribution. Sculptures, digital paintings, installations and performances appear on the internet as documentation of art, whilst animated gifs and videos are moving images that require browsers, screens or projections as the apparatus for (re)presentation. This essay traces the shifts in value of internet art from browser to gallery, and compares disparate examples of curation, collection and selling of net art from past and present. Some questions that started this inquiry were:

- Can internet art make money like other artistic genres?
- Who buys internet art?
- How has value been ascribed to net art as a freely accessible form?
- How has web-based been curated and sold in the gallery system?
- What implications does its monetization have on existing modes of distribution and the definition of the collectible art object?

As a result of decentralized distribution, the media object undergoes reification when the documentation of an art object is reproduced and viewed more than the object that is represented within it. In its move from digital to physical exhibition spaces that may be self-organized or affiliated with professional institutions, web-based art accrues exhibition value. As Nicholas O'Brien has observed with the paradoxical installation demands of media objects:

> "…there is an unexpected reliability and expectancy for physicality to substantiate a work – or else to give any ephemerality of a medium some sense of belonging within the gallery."[1]

Commodification occurs in the physical representation of a digital media object for exhibition in a physical gallery space, where screen-based media becomes an object of culture for visual consumption and contemplation. I will compare traditional approaches to selling with alternative, artist-run exhibitions to explore ways of creating value for net art beyond the computer interface. In this study I trace the shifts in value of net art (in particular, the conception of aura and the move from free distribution to spatialized, sellable commodities). Finally, I argue that the most effective way to monetize net art is not through selling a physical analogue of the digital object, but a contextual integration of the buying process into the completion of the artwork.

[1] Nicholas O'Brien, "Hyperjunk: Notes on the Installation Demands of Media Objects", *Bad At Sports*, August 11, 2011. http://badatsports.com/2011/hyperjunk-notes-on-the-installation-demands-of-media-objects/?utm_source=rss&utm_medium=rss&utm_campaign=rss

A Brief Definition of Net Art

There are many definitions of what constitutes internet art of the present. Known interchangeably as “net art” (and “net.art” in its early days), internet art has developed into a pluralist practice that takes form not only as websites, but livestreamed performance, software modification, online games and applications, anonymous personas, image collection, and digital imaging.[2] Besides commenting on web culture and the influence of technology on everyday life, net art practices utilize the internet as the primary contexts for art distribution. However, for the purposes of this investigation I will be examining the shifts in economic and cultural value in terms of browser-based and screen-based art because it is less often included in museum exhibitions.

Net.art, Net art, Postinternet art, Web-based art

Media art historians and curators have characterized net art as anti-institutional because its earliest artists chose the internet to provide a cost-free encounter with art outside of a gallery setting.[3] These principles are echoed by

[2] Josephine Bosma notes that the definition of net art is not confined to websites, but also surprisingly incorporates pre-existing, non-technological media such as performance.
“It covers not only browser based art (which should be clear) or the even more restrictive definition of 'site based' art, but also art that happens in any other kind of software, any other kind of time frame than the individual now-ness of site based, site anchored art.
Josephine Bosma, “Between Moderation and Extremes - the tension between net art theory and popular art discourse”, May 2000. http://josephinebosma.com/web/node/63

[3] Curators Christiane Paul and Steve Dietz have mentioned that net art operates rather independently of museums. Paul notes that “…characteristics of so-called new media art have introduced a shift from the object to process… digital art resists "objectification" and has changed traditional notions of the "art object.""

an instructional net.art manifesto by net.artists Alexei Shulgin and Natalie Bookchin in 1999. Their definitions of net.art maintained that the genre would have "0% compromise" to traditional models of distribution and institutional operations.[4] However, as the list of declaratives continued, both artists self-deprecatingly note that a key to long-term success included involvement in both online and contemporary art events at physical museum spaces. The museum and gallery were also always valuable exhibition venues for net artists as any work exhibited within it gains affiliation with a concrete institution in the larger art world.[5] Besides possibly elevating an artist's work to a canonical status, their work reaches a gallery-going audience instead of disparate and inattentive internet users. It is the liminal context of the museum that grants the artwork space for viewer contemplation.

In recent years, scholars have employed "postinternet" to describe the art with regard to the condition where the internet has become more of a necessity and a banality than a novel technology.[6] Such works differ from the formalist play on code and information architecture that was more visible in late-nineties net.art. More willing to exhibit in galleries and trained mostly in art institutions, emerging

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Christiane Paul, "Challenges for a Ubiquitous Museum: Presenting and Preserving New Media", NeMe, 2005. http://www.neme.org/571/preserving-new-media
Steve Dietz, "Collecting New Media Art: Just like anything else, but different" Bruce Altshuler, ed. *Collecting the New: Museums and Contemporary Art*. Princeton University Press: Princeton and Oxford, 2005, pp. 85-101. NeMe, http://www.neme.org/524/collecting-new-media-art
[4] Alexei Shulgin and Natalie Bookchin, "Introduction to net.art (1994-1999)", March-April 1999. http://www.easylife.org/netart
[5] Sarah Cook and Beryl Graham. "Why would a New Media Artist Want to Exhibit in an Art Museum?" Curating in an Art Museum, *Rethinking Curating: Art after New Media*, Foreword by Steve Dietz, MIT Press: Cambridge and London. 2010. 189-190.
[6] Marisa Olson, "Postinternet", *Foam Magazine*, Issue 29: What's Next?, 2011, Winter 2011/2012 59-63 http://www.foam.org/foam-magazine/news/foam-magazine-issue-29-what's-next

artists are modifying artworks for different contexts of presentation in physical space and cyberspace. Having witnessed increasingly postmedia processes of art production on the internet, I am prompted to use the term “web-based art” interchangeably with “net art”. It suggests that the internet is the artwork’s primary medium for public distribution, but also implies a possible exhibition in offline environments.

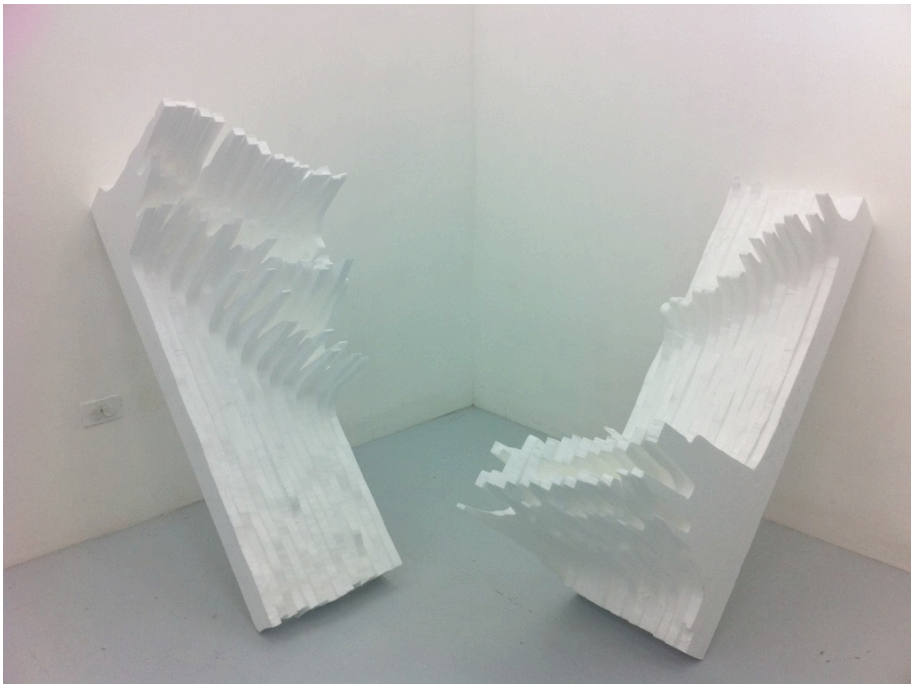

Fig. 1. Artie Vierkant, *Monochrome Arc*, 2010
Styrofoam, histogram curves from video stills, autoexposure, color digital fingerprint

Exploring the unfixed properties of the digital index and its representation of objects, the artwork of Oliver Laric and Artie Vierkant demonstrate the versioning of an image and idea for exhibition environments that are physical and online. Artie Vierkant’s *Monochrome Arc* and *Copy* are auto-exposed video stills that have been converted to digitally printed sculptures. (Fig 1) Their shape and

structure symbolically refer to light values (histograms) in the original images.

Citing different models of exhibition from the physical gallery to the “online-only” Whitney Museum curator Christiane Paul observed:

> Variability entails a fluent transition between the different manifestations that a "virtual object"… the same work could potentially be shown as an installation, projection, or within a kiosk set-up.[7]

Laric and Manovich refers to the process of adapting an artwork for a gallery as versioning; Quaranta calls it “translation”.[8] Assembled by Katja Novitska, *The Postinternet Survival Guide* is a collection of net artists’ artwork that exists as a peer-curated blog (http://survivaltips.tumblr.com), a printed book, a .pdf file for user download, and also a gallery installation of found and modified objects which refer to the books’ content.[9] (Fig 2)

[7] Paul, 2005.
[8] Domenico Quaranta, *In Your Computer*, LINK Editions, LuLu.com,76.
[9] Katja Novi, *Post Internet Survival Guide*, 2010. http://katjanovi.net/postinternetsurvivalguide.html

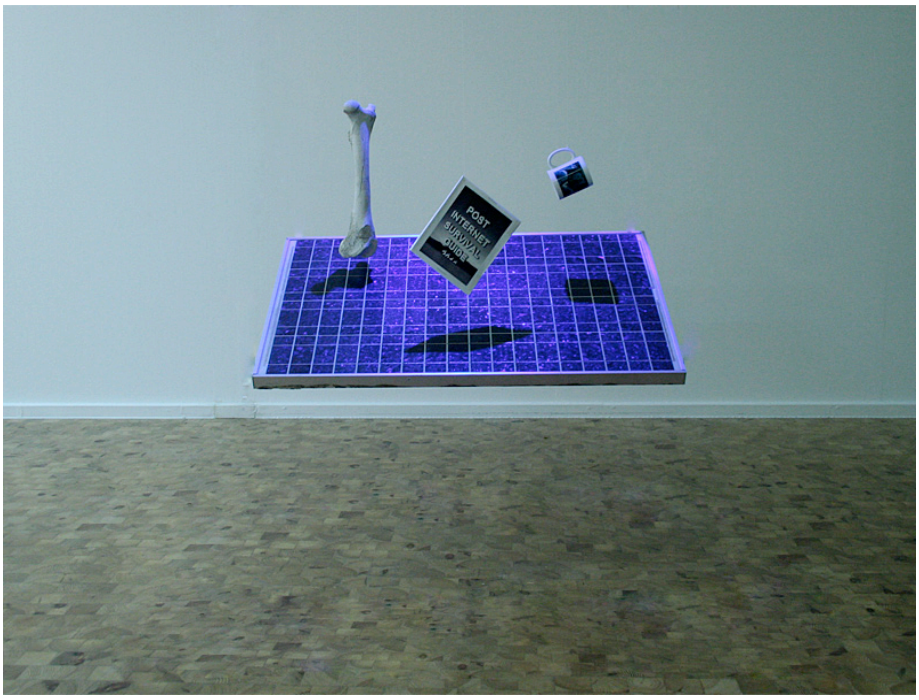

Fig. 2 Katja Novi, *Post Internet Survival Guide*, 2010. *FORMATS*, Brakke Grond, Amsterdam. http://katjanovi.net/postinternetsurvivalguide.html

Art and Cultural Value

The western artistic canon has traditionally ascribed cultural value to a work of art-as art-through the affective experience of it as a unique, finished object in a particular time and space. Walter Benjamin employed “aura” to describe the aesthetic presence of original art objects; Carol Duncan compared the socialized codes of art viewership in museums to religious ritual in a secular context–a civic ritual where found or carefully crafted objects are carefully arranged for quiet contemplation and transcendent viewership. In “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Benjamin warned that mechanical reproduction would lead to the “loss of aura”, an increasingly distracted mode of

observation and a loss of authenticity.[10] In conversation with this notion of complete artwork, a common complaint with curating and selling new media art is its lack of "objecthood", physicality or temporal stability.

The screen-based, gratuitous distribution of information of on the internet challenges notions of tangibility and uniqueness. In 1988, Bill Nichols wrote a pointed response to Benjamin's arguments, titled "The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetics". Nichols argued that the computer was more than an instrument, but also an icon and metaphor that would radically alter human subjectivity.[11] Later, Domenico Quaranta cited a re-emergence and reconsideration of aura in the form of a website and the curation of its contents within an exhibition context.[12] Along with Boris Groys, he observed that aura is not destroyed through digitization of images because each image or media object has a specific code for computers to decode in order for the image to appear on the screen.[13] The (code of the) original image is therefore essentially an "invisible original", made invisible due to its infinite reproducibility. Furthermore, digital files are no less "real" or immaterial as they are formatted in files that occupy space on hard drives and servers, which require cables and computers to facilitate its display.

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[10] Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanicl Reproduction" (1936). *Film Theory and Criticism*, Edited by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen, (New York: Oxford University Press) 2009.

[11] Bill Nichols, "The Work of Culture in the Age of Cybernetics", *The New Media Reader*. edited by Noah Wardrip-Fruin, and Nick Montfort, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press), 2003. 627-641

[12] Domenico Quaranta, "The Unbearable Aura of A Website", *In Your Computer*, LINK Editions, LuLu.com, 157-161.
http://www.lulu.com/items/volume_70/9992000/9992921/3/print/In_Your_Computer.pdf

[13] Boris Groys, "From Image to Image File—and Back: Art in the Age of Digitalization", *Art Power*, MIT Press: Cambridge, 2008. 84-85.

Quaranta argues that a website's domain name has a specific place that can be synchronously accessed by anyone on a computer or networked device. If there can be no copy without the notion of an original, digital art accrues substantiation as art through the abundant (re)distribution of the copy. In his video-essay *Versions*, Oliver Laric describes the facile and credible manipulation of the found image in everyday media before and after the popularization of digital media.[14] Over images of classical sculpture, a robotic female voice reads, "Multiplication of an icon, far from diluting its content power, rather increases its fame, and each image however imperfect, conventionally partakes in properties of its precursor." Later in *Kopenkritik*, Oliver Laric arranges similarly-posed multiples of Greco-Roman sculptures in a museum installation. (Fig. 3)

Fig 3. Oliver Laric, *Kopienkritik*, 2011. Skulpturhalle Basel , Kuratiert von Raffael Dörig

[14] Oliver Laric, *Versions*, digital video, 8:49 2010. http://oliverlaric.com/vvversions.htm

Taking the copy as subject matter and appropriation as genre, this installation emphasizes the power of the conceptual original and its use in art– even as canonical tastes filter through time. His curation of these objects are a comment on how even historians are sometimes unable to tell the Roman copy from the Greek original in the analysis of historically "authentic" art. As Nichols noted, "The ubiquitous copy also serves as an externalized manifestation of the work of industrial capitalism…simulation displaces any antecedent reality, any aura, any referent to history. The very concept of a text, whether unique or one of myriad copies…undergoes slippage." When simulation (copy) begins to conflate with reality and copy begins to stand in for concept, documentation of art becomes as real as the physical version of an artwork, and also the exhibition of it in real life. We as cybernetic subjects have become sophisticated enough in recognizing the mechanisms and contingencies of mediation to view documentation as art, and also anticipate the representation of art-as-documentation.

Due to their reliance on networked technologies to distribute and create art, net artists were inherently critical of technology's ideological and economic determinants from its beginning. To subvert the increasingly commercial nature of the web in the late 90s, Eva and Franco Mattes (0100101110101101.org) copied and reproduced websites such as Hell.com, JODI.org and Art.Teleportacia.org in 1998.[15] They hosted the copied websites under their own

[15] Eva and Franco Mattes (0100101110101101.org) –*Copies*, 1999. http://www.0100101110101101.org/home/copies/index.html

domain, which invited media attention towards the definition of commercial and public property. From 1998 to 1999, 01.org created a series of websites with appropriated code and content from their peers' websites and titled the remediated work *Hybrids*. Despite challenging notions of authorship in a networked public domain, the efficacy of their critique relied on viewer foreknowledge of their peers' websites to identify the reappropriation of others' net art. Currently, the lack of recognizable aesthetic references or foreknowledge of other net artists' makes their process redundant. Furthermore, their peers' websites have also changed in layout, thus decontextualizing the reading of the embedded code. It therefore looks like a typical piece of 90s net.art in the current online viewer's eyes. Nonetheless, their projects invoked the redundancy of intellectual copyright in a networked economy. Any work posted on the internet would be a part of public domain since it would be accessible by anyone with a computer.

Large cultural institutions and the art economy have adapted to accommodate presentations that suit the technical constraints of different media. The white-cube gallery, the cinematic "black box" or the museum is usually the liminal context for contemplative viewership of pre-existing media genres such as film, video, photography and installation. Thus, the technical apparatus that media is installed on ends up emphasizing the currency or redundancy of the

–*Hybrids*, 1998-1999. http://www.0100101110101101.org/home/hybrids/index.html

technological apparatus that is channeling it.[16] For example, the use of boxy 4:3 television sets now harken more to Seventies video installations in a time when media reception has converged onto flatscreen LCD monitors.

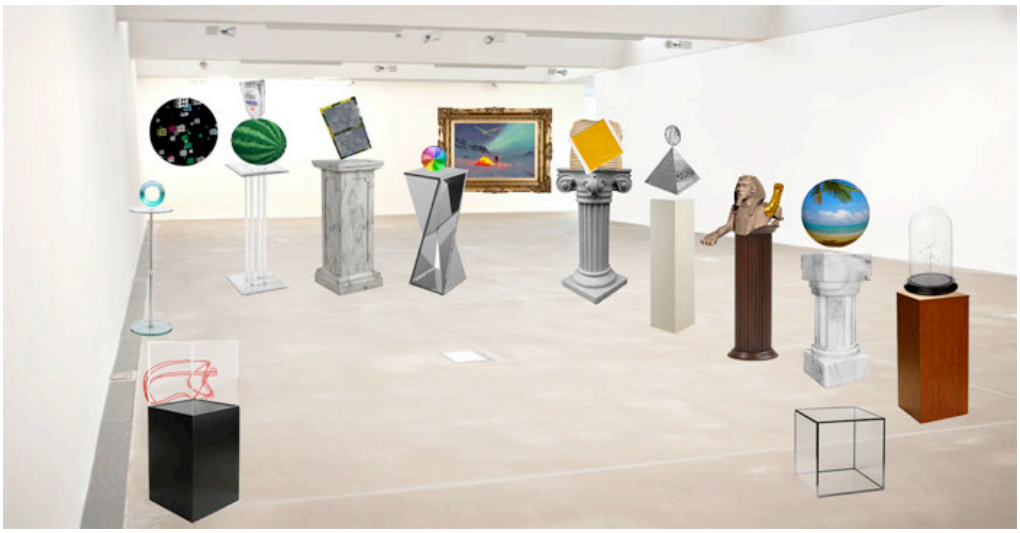

Fig. 4 Anthony Antonellis, *put it on a pedestal .com,* HTML/JavaScript, 2011
http://www.putitonapedestal.com

Anthony Antonellis' *Put It On A Pedestal* (http://www.putitonapedestal.com) playfully challenges such ideas of original, copy and reproduced objects and aesthetics. (Fig 4) With a white-walled gallery background, the artist offers the user a selection of animated icons and floating digital objects to assemble freely on different types of generic gallery furniture such as plinths and glass cases. Like Laric's installation of roman sculptural multiples and Sterling Crispin's collection of *Greek New Media Shit* (http://www.greeknewmediashit.tumblr.com), Antonellis' moveable collection of

[16] O'Brien calls these physical representational tools "sub-content" as he feels they are highly determinant of how the viewer perceives screen-based work.
O'Brien, 2011.

digital and classical objects comments on the memetic value of classical motifs and how its production was based from the reproduction of copies.

Deal or no deal: Exhibition installation from Screen to Gallery

Since its induction into museums and galleries, members of online art communities have been divided on how digital art should be exhibited or sold. While some artists maintained that digital work could only be exhibited in online, screen-based contexts, others were enthusiastic about merging its aesthetics and approaches with mainstream contemporary art. Darren Tofts believed that digital art could only be computer based in presentation; there could be no website displayed without the representational subtext of the computer.[17] According to him, digital art's interactive and ephemeral nature that often placed its content at odds with exhibition conventions. Contradictorily, he anticipated "unencumbered movement through a compellingly realistic environment" would be most appropriate for compelling gallery visitors.[18] This immersive, walkthrough-exhibition is usually realized by integration of installation or responsive media within larger institutions that are technically and financially equipped to accommodate such installations. In Ryan Trecartin's solo exhibition, "Any Ever" (2010-2011), the online video auteur projected his videos in a maze of darkened rooms. Each contained installations of picnic tables, leather sofas,

[17] Writing in 1996, Tofts characterized digital art as "endemic to the computer". Darren Tofts, "Your Place or Mine? Locating Digital Art" Mesh, No. 10 (Spring 1996), 2-5. http://www.experimenta.org/mesh/mesh10/10toft.html

[18] Ibid.

airline seats, and beds placed in front of the projection to entice gallery-goers to spend a longer time viewing his rapidly edited videos. (Fig 5)

Fig. 5. Ryan Trecartin, *Any Ever*, MoMa PS1, June 19-September 3, 2011

Net artists and curators alike complained about the lackadaisical installation of webpages on desktop computers during *Documenta X* (1996) in Kassel on nettime mailing list.[19] (Fig. 6) However, the office-like installation of desktop computers on within a separate lounge space resonates in the contemporary exhibitions such as *Speed Show* (http://speedshow.net/). As an informal social-exhibition, the internet café serves as a casual, yet web-relevant setting for artists to meet face-to-face.[20]

[19] Domenico Quaranta, "Lost in Translation. Or, Bringing Net Art to Another Place? Pardon, Context" *In Your Computer*, 2011. LINK Editions, LuLu.com, 71-79 http://www.lulu.com/items/volume_70/9992000/9992921/3/print/In_Your_Computer.pdf

[20] Karen Archey, "BYOBS: Bring Your Own Beamer Opens to Much Fuss and Ballyhoo" Image Conscious, *ArtINFO*, November 19, 2010.

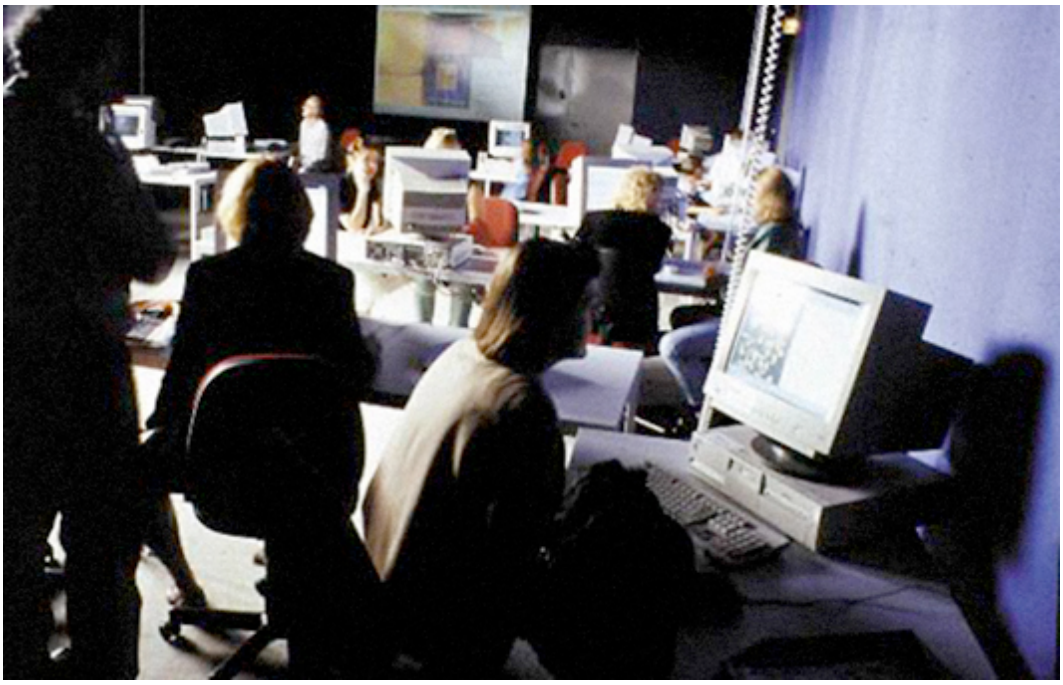

Fig. 6. *Documenta X*, Kassel. 1997, Image courtesy Vague Terrain.

The "First" Piece(s) of Net Art Ever Sold

A general Google search during my time of writing (November 2011) finds multiple results proclaiming the "first net art sold". One of the earliest self-proclaimed examples is Teo Spiller's website, *Megatronix*. Alexander Bassin, the buyer at Municipal Museum of Ljubljana, purchased the work for 85,000 SIT, or approximately $500 USD in 1999. During a discussion panel on the topic, the monetary of who owned the advertising revenue or the website after its sale and

http://blogs.artinfo.com/imageconscious/2010/11/19/byobs-bring-your-own-beamer-opens-to-fuss-and-ballyhoo/

maintenance service were not clearly defined.[21] Spiller had agreed allowing the museum to place a banner on the website's opening page to indicate its ownership by the Ljubliana Municipal Gallery. However, such a branded presence could aesthetically impair its impression as art and interrupt the typical online with the website. While published online news articles and conference press testify to the sale having occurred, the website is no longer accessible on the internet.[22]

Later in 2002, the Guggenheim collected formalist net artworks such as John F. Simon's *Every Icon* (1996).[23] For this artwork, Simon wrote a Java-based algorithm to convert every element in a white square to be black, and vice versa. He then sold unique versions of code for $20 each and attached a certificate of authenticity with each version that was sold. These works might have appealed to art historians and collectors due to its resonances formalist painting and Seventies conceptual art which was concerned with language as a starting point of creative production. With *Every Icon*, the coding offered every possibility for conversion as an impossible task, recalling the redundancy of visual-verbal puns in Sol LeWitt's *Red Square, White Letters* (1962). Another contemporary approach that adheres to the artist-buyer contract is reinforced by Rafael Rozendaal, who created *Art Website Sales Contract*

[21] Teo Spiller. "net.art.trade. World's First Net Art Sold" *5th International Festival of Computer Arts*, May 12,1999. http://www.netartist.eu/net-art/net-art-sold.html
[22] See "Link Rot"
[23] John F. Simon Jr. *Every Icon*, January 27, 1997. http://numeral.com/appletsoftware/eicon.html

(http://www.artwebsitesalescontract.com), to share his own version of the website sales contract with the online art community.

Both the sales of *Megatronix* and *Every Icon* awkwardly imposed traditional models of collection and selling onto digital works. In the case of *Every Icon* the artist chose to custom-code the reproducible art object to reinforce the notion that the intellectual artistic labor attributed to authoring code was worth money. Because it was mutable and reproducible, Simon offered it for an extremely affordable cost. Meanwhile, Megatronix was sold with ownership stipulations like any other art object. However, the ephemerality of art existing on a network was not accounted for. The buyer did not anticipate issues related to archival and preservation of the website, which may have led to its eventual unavailability. In this case, selling a net art piece for money devalued its status and possibly shortened its longevity as art.

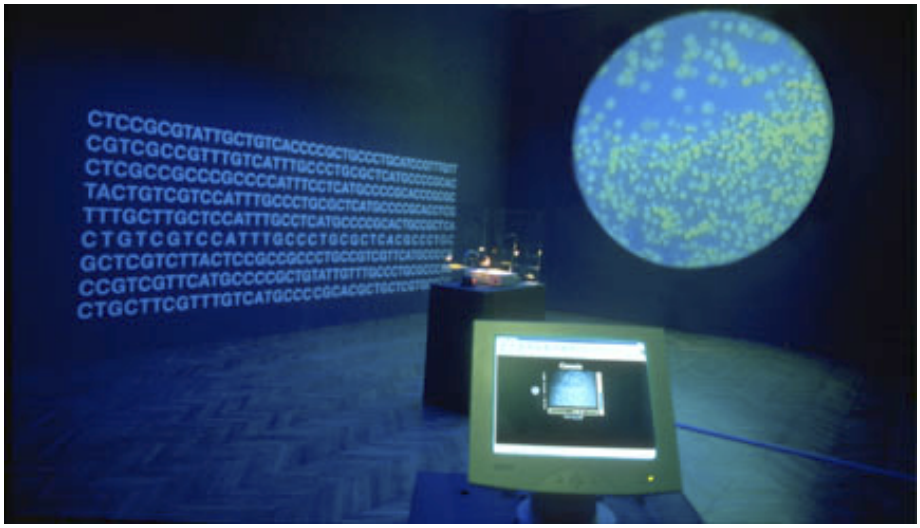

Fig. 7. Eduardo Kac, *Genesis*, Installation of computer, projection and sound, 1999.

Commissioned by Ars Electronica in 1999, Eduardo Kac's *Genesis* is an early example of institutionalized net art that was made salable. The immersive installation of bioluminescent bacteria consisted of projection and sound. Kac had written a synthetic gene that would translate a sentence from the Bible into Morse code, and then DNA base pairings. A computer that was connected to the internet broadcasted the development on the project and allowed remote viewers to comment on the growth of the bacteria. The installation first showed at the O.K. Center for Contemporary Art in Linz. Eventually priced at $150,000 by his gallerist in Chicago; meanwhile engraved sculptural objects which were parts of the installation (*Encryption Stones* (2001)) sold for $13,000 per piece.[24]

Link Rot

"Link rot", or the unavailability of preexisting web pages occurs because of its incompatibility with newer browser technologies. While there are multiple attempts to archive and preserve older webpages, broken links and redundancy is inevitable in a consistently upgrading and innovating networked culture. Although projects such as Internet Archaeology and WayBack Machine preserve the digital artifacts from early internet culture, link rot is inevitable if the web designer or artist does not migrate their website to operate with newer versions

[24] Carly Berwick, "Net Gains: As interactive, computer-based artworks are collected and commissioned, are they losing their edge or gaining an audience?" *ArteNews*, December 2002. http://www.artnews.com/2002/12/01/net-gains/

of an internet browser.[25] In this case, another argument for aura could be applied in regard to the specificity and currency of technologies that are required to effectively display a website and its media contents. As Christiane Paul observed, “From its very beginning, an online project or exhibition is not bound by the framework of one institution but exists in a larger network where institutional control tends to be more distributed.”[26] Once technically outmoded by newer browser-based technologies, upgraded application plug-ins, and new uses and redundancies of web development code, the web-based work is no longer accessible. This results in a dead link, or a loss of context for any work that remains displayed.

Internet-based institutions: The Virtual Gallery

Since the late Eighties, artists have made efforts to collect and show work in the form of a website-gallery. Online galleries have either appropriated conventions of existing museums or operated in a completely extra-institutional nature. 10 years before the boom of e-commerce in 1986, artist-producers Carl Loeffler and Ted Truck started the Art Com Electronic Network. Based out of San Francisco, it was one of the first networks that gave artists access to electronic publication, mailing systems, and even an electronic art shopping mall and

[25] Ryder Ripps et. al, Internet Archaeology, 2009-present. http://www.internetarchaeology.org/ Wayback Machine, Internet Archive, 1996-present http://www.archive.org/web/web.php
[26] Christiane Paul, “Context and Archive: Presenting and Preserving Net-based Art” Intelligent Agent, 2008. http://intelligentagent.com/writing_samples/netpioneers.pdf

gallery. The network started as a mailbox on a bulletin board system WELL (Whole Earth Lectronic Link). They also began charging for access to net art. In 1996 the net.artist Olia Lialina started Art.teleportacia.org, one of the first online galleries to exhibit and sell artwork that was vernacular to 90s computer culture and the browser. Although the original gallery no longer exists, a collection of net art from 1998 titled ""MINIATURES OF THE HEROIC PERIOD" can be found on the website.[27] Accompanied by artist-determined pricetags of approximately $2000, the pieces are displayed as clickthrough links in a formal table layout much like that of the late bubblebyte.org (http://www.bubblebyte.org)

Fig 8. Jstchillin.org, *Read/Write*, 319 Scholes, NYC.
View of installation during opening night at "Read/Write". Photo by Karen Archey

In 2004, Tim O'Reilly coined the term "Web 2.0" to describe a set of new and pre-existing technologies that enhanced the experience of user-generation in

[27] Olia Lialina. "MINIATURES OF THE HEROIC PERIOD", collection of net art from 1998. *Art.teleportacia*. 1998. http://art.teleportacia.org/exhibition/miniatures/

online environments.[28] Afterwards, the popularization of social media such as Facebook, tumblr, digg and twitter seemed to inspire net artists to use such platforms for art production and distribution. Soon emerging artists began co-opting social networks for performance, curation and art distribution. Curated by Parker Ito and Caitlin Denny, jstchillin.org is a recent example of a self-organized online curatorial project.[29] For a year, the curatorial collective featured a net artist's work for two weeks on its index page. They used media sharing websites such as tumblr and Facebook to promote and appeal to emerging artists who used the internet in a similar fashion. Most of their selected artists made work about web aesthetics, online friendships and trivial digital interactions. The project culminated in "READ/WRITE", a gallery exhibition at 319 Scholes, an artist-run space in New York City. While the plurality of styles were appropriate to the informal environment of the internet, much of the gallery-adapted artworks appeared to be disjunctive assemblage of installations and found object sculptures that bore little reference to its "original" digital context and counterparts. (Fig 8) Art from and about the internet began to look like any other contemporary art in the gallery.

[28] Tim O'Reilly, "What is Web 2.0", September 30, 2005. http://oreilly.com/web2/archive/what-is-web-20.html

[29] Ceci Moss. "An Interview with READ/WRITE Curators Caitlin Denny and Parker Ito" *Rhizome Editorial*, March 16, 2010. http://rhizome.org/editorial/2011/mar/16/internet-surfing-prime-interview-readwrite-curator/

The Virtual Museum

Institutions Adopting Online Exhibition Models

During the late nineties and early 2000s, a handful of curators who worked at large cultural institutions were invested in curating, collecting and preserving digital media artworks. What ensues will be a long and incomplete list of names and institutional affiliates who were fundamental to the commodification of net art. Each had their own reasons for spatializing web-based work within museums; some initiatives started independently and others were endorsed by institutions.

Supported by a group of major institutions, Jon Ippolito and Alain Depocas led the Variable Media Initiative for preserving future access and presentation of digital artworks in the face of software obsolescence and redundancy.[30] Its website attempted to established a vocabulary for conservation of ephemeral media art. With case studies that compared and contrasted the characteristics of existing artworks, the website provided a framework for museums to think about the curatorial translation of art into exhibition and networked contexts, as well as the need to upgrade software for presenting media works in the future. However, much of these administrative and research efforts require maintenance. The website has not been updated for years, and only features one clear example of net art preservation (i.e. Mark Napier's *net flag*).

[30] "Variable Media Network", 2000. http://www.variablemedia.net/

Curated by Christiane Paul, Whitney Artport attempted to introduce artworks before users clicked through to its website. This way, the curatorial scope and context of production was provided before the experience of the art. Similarly, Steve Dietz at the Walker Arts Center in Minneapolis acquired Benjamin Weil's adaweb.org to aggregate a canon of web projects. In Canada, the Daniel Langlois Foundation granted new media artists $10,000-$100,000 for production, research and conservation of digital art projects.[31] In the UK, the Tate Museum began commissioning and presenting art online in 2000; artists were invited to submit proposals for juried selection by institutional gatekeepers. Soon after in 2002, they launched a permanent "Net Art" program for commissioning works by two net artists every year. Like *THE STATE* or *PaintedETC.com*, critical texts have accompanied the online launch of each of these works.

On the other hand, Rhizome started as a mailing list for new media art community members, and was eventually bought by the New Museum. The organization started their commissioning program in 2001. Successful submissions are voted on by its online members and also juried by institutional leaders. The mailing list developed into a content aggregator or collection, journalism, review and distribution of new media art. Its community art portal is open to all registered members to submit artworks, however its collections manager curates work into their public digital archive, the ArtBase. Much like the Variable Media Initiative which included a questionnaire for artists and curators to

[31] Jennings, Pamela. *New Media Arts | New Funding Models*, The Rockerfeller Foundation, 2000. http://www.pamelajennings.org/PDF/New_Media_Arts_New_Funding_Models.pdf

answer, users may tag and enter technical information about their works to make it easily searchable on the web when they submit to the ArtBase.[32]

Image Aggregation and Distribution

Online image collection and art blogging reinforces the cult value and exhibition value of web-based artwork. Practices of conversing with images emerged from online friends who chose to share images on "surf club" websites and forum threads. Media-sharing micro-blogs such as ffffound and tumblr would allow users to categorize and rate found media with meta-tags and reblogging functions. The decontextualized, screen-based representation of art documentation as a stream of images, or a grid of thumbnails imbues images with a transformed sense of aura.

Perhaps there is cult value attached to web culture and the ways of seeing images as a stream, as a thumbnail on a shared URL or a hovering preview. Inquiring into the concept of aura in relation to traditional and digital forms, Gene McHugh noted that Benjamin had never provided a concrete definition. However, he proposes that the "ornamental halo" Benjamin described of viewing an original artwork stemmed not from an artworks ahistorical, timeless beauty, but from an

[32] Benjamin Fino-Radin. "Digital Preservation Practices and The Rhizome ArtBase", *Rhizome at The New Museum,* 2011. http://media.rhizome.org/blog/8332/rhizome-digital-preservation-practices.pdf

underlying notion of a linear social history to an artwork.[33] This includes ideas of where it has been exhibited and who has owned, bought, sold and handled it. Regardless of size and quality, the existence of art documentation on the internet testifies to an original idea of an artwork having been installed somewhere in physical space, thus lending the art objects authority and validity in distribution.

On white-space blog-websites such as *VVORK*, *PAINTED.ETC*, and *Greek New Media Shit*, artists curate and collect artwork and its documentation with little or no discursive dimensions. Instead of ideological continuities, aesthetic vernaculars become the basis of image curation and community formation.[34] Curatorial cohesion is determined instead by conceptual and aesthetic conventions, such as ironic references to ancient Greek culture in Crispin's *Greek New Media Shit* or the lineage of painting in computer culture in Ry David Adley's PAINTED.etc.(http://www.paintedetc.com) Operating on similar vernaculars but on a non-profit basis, the late Widget Art Gallery (http://the-widget-art-gallery.blogspot.com/) accommodates for the fluidities of image presentation on browser and screen-based mobile devices by curating works for both computer-based and smartphone access.

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[33] Gene McHugh, "Friday, August 20th, 2010", Posts tagged "aura", *Post Internet*, 2010. 1229a.com
For more on how art accrues aura online in a social network, please see "Accordant Aesthetics"

[34] Artie Vierkant, *The Image Object Post Internet*, 2010, 9.
"Posting an image of a gradient implicates an artist within a particular aesthetic mindset in the same way that having a Tumblr adheres an artist to a particular format of transmission…
the architecture of the Internet…helps facilitate an environment where artists are able to rely more and more on purely visual representations to convey their ideas and support an explanation of their art independent of language."

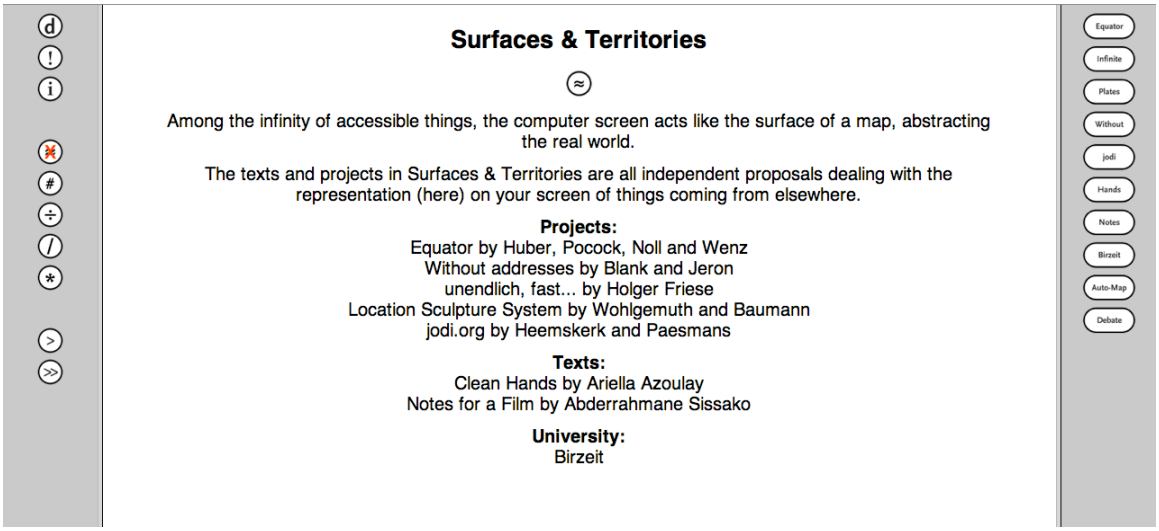

Fig. 9. Documenta X, exhibition website, 1997. http://www.ljudmila.org/~vuk/dx

Meanwhile, *THE STATE* (http://thestate.tumblr.com/) foregrounds the intellectual dimension of art production by featuring a didactic caption on each blog post. This approach recalls the online component of curated net art for *Documenta X* in Kassel, which would feature a webpage with curatorial text before linking to a title page. This page would show the artist information and contain an external link to the net.art website. (http://www.ljudmila.org/~vuk/dx/) While innovative for its time as a web-based analogue for a physical exhibition of net art, the website's "broad and deep" information architecture is cumbersome in comparison with contemporary virtual gallery pages. (Fig 9) With no verbal labeling, the navigation toolbar iconography was also small and unrecognizable. In addition to multitudes of nested pages users would need to click through to see each website, the design would likely discourage viewers from returning to the exhibition website.

In terms of art criticism, independent yet reputable art review blogs such as networked_performance, Furtherfield, and Art Fag City offer casual criticism and image posting to reinforce the exhibition value of net art through the reblogging and citation of existing art practices.[35] The aforementioned image blogs are run by contemporary artists who are active within internet art communities. The presence of such websites forms an alternative venue for tastemaking and art distribution. While operating without large jurying committees at museums or galleries, the apparent anonymity and professionalism of these media aggregating website-galleries cause them to appear as though they are institutions in and of themselves. In my own practice, Installation Fail is a white-space tumblr that uses these non-discursive codes of image curation to critique the trope of found object installation in contemporary art.

Accordant Aesthetics

Reblogs, Shares, Likes

Academics and artists communities responded to the use of web 2.0 distribution platforms differently. Emerging post-2.0 net artists such as Brad Troemel and Artie Vierkant reveled in the circulation of decontextualized media as a way to reconsider art production practices. Art was able to reach larger and more specific audiences, while specific tastes were likely to be understood by interested subscribers. On the decentralization on art on the internet, Brad

[35] networked_performance, http://turbulence.org/ 2011.
Furtherfield, http://www.furtherfield.org/ 2011.
Art Fag City, http://www.artfagcity.com/ 2011.

Troemel declared that the advent of web 2.0 technologies progressively democratized art distribution from surf clubs (Nastynets) to the use of media aggregating online services such as Google reader.[36] Positing that the many-to-many sharing allowed by media-aggregation sites such as delicious and tumblr cultivated methods of image curation that became "*externally contingent on a network of other artists' content [sic]*", an unspoken contract of peer-aware art production began emerging.

Troemel had speculated that artists with an existing following on the internet found institutional recognition after a period of showing their work in DIY gallery exhibitions.[37] Net art historian and critic Josephine Bosma challenges this notion of democratic gatekeeping in regards to an older collection website started by in 2002.[38] Started by Doron Golan, *Computer Fine Arts* (http://www.computerfinearts.com) was a website which featured links to alphabetized folders of net.artists' works. Bosma questioned if any one user's collection of art may be valuable for others beyond their immediate online community. While any one person may develop a distinct curatorial vision by sharing media on a micro-blogging platform, its existence does not guarantee that they will receive viewership or subscription from other users. Not every net artist uses tumblr or YouTube. Although web 2.0 might may have enhanced

[36] Brad Troemel. From Clubs to Affinity: The Decentralization of Art on the Internet, *491*, January 6, 2011. http://fourninetyone.com/2011/01/06/fromclubstoaffinity/
[37] Troemel coined the oxymoronic term, "the minor league" to describe postundergraduate net artists who would gradually become inducted into the gallery system.
Brad Troemel, "The Minor League", *Image Conscious,* ArtInfo, November 30, 2010, http://blogs.artinfo.com/imageconscious/2010/11/18/the-minor-league/
[38] Josephine Bosma, "Collecting Net Art - computerfinearts.com" CREAM *10*, Summer 2002. http://laudanum.net/cream/index.html

practices of collaboration and user-generation, Troemel overlooked the similarly decentralizing impact of mailing lists, forums and bulletin board systems in early net.art.

As social media offers each user an enhanced sense of personalized media consumption, the public sphere exists in a fragmented manner on the internet. Perhaps post-2.0 user generation has irreversibly shift one's subjectivity to a disembodied, spaceless, and placeless position.[39] If this is the case with contemporary net artists, then practices of decontextualized content curation is problematic as the reblogging of uncritical, odd media could produce a surge of irreverent "hipster capital", according to Nelson. In other words, a ubiquity of non-discursive art blogs might only serve a niche group of viewers who are interested in a narrow set of conventions, thus creating aesthetic homogeneity and insularity. This way the peer-validation of user-generated online galleries runs the risk of self-marginalizing net art instead of elevating each featured work. Nelson also warned of denigrating attention spans and declining visual ethics as users may quickly scan through an abundance of media on image aggregator blogs. [40]

Net artists often gauge community responses to web-based art through the liking and sharing of a project's URL within and beyond an online community. In a networked environment, attention and peer approval is currency for freely accessible media. In reconsideration of the Benjaminian aura of net art, McHugh

[39] Nichols, 631.
[40] R. Gerald Nelson, "Dddoomed: Or, Collectors & Curators of the Image—A Brief Future History of the Image Aggregator", MK Editions, 2010.

observed that artwork gained authority not only through its provenance, reproduction and social transactions, but its dispersion through smaller niche communities.[41] For Troemel post-2.0 practices are rhizomatic, but I anticipate a coterminous trickledown effect from between authors and peers. Users who contribute content consistently and have a longer history of content curation may become opinion leaders for their network of peers. This might explain the difference between blogger art critic Paddy Johnson's categorization as a "thought leader" on Klout as opposed to a "socializer" or "specialist" a geek internet user may be. To borrow from the logic of a two-step flow media reception theory, a peer or friend would be more likely to view a link that a respected peer approves of. Similarly, McHugh cites delicious users on accruing gatekeeping power through a publicly viewable "track record" of shared links.[42]

On Facebook, liking is an extension of rapid and non-discursive tendencies in the informal spaces of the internet. Louis Doulas cites Rafael Rozendaal's Pleaselike.com as an artwork that exemplifies the non-specificity of "liking" in online art communities.[43] While it is not indicative of the quality or sophistication of the artwork's content, attaining a high number of "Like"s, comments and "Shares" on a Facebook post proximately after its publishing

[41] McHugh, 2010.
"The aura of a work of net art is not necessarily based on its dispersion through mass culture, but through the a combination of both mass dispersion and dispersion through the smaller community of net artists and fans of net art."

[42] McHugh, 2010.
[43] Louis Doulas, "Likes at a Glance: Consumption without Contextualization" DINCA, December 8. 2011. http://dinca.org/likes-and-notes-at-a-glance-consumption-without-contextualizatio/9180.htm

raises its EdgeRank position of social newsworthiness.[44] There is no inherent political ramification or specific content with liking an artwork, but users do so as a form of public support. Therefore the appearance of a greater number of "Share"s for a post would increase the probabilities of an artwork URL reaching the –an indirect way of "seeding" social-art capital.

Alternative Exhibition Practices

Net art in the Home and the City

Aside from ad-hoc one-night exhibition projects, physical spaces for net art exhibitions have sprung around the world. Appearing as rented storefronts and apartment galleries, PRETEEN (Mexico), Future Gallery (Berlin), and Butcher Gallery (Toronto) all emulate the white cube while providing a venue for emerging net artists to exhibit web-based work. These often self-funded spaces appear to exist only for showing-not selling-art. Here the value of such exhibitions is often more social, not monetary. Such exhibitions become occasions for what used to be called face-to-face (f2f) meetings–now known as meeting in real life" (irl).[45] Besides networking, artists who have artwork curated into exhibitions around the world are able to add the event to their CV regardless of location.

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[44] Carolyn Gerlitz, "The Like Economy: The Social Web in Transition", Conference Paper MiT7 Unstable Platforms – The promise and peril of transition May 13-15. 2011 Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Boston, MA. 5. http://web.mit.edu/comm-forum/mit7/papers/MiT7%20Gerlitz%20%20%20%20%20%20Helmond%20-%20The%20Like%20economy.pdf

[45] Rachel Greene. *Internet Art*, Thames & Hudson, 2004, 75.

Fig.10. IT2TS. “Crates and Laptops”, *It Takes Two To Stereo*, June 2010. LIVESINNY$LA, Chicago.
http://ittakestwotostereo.blogspot.com/2010/06/crates-and-laptops.html

Away from bureaucratic operations of large art institutions, self-organized exhibitions created an informal social-exhibition environment where work that might not be finished may be installed unconventionally. Operating on a similar self-organized logic to *BYOB*, “Crates and Laptops” featured artists who would show web-based work laptops, which would sit on top of milk crates.[46] (Fig. 10) With exhibition titles that are laced with raunch and controversy like “Cat Fight Gang Bang”, curator Gerardo Contreras takes the emphasis off the technological dimension of new media and offers a hypersexual and provocative lens to view net art.

[46] IT2TS. “Crates and Laptops”, *It Takes Two To Stereo*, June 2010. LIVESINNY$LA, Chicago.
http://ittakestwotostereo.blogspot.com/2010/06/crates-and-laptops.html

Reflections and discontents with ways of curating these early net art shows were discussed in the Third BALTIC Seminar, where inadequacies with the installation of net art were debated in one of the first academic gatherings between net artists and curators.[47] Previous curatorial errors such as presenting multiple webpages on full-wall projections or computer screens were disproved by many artists at the time.[48]

However, continuities of such installation decisions can be seen in recent DIY social-exhibition formats for net art. *Speed Show*'s internet-café setting harkens to the office-style presentation of websites on desktop computers in *Documenta X* in 1997. Aram Bartholl later revived this concept by initiating *Speed Show* in 2010. This inspired a global organization of casual exhibitions that would happen in internet cafes. In the same year, Rafael Rozendaal also initiated the *Bring Your Own Beamer* format, which consisted of artists showing work from their projectors in an open indoor space.[49] This informal exhibition strategy demonstrates more lenient installation standards in comparison to museum opening receptions. Artists may be attracted to participate in such an exhibition to have their work aligned with the exhibition-as-movement, or to become affiliated with artists working in a regional community.

[47] Sarah Cook, Beryl Graham and Sarah Martin. *Curating new media. Third Baltic International Seminar, May 2001*, 2002. Gateshead: BALTIC.
[48] Quaranta, 71-79.
[49] "Bring Your Own Beamer Worldwide", 2010-present. http://www.byobworldwide.com/

For *BYOB* and *Speed Show,* accreditation of the "initiator" (instead of curator) would become attached to any promotional material of the event, such as press releases, Facebook events, and tumblr posts. While an emerging artist may benefit from exhibiting work with other established artists in such a vanguard exhibition format, their organizers' authorship of a mundane exhibition concept (a prototypical multi-projection exhibition) continually returns to these two artists regardless of how each rendition of the exhibition differs in curatorial theme and location. As much as it has allowed regional net artists to meet in the cities these DIY events have been organized in, *BYOB* and *Speed Show* have become franchise exhibitions due to their authorship and affiliation to a particular group. Furthermore, conscientious citation of the "initiator" contradicts ideas of inherently decentralized authorship and seeming anonymity that defined net art.

Objectifying Net Art

artobj(ect)-cult(ure) (http://artobj-cult.biz/)

> The ability to "objectify" digital art and make it as palpable, and salable…is raising questions as to whether a genre based on the community-focused ethics of open-source computer programmers has lost the edge that made it exciting in the first place.[50]

The aforementioned examples I have mapped have been concerned with funding and how curators and administrators have determined the sales and exhibition of net art. Writing on the integration of net art in institutions in 2002, Carly Berwick observed that the monetization of net art was both a blessing and

[50] Berwick, 2002.

a curse. On one hand, its appearance in institutions would contribute to autonomization of the form and give it presence and value in the mainstream contemporary art market. On the other, net artists may come under pressure to modify or create work for large institutional presentations.

After the initial wave of net artworks entered museums, art fairs and Biennales, artist-researchers such as Mark Amerika and Patrick Lichty declared net.art "dead".[51] According to Lichty, artists had pandered to a curatorial dialogue race on technology's effect on art. Unlike 01.org or JODI's view of the exhibition context as opportunity to infiltrate the museum's rigid distribution systems, they felt that the original impulses of net.art to remain cost-free and separate from the art market had been tainted by pursuits for fame and money. Contemporary artists are increasingly open to parodically or sincerely selling digital art objects than before. However, the tension between utopic visions of the self-funded exhibition and a commercially adapted practice remains an ongoing topic of contention in the online art community.

A recent example that plays with the literal notion of the art object is artobj(ect)-cult(ure) (http://artobj-cult.biz/) by Lucy Chinen and Emilie Gervais. The two artists started the online venue for inviting net artists to create sellable digital items, curated images or edition for sale on the homepage for intervals.

[51] Patrick Lichty, "On the Death of Net Art" March 31, 2004. http://www.voyd.com/texts/lichtydeathofnetart.pdf
Mark Amerika, "Ten Reasons Why Net.art is Dead", *META/DATA: A Digital Poetics*, 2007. MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachussetts and London, England. 113

Here exhibition combines with storefront–a likeness to the selling of artist multiples at Printed Matter (NYC) or Art Metropole (Toronto). While conceptually ironic and quirky, the featured exhibition-projects fluctuate in terms of conceptual innovation. The selling of products that have physical bearing may differ little from the processes of an average online shopping experience. Here paying for the "aura of the digital" can be followed by the anticipated acquisition of a physical object.

Emergent Practices of Monetizing the Digital

e-toy, *gif market*, and *Ten Thousand Cents*

What I propose as effective ways to monetize browser-based digital arts are websites that require financial transaction as process and product of the artwork. This approach to monetization is contextual to both online and offline practices of art economy and artistic activism. A past example of such a move was *etoy* (http://www.etoy.com), a Swiss collective who employed their website as a corporate social sculpture. With the intention of infiltrating everyday life with overriding digital professionalism, they created a website to sell shares of stock on cultural value in 1994. Like the Yes Men, etoy employed corporate aesthetics in their web design to satire the profit-driven mechanisms of dotcom operations.[52] Users would be implicated to enter an arbitrary value for investing in a share of "cultural value" on the website.

[52] Greene, 65.

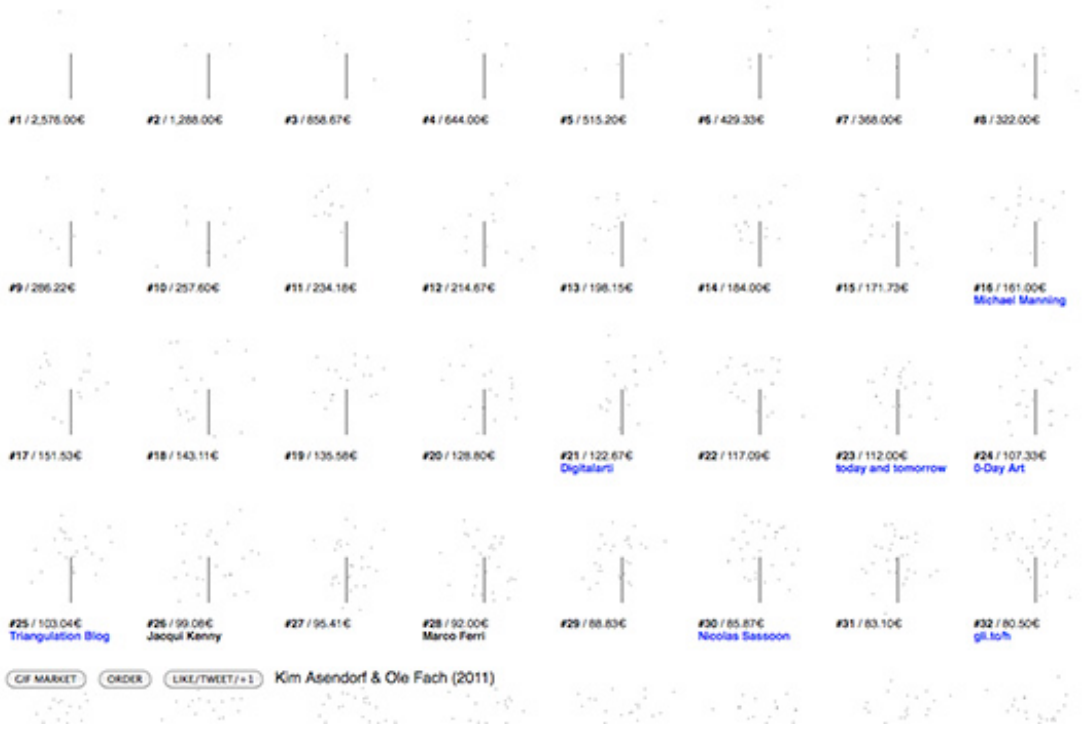

Fig 11. Kim Asendorf and Ole Fach, *Gifmarket.net*, 2011. http://www.gifmarket.net

A contemporary example of selling an unflattering digital object is gif *market* (http://gifmarket.net/) by Kim Asendorf and Ole Fach. (fig 11) The website is designed in a professional-amateur manner with a grid of 1024 pixeled gifs displayed on a white background. An “Order” button on the interface invites users to purchase any number of gifs from the web page through PayPal. The gifs they are selling are not spectacular; in fact the number of moving pixels decreases in the gifs near the top row of the website. Asendorf and Fach satirically extended the concept of unique coding in their explanation of their formal decisions to make a series of lackluster gifs:

> The GIFs show a black line which marks the centre for the 1px large particles rotating around it. #1 is the most unique, it has only 1 pixel flying around…the most expensive…The price gets calculated by this [sic] formula: PRICE = SALES / NUMBER * 16
> So each sale increases the price, at the end the #1 will cost 16,384.00€[53]

Referencing a stock market system, the value of gifs in higher rows increases everytime a gif is purchased. The sponsor's name and website may be linked to the name or word they choose to feature underneath their selected gif. This possibly provided new visitors with a first impression that funders who had their names linked to the gifs had authored the gifs. On the other hand, visitors are presented with the opportunity to join the community of funders. The inclusion of simple gifs demonstrate that Asendorf and Fach are not appealing to viewers' aesthetic sensibilities to attract purchases. In fact they are asking viewers to speculate on the prospective gains of buying a digital object on a particular part of the website. A net artist may receive more relevant traffic from backlinking to their website if they purchase a gif near the top. Soon artists who had "bought" gifs began to reappropriate the spinning pixilated gifs into other gifs of their own– a recycling of value into aesthetic despite the reproducible copy.[54]

[53] Triangulation,"Gif Market", Triangulation Blog, August 2011. http://www.triangulationblog.com/2011/08/gifmarketnet.html
[54] Michael Manning, *untitled*, 2011. https://lh3.googleusercontent.com/-MXdLen_cmzc/TjoraCnpA2I/AAAAAAAAAj8/vPKuCs3YZjQ/s300/313_sculpture.gif

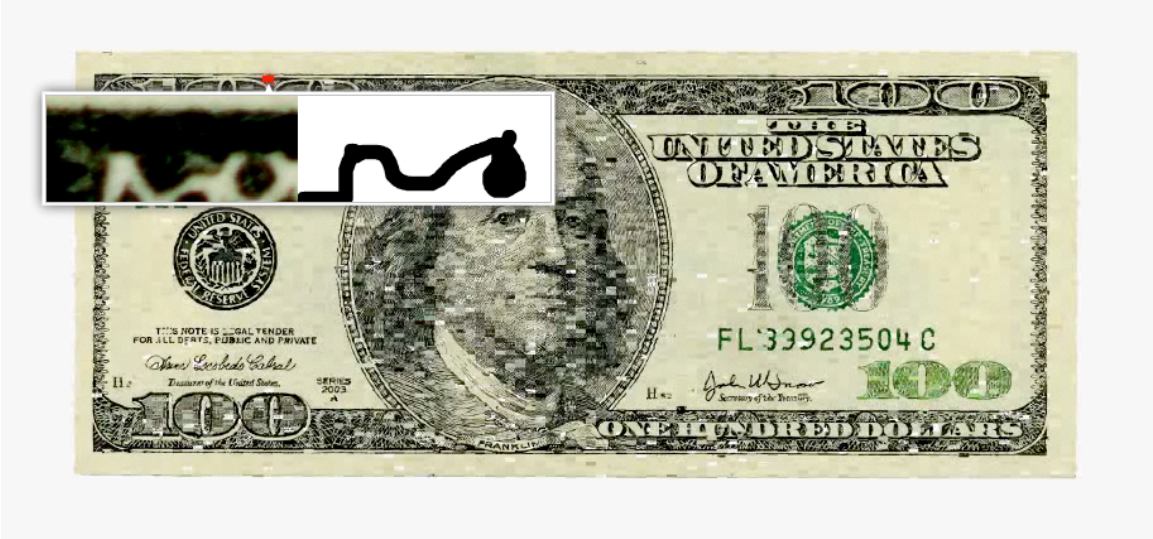

Fig 12. Aaron Koblin and Taskashi Kawashima, *Ten Thousand Cents*, 2008. www.tenthousandcents.com

An online project that rigorously applied a Marxist critique of the post-industrial economy to the information society is *Ten Thousand Cents* (www.tenthousandcents.com). Using Amazon's Mechanical Turk distributed labor tool, Aaron Koblin and Takashi Kawashima crowdsourced 10,000 internet users and paid each of them 1 cent to digitally paint a tiny fraction of a hundred dollar bill.[55] In the same way proletariat worker's consumption and labor is separated from the product, the users would not know of each other or what the final product would be. All painted works were collected to create a digital representation of an American hundred-dollar bill. Koblin and Kawashima made the collected works for sale on the website for $100 each and decided the proceeds would go to charity. Using the process and product as a critique of labor in digital capitalism, *Ten Thousand Cents* extends e-toy's satire of

[55] Amazon. Mechanical Turk. 2005-2012. https://www.mturk.com

corporate aesthetics and the related novelty of using networked technologies to make money.

A platform that employs similar crowdsourcing logic to attract donations is *Art Micro Patronage* (http://artmicropatronage.org). Started by Eleanor Hanson Wise and Oliver Wise, the project attempts to provide artists with income consistent with the amount of positive feedback (reblogs, Likes and thumbs-up) from their online viewers. The highly animated website displays monthly exhibitions of digital art that are compiled by guest curators. Interested patrons are asked to pledge donations to online artwork by creating an account in which they may dispense “Likes” of values from 50 cents to $20. Alternatively, they may become a member, where membership fees would pay artist fees at the end of six exhibitions. As the project is relatively new during my time of writing, it is hard to speculate on the efficacy of this model of selling net art. Perhaps one of problems with this model is that artists require curators to introduce their work into this platform to gain distribution in this manner.

As an artist-curator, I am interested in artists politicizing their production practices instead of versioning a saleable form of their artwork. The artists of the aforementioned projects decided to use their projects to determine the conditions of distribution and participation instead of working with a gallery, buyer or platform for distribution. They utilized the website and the financial transaction to force the user to consider their role as consumer of supposedly-free culture.

Although projects like *etoy* and *Ten Thousand Cents* may require viewer foreknowledge of the processes and conditions of production for a viewer to understand its politics of representation, it nonetheless demonstrates a deviation from the usual course of creating a gallery-ready object for sale.

Conclusion

In this study I have identified multiple ways net artists and curators have negotiated with traditional modes of exhibition and distribution. Beyond notions of authenticity and simulation, digital reproduction allows a concept to exist variably and transferably. When a web-based version may not necessarily last forever as technologies obsolesce, the conversion of a digital into an analogue object allows it to enter the dialogue of mainstream contemporary art.

In my survey of past and present practices of net art exhibition and sales, it appears there are no standard practices for the commodification of net art. Some net artists have exhibit physical analogues of web-based work in order to enter the gallery system and to leverage their personal branding. Meanwhile, and certificates of authenticity and artist contracts for exhibitions adhere to more traditional modes of art dealership. Self-organized, DIY practices in both online and physical spaces allow emerging artists to experiment with alternative exhibition formats. However, both curators and artists need to be wary of conditions of production and presentation. Inevitably even the most ad-hoc of

projects (such as *BYOB*) become institutions when appropriated to gallery systems.

Ultimately in its move from screen to gallery (and back), web-based art takes on multiple dimensions of social and cultural value. Peer-validation and node-to-node sharing of media continually determines vernacular approaches to its spatialization and monetization. In 1988 Bill Nichols had predicted:

> The consequence of systems without aura, systems that replace direct encounter…is a fetishism of such systems and processes of control themselves. [56]

In the shift from physical to digital processes of producing art, the process of engagement has become both product and fetish for the cybernetic subject. It is the potential for mediated belonging and participation determines the consumptive appeal of websites like gifmarket.net as a platform of monetizing but also critiquing economies of visual consumption. While there shouldn't be an absolute open-source policy for distributing web-based art, artists who are aware of the operations and constraints of internet services might benefit the most from acknowledging it in their work.

From the screen to the gallery, media objects become objects and installations, and then documentation. It is likely that greater potentials for viewership and consumption of net art occurs during a private surfing experience,

[56] Nichols, 632.

but the spatialization of net art inspires new ways of looking at art beyond the confines of a screen. Perhaps aura and authenticity are even dated ideas evaluating the exhibition and sales of ubiquitous and reproducible media objects. As Michael Betancourt observed, the notion of aura is a socially-constructed concept.[57] While circulating art on media-sharing platforms reinforces its exhibition value, and community reaction on social networks enhances its cult value, artists and curators should consider all possible contexts of distribution and exhibition before versioning or selling a web-based artwork.

Fig. 12. Alex Tew, *Million Dollar Homepage*, 2005. http://milliondollarhomepage.com

It may be possible to make an argument for the monetization of net art by comparing it to the social capital and the monetary value of the social networks it is shared within. *The Million Dollar Homepage* (http://milliondollarhomepage.com/) wasn't made with artistic intentions, but the

[57] Ibid, 2006.

combination of context (advertising) with form (website) attracted many businesses to buy advertising space on the website. (Fig 12) Likewise, Michael Bettancourt observed:

> …digital works with the "aura of information" imply a transformation of objects to information…understanding the specific structure of digital art makes the form of the "digital aura" much more explicit.[58]

The integration of monetization into the process of art production allows viewers to contemplate the significance or exhibiting and owning a piece of net art. Without planning context-appropriate translation of media in physical space, web-based media runs the risk of losing its "digital aura", or its reference to web culture and its conflicted subtexts of agency and control. In other words, net art that no longer looks like net art in a gallery would be literally post-internet–when web-based art looks ahistorical of the digital era.

[58] Michael Betancourt, "The Aura of the Digital", *1000 Days of Theory*, Edited by Arthur and Marilouise Kroker. 2006 http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=519