Now That You Have It, What Are You Going To Do With It and How?

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REAL OR NOT

Now That You Have It, What Are You Going To Do With It and How?

by Anne Britton

Cataloging Internet art creates an opportunity for libraries to provide immediate access to contemporary artworks for an unlimited number of patrons. In short, Internet art integrated in a library catalog can distribute art, cheap and fast, to a wider audience than artists' books ever could. In this paper I will discuss some practical aspects of cataloging and archiving Internet art. My discussion is divided into five sections: Definitions, Selection, Acquisition, Cataloging, and Preservation.

Definitions

There are many similarities between artists' books and Internet art. Like an artist's book, Internet art can be linear, non-linear, self-published, gallery-driven, high production, low production, technically complex, technically simple, ephemeral, archival, purely pictorial, all-text, interactive, prosaic, poetic, goofy, gimmicky, one-liner-ish, accessible, inaccessible, art, documentation and surrogate.

One example of an artists'-book-Internet cross-over artist is Claude Closky, who has made books like First Thousand Numbers Classified in Alphabetical Order (1989) and 100 Photographs Which are Not Photographs of Horses (1995). Critic Lynne Cooke of Dia writes about Closky's cross-over to Internet art: "Whether in the form of cheaply printed books, unlimited editions of single-channel videos, posters or wallpaper, multiples are Closky's preferred vehicles. Given its demotic range, ready availability, and relatively low-cost production, the World Wide Web has become for this young French artist an equally appealing medium in which to work."1

There are a few articles which articulate the connection between traditional contemporary artists' books on the one hand and Internet art on the other. In particular, see The Structure of the Virtual Book by Chris Perego;2 Is it a Book? by Karen Drayne, Barbara Davison, and Emily-Jane Dawson;3 and The Self-Conscious Codex: Artists' Books and Electronic Media by Johanna Drucker.4 There are many books and articles on Internet art generally, including the recent Digital Dialectic edited by Peter Lunenfeld.5

Selection of "Virtual Artist Books"

There are several new and established cultural efforts focused on Internet art and its display, meaning, techniques, dissemination and so on. The Web sites of these efforts are generally important sources for compilations of links. They include the Musée d'Art Contemporain de Montréal; Walker Art Center; Nettime discussion list; 7-11 discussion list; the New York Times (Matthew Mirapaul's arts@large column); Zentrum für Kunst und MedienTechnologie; adaWeb; the commercial Wired Digital Inc; the Museum of Web Art; and many others.

When you are out there surfing, you may notice that compilations of links to Internet art, that is, art made from Internet tools, are variously named. Uncontrolled categorical headings include: “Artist’s Projects” (Artsource), “New Media” (Artsource), “Artist studios/Digital artists” (Art on the Net), “Artist studios/Hacker artists” (Art on the Net), “Projects” (NYU’s Interactive Telecommunications Program), “Art Sites” (Museum of Web Art), “Networks” (7th Annual NY Digital Salon), “Online Projects” (Oxford University’s Laboratory), “Works online” (OW@C), as distinct from “Artists’ Sites” (OW@C). More about vocabulary later. Selection aids like reviews are commonly found online (try Leonardo Almanac), also offline in Art Monthly (Michael Gibbs), and Artforum.

Acquisition

Having selected some Internet resources, the information professional then considers access. Roy Tennant writes in the January 2000 issue of American Libraries, "When one decides that a resource is worth collecting, how does one 'collect' it? Is pointing to it from a Web page sufficient? Should the resource be cataloged in the library catalog? What is a collection? Is it what you own, or everything you can encompass with links as well as walls?"6

A collection of Internet art can consist of either locally held or remote resources, or both. A lot of Internet art lacks the stability on which much of art history so far has been predicated and which is so helpful to librarians in acquiring and cataloging a particular published resource. As Steve Holtzman notes: “Even if a basic property of digital technology is perfect repeatability, ‘repeatable’ is exactly what nonlinear hypermedia is [not].”7

One might encompass this flux by acquiring/archiving an actual copy to hold in your local collection. The Sales Department of MT Enterprises’ "Visual-Text Art Venue (VTAV)," (mteww.com/VTAV/sales.html), a parody site, offers work for sale in four formats: “1. Artifact; 2. license; 3. shared copyright; 4. full copyright.” An “artifact” is “a hard-copy print” (signed by the artist); a “license” is the work “on a floppy disk” and “allows one to create as many copies as one wishes of the work for personal use.” With “Shared copyright” “the collector..."
shames [with the artist] all rights regarding publication” and “Full copyright” gives the collector “all rights to...publication.”

On the other hand, there are remote resources. As Eugenie Prime, Hewlett-Packard’s Library Manager, says: “Own nothing, Maintain nothing, Access everything. That’s my mantra.” Put another way, remote resources require less tech support overall. In a Web-based library catalog, the beauty of cataloging the link (using, for example, MARC’s 856 field) as opposed to archiving and cataloging the object itself, is that little or no tech support is required.9

Further, many works of Internet art are already archived and fully accessible. Turbulence, for one, has very functional archived copies of some thirty-four works from 1996 to the present. Rhizome, also, with a database of some seventy works, provides access to both the original URL and often its “clone.” Also, as you would expect, cataloging is unfortunately often non-standardized and varies in fullness from archive to archive (at least for now). In contrast to archives are collections of links. A functionality check I conducted earlier this year of links compiled (but not archived) by the Musée d’Art Contemporain Montréal showed, of 255 total “Web Art Projects,” (that is, artworks) seventy-six per cent active links and twenty-four per cent inactive ones during random sampling in January and February 2000. Of the seventy-eight total “Sites Presenting Web Art Projects,” eighty-four per cent were active, sixteen per cent inactive.

Cataloging

In the cataloging process, one solution to the problem of shiftness is to note that a particular site has been cataloged on a particular day. That is, the catalog record might include a note such as: “(Viewed via the World Wide Web on March 20, 2000).”

In cataloging either remote or local resources at the level of data fields, one might choose MARC, Dublin Core, or VRA’s core data fields, for instance. Other data fields are worth considering as well, like those for interactive telecommunications projects at New York University [http://itp.nyu.edu/itpWeb/html/prj_index.shtm], which include fields for: “Type, Technology, Freshness Date, Plugin, Semester.” Rhizome [http://www.rhizome.org/artbase/ab_indexing_info.html] also uses locally contrived data fields, some nominally identical to NYU: “Type, Technology, Category, Keyword.” These fields are standard only at the local level, although some can be cleanly mapped to MARC or Dublin Core.

At the level of data values, catalogers need controlled vocabularies. Some archives of Internet art have created their own field-specific vocabularies. Rhizome, for instance, allows the following values in its “Technology” data field: “HTML, DHTML, QuickTime, CuSeeMe, Java, Perl, Flash, Shockwave, Javascript, VRML, RealPlayer, MP3, download, and E-mail.” Rhizome’s “Keyword” field is also controlled by a short word list which includes terms like: “Artificial Life, Broadcast, CD-ROM, Colonialism, Design, Labor, Language, Publish, Resistance, Responsibility, and Rumor.”

At the risk of belaboring the point, let me mention one last word list. NYU’s Interactive Telecommunications “Types” data field includes terms relevant to “virtual artists’ books” as well as to more general, art-related Internet resources, such as: “Digital spaces, Games, Narrative space, Narratives, Portfolio, Web
Notes

1. diacenter.org/closky/intro.html
9. Lena Stebley, “Faculty Perspective on Teaching with Digital Images; Results of Focus Groups with Art Faculty,” Visual Resources 14, no. 4. (1999): 472.
10. Stebley, op.cit., 473.

Internet Art Resources: Select Examples

by Doro Boehme and Anne Britton

http://www.geocities.com/rushca26/resources.html

COMPIKATION OF ARTWORKS:
adaWeb: http://adaWeb.walkerart.org
@art: http://www.art.uiuc.edu/Aart/main.html
The Thing:
    http://www.thing.net/
        http://old.thing.net

INDIVIDUAL ARTWORKS:
1am: http://www.1am.org
Blast: http://www.blast.org/menu.html
Freud-Lissitzky Navigator:
    http://visarts.ucsd.edu/~manovich/FLN
Kac: http://www.ekac.org/multimedia.html

HISTORY, THEORY, CRITICISM:
Artswire: http://www.artswire.org
Ctheory: http://www.ctheory.com/ctheory.html
Rhizome discussion list: http://www.rhizome.org/subscribe/

ACQUISITION:
Visual Resources Association Copyright page:
    http://www.oberlin.edu/~art/vra/copyright.html

CATALOGING:
MARC:
    http://lcWeb.loc.gov/marc/bibliographic/ecbdhome.html

EXAMPLES OF CATALOGED ARTWORKS:

PRESEKATION:

EXKAME OF AN ARCHIVE:
Turbulence: http://www.turbulence.org