

Artists of the future may not know that they are artists. If the Internet continues to expand (and withstands the commercial impulse to convert it into interactive TV), collaborative and modular digital art practices will also grow.

Many net users, gamers, musicians and programmers will produce cultural artifacts, software, digital accessories, game warez, and music warez that they share with each other both freely and for pay. Users will be cultural producers (artists) and consumers, readers and writers, and information filters and collectors: i.e. net curators. In describing "future" artists and curators I also refer to present day artists and curators. Just as cyberpunk science fiction describes near future scenarios whose seeds are sown by present day conditions of increasing globalization, my future art scenarios are pixel painted from the work of contemporary artists and netizens.

Fluidities and Oppositions among Curators, Filter Feeders and Future Artists

Future Artist Scenario X:

This artist keeps his/her identity guarded from the public, concealing gender markers, age and physical location. He/she/it, (shall name her/him/it X), spends 99.9% of its every waking hour sitting in front of a high-grade lap top bought with student loans, a credit card, some kind of grant, or perhaps savings from a pre-dot com bust job. X eats breakfast while reading X's email every morning while still in a bathrobe. X's email is filtered into many folders for multiple art, music, and news lists. Thus reading email, in addition to responding to the odd personal, professional, or fan mail, entails also reading news articles, following links to MP3 downloads, and clicking on links to art sites, anime sites and random bizarre web curiosities.

Future Artist Scenario Y:

This artist sometimes works solo but more often than not collaborates in an artist collective with four other artists, some who live nearby, and others quite far. Artist "Y" does not have a formal artist training - he studied computer science in college. By day, 28-year-old Y works as a database programmer at a local firm where Y dresses just like one of the other guys except for his shoes. (Unfortunately most of Y's programmer colleagues are men due to complex gender and economic factors in the country/city where Y lives, although his project manager is a woman.) After work, Y grabs a burrito or falafel and heads towards the shared rented lab space where Y and a few other members of Y's art group goof around, surf the web, play network shooter games and hatch up crazy projects. At 1 a.m., Y and possey head out to a bar and catch some friends' experimental music performance. (Maybe artist X's live broadcast is playing there too!)

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Future Artist Scenario Z:

Artist Z is a 19-year-old college student and hasn't figured out what her major is yet - she likes both mathematics and drama (having never studied art yet). Since she was a kid, Z has always had her own computers, built web sites for friends, played games and surfed the web searching for her favorite anime and pokemon pets. When she was 12, she programmed her own demo V.J. (Video Jockey) effects program that made jagged swirly 3-D patterns in response to musical input. Now she is into GWUB, growing without Unix babies, an open source form of alife creatures/digital dolls that hop on and off linux computers and into smart linux protocol t-shirts, backpacks and liquid tattoo patches. Her first GWUB doll used alife algorithms made freely available by other GWUB makers and the second included a special "compulsive echolalia" configuration she actually paid money for to a guy named Fats Cho. The third was a mixture of her own dolphin algorithm and some algorithms coded by others - her most complex GWUB to date who is attracted to any movement resembling ocean waves. People have downloaded Z's GWUBs hundreds of times and her site is linked from the front page of the most popular GWUB directory. She is working on ways to compress her GWUB file sizes, so low-end boggy cable modem users can use them at peak hours.

Artists will become more like mad scientists and musicians, collaborating in "laboratory"-like conditions, mutating software to achieve unexpected results, morphing, jamming, riffing off of one another and also within feedback loops in communicado with generative visual and audio software. I saw this enacted in 2001 in Barcelona, Spain, where every week a new festival seemed to showcase local and international V.J.'s, musicians, and net artists. Artists from all over Europe were converging - working, playing, talking, partying and performing. Some of the luminary net art collectives were also living in Barcelona on a more persistent basis, and serving as attractors for this activity (fiftyfifty, jodi, 011s, d-i-n-a). Thus, despite the importance of the web as a deterritorialized exhibition space, a kind of live performance mode coexisted with web presence (more like musicians), magnetically attracting other creators to a particular physical location. Enjoying the company and work of others so online makes one long for multi-modal live contact as well. Virtual communities solidify into the physical.

OPPOSITIONS

Past Artist

Studio
Solo Genius

Shock-generating
Invention
Masturbation
High profile wickedness
New York art market
aspirations
Flirting with museums and galleries
Male ego overblown on itself

Individual
Art elite

Future Artist

Bedroom or lab
Member of high status list serv
or collaboration
Beta-testing
Playful mutation, hacking
Feedback loops
Untraceable mischief
Nomadic Hoboism

Flirting with reporters
and festivals
Female ego overblown
on fan mail
Flexible clusters
Discreet online communities

Fluidities:

Non-linear thinking

Process-driven evolution

Collage, montage, hybrids

Playing with rule systems

Fetishization of aesthetics

Compulsive creativity

Compulsive deconstruction



Musician/Artist/Curator collective Fiftyfifty (Pedro Soler right) organized and invited international and local artists to a series of "art hacking" workshops at Hangar in Barcelona extended over six months.

Filter Feeders:

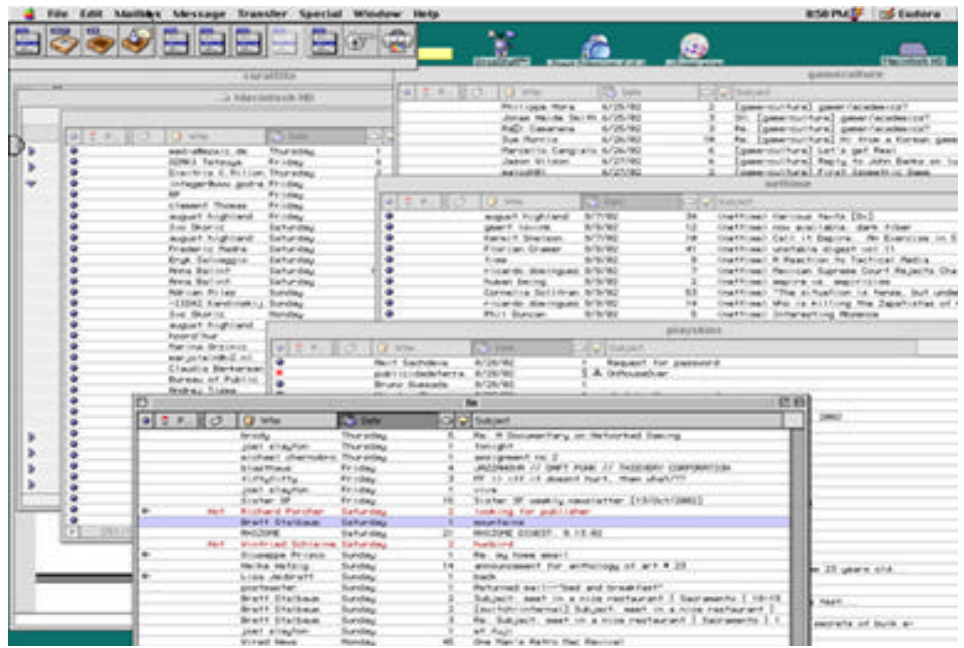
Most web sites contain hyperlinks to other sites, distributed throughout the site or in a "favorites" section. Each of these favorite links sections serves as a kind of gallery, remapping other web sites as its own contents. Every web site owner is thus a curator and a cultural critic, creating chains of meaning through association, comparison and juxtaposition, parts or whole of which can in turn serve as fodder for another web site's "gallery." Site maintainers become operational filter feeders, feeding of other filter feeders sites and filtering others' sites. Links are contextualized, interpreted and "filtered" through criticism and comments about them, and also by placement in the topology of a site. The deeper a link is buried, the harder it may be to find, the closer to the surface and the frontpage, the more prominent it becomes, as any web designer can attest to.

I am what I link to and what I am shifts over time as I link to different sites. It is useful here to invoke Henry Jenkin's studies of television fan culture in Textual Poachers. In the 1980s, female Star Trek fans went beyond passive reception of Star Trek episodes to radically rewriting Star Trek plots, sometimes as audacious "slash fiction" gay (male) porn flicks set in outer space. In a pre-web era, they distributed their stories through homeprinted fan zines. Being a radical fan does not inhabit a passive role of being besotted by media-it is to actively restructure and rewrite media, using the media as a "silly putty" starting point for mutation. Building and maintaining a web site is also an active process of restructuring and organizing such that other people's data undergoes ontological shifts and mutations through filtering. In the process, I invest my identity in my collection - I become how I filter.

Oppositions among Curators:

I'm not describing a version of mortal combat where you choose to play a curator from a top media art institution, (picture Peter Weibel of Karlsruhe's Z.K.M vs. Barbara London of New York MOMA, or Christiane Paul kickboxing Steve Dietz of the Walker.) I'm also not referring to the backstabbing, competition or uninspired plagiarism that sometimes occurs among and between net, free-lance and traditional institution affiliated curators. The oppositions I outline arise from transformations in public art viewing practices and also from dissolving delineations between fine and popular art forms. Public space has shifted to the web and engages audiences located geographically distant from one other but perhaps with hobbies and tastes closer than those shared by the average museum patron. While some lament the creation of narrowly focused, "geeky" niche microcommunities, others are drawn into the specialized knowledge sharing and intense involvement of these communities. In art, these clades have subdivided from initial broader categories such as "net art," "electronic music" and "game mods" into narrower niches supported by email lists where "artists" and "curators" post links, announcements and software updates. Some of these narrower bifurcated creative communities include the "generative art list," the live electronic video programming list (lev@shoko.calarts.edu), the Counter-strike spray forum, the Adult KiSS forum, and so on. Split, bifurcate, mutate - these communities are constantly restructuring, expanding and dying.

Physical, audio, tactile aspects of artworks can be represented in a traditional art space in tandem with online presence or experienced in the greater privacy of the bedroom or smaller shared space (classroom, workplace, lab). Of late, emaciated or overweight atrophied bodies still old enough to remember another time before even TV (or imagined through role playing games where elves and dwarves roam freely) wax nostalgic for a world that was not framed by the 4-by-3 monitor aspect ratio, not interfaced with through smaller "windows," and not fucked around with through a mouse and keyboard. A kind of impatience for the promise of "wireless" circulates among the limbs but, once bound, we are unwilling or unable to disconnect for longer than a few days (escapes to ocean, dancing, woods, sex, Burning Man) from the online networks we constitute and the audiences and communities we belong to.



My email is filtered into five mail boxes right now.

My binary splicing of artists and curators into two separate categories here has been useful to some extent, but at this juncture, I want to glue the two heads of the artist and the curator back onto the same body again. I believe this hybrid chimera has arisen quite "naturally" from the web. Online filter feeders are often also artists. In the heyday of pioneer net art, net artists jodi.org maintained a map constellation prominent in their site, linking to other artists. Making it through jodi's filter to their map was once considered a

Past Curator:

- Museum or gallery exhibition space
- Art history education
- Ties to wealthy patrons of art
- Designer suits and high heels
- Urban Metropolis located
- Navigates bureaucracy and institutions well
- Art as Commodity

Stays within Art Community

Future Filter Feeder:

- Space peripheral, in tandem or 0
- Pop culture criticism, Tech history
- Ties to other Filter Feeders and artists
- Pajamas and sex toys
- Dispersed locations
- Flows around and avoids institutions
- Ephemera, Extreme preservation challenges
- Infiltrates, subverts other communities

Fluidities:

- Thriving on social interactions
- Compulsive collecting
- Problems with Funding of Endeavors
- Restructuring Information Writers

marker of success as a net artist. Many KiSS Doll makers, (Kiss dolls are interactive digital paper dolls) also run specialized sites showcasing the work

of other KiSS artists, such as Dominatrix's "Blue Page," a site dedicated to sophisticated adult KiSS dolls.

Filter Feeding with the Subversive Imagination:

In this last segment, I am speaking from my own personal experience as an online curator. Most of my online shows have been motivated not only by discovering interesting pre-existing work, but also a desire for that which does not quite yet exist but should, a kind of wishful imagining into the void. As a filter feeder, I may create the filter first and then fill in the data to feed it as best as presently possible. In 1998, I put out a "call for submissions" for "Cracking the Maze" hoping to find artists creating game mods that were both challenging perceptual and visual experiences of game worlds and/or using games to speak about gender, race and politics, both inside and outside "gaming." I was surprised and happy to receive submissions of completed pieces and proposals by Mongrel, Josephine Starrs, Natalie Bookchin and RTMark that addressed the second component of my filter. (I also procured game editing software from a game company for the artists and, in one case, provided some tech support for one piece, further providing fodder for my filter.) A few years later, "the medium" of game modding has evolved to the extent that artists are deeply immersed inside particular game companies' engines, something that was not quite there yet at the time of "Cracking the Maze."

With my site of female character game hacks, "Mutation.fem," created for the Helsinki Kiasma Museum show "Alien Intelligence" curated by Erkki Huhtamo, I

focused on a female affront in gaming that in actuality was much too small, but deserved to be in a bigger spotlight. In "Lucky Kiss," I tried to describe what seemed to be a rare community of both male and female artists who were making interactive erotica. In "Snow Blossom House" (for the Sonar Festival in Barcelona and shown in the basement of the Museum of Contemporary Art Barcelona), I constructed a role for myself as a Japanese teenage girl doll collector secretly playing with her brothers' hentai games, exploring her erotic imagination through her collection of adult interactive media. The curator with a subversive imagination creates filters for things that she only finds traces of and then asks the world to fill in the blanks.

My most recent "curatorial" venture was "Velvet-Strike," a loose collaboration with Joan Leandre and Brody Condon and others who contributed to the collection. Velvet-Strike is a site with downloadable peace sprays and game-play "intervention recipes." Like my other online curatorial projects, Velvet-Strike was also a kind of open questioning and response feedback loop through the net that - in addition to engendering some fabulous anti-war spray paint logos by people like Rebecca Cannon of Select Parks, and Chris Burke, former Counterstrike texturer - yielded a violent and angry barrage of hate mail, death threats and spam from pro-military male gamers. These angry gamers resented intrusion into their favorite military network shooter sim by "tree huggers, faggots and bitches." Thus we, perhaps not quite anticipating the extreme misogyny and right wing character of many (American) players (and poor Joan being mistaken for a woman as well),

infiltrated a community quite outside the art-going public and the scope of museums and galleries. Reaching broader audiences is an important advantage to exercising "the subversive filter feeding imagination" through the Net.

I project the filter feeders and digital artists of the present into the future, where their filter feeding and online artworks will be augmented by live performances and in-person collaborations and interactions such as those experienced by my imaginary artists X, Y, and Z. Filter Feeder is a role inhabited by not only artists trained as "artists" but by other creators whose mode of distribution and display is primarily digital and online. Filter Feeders are filter creators (curating as artmaking at a meta level), data organizers, and artists. Perhaps taking this broader net user/creator perspective beyond the traditionally defined field of art can add something to existing studies of net art, for example to the writing of Josephine Berry and responses from others on the nettime list in January 2001, or to the writing from the February 2002 "Collaborative Curatorial Models" Switch Issue. I have also taken advantage of this opportunity to describe the "subversive imaginings" of my personal curatorial process, a process that I usually engage in under the spell of some kind of compulsive filter-feeding, filter-imagining instinct.

NOTES:

- i Jenkins, Henry, *Textual Poachers*, Routledge, London, 1992.
- ii <http://www.c5corp.com>
- iii Manovich, Lev, "The Poetics of Augmented Space: Learning from Prada" posted to nettime list 5/16/02.
- iv Schleiner, Anne-Marie "2 Reviews: Untitled Game and Ego Image Shooter," posted to nettime list March 2002.