

## **On the Death of Net Art By Patrick Lichty 3/31/04**

*"In a small article in the New York Times this morning, (sorry, it does not seem to be online) entitled "Internet Art Survives, But the Boom Is Over", Cory Arcangel, Rachel Greene, Jonah Peretti, Mark Tribe and Lawrence Rinder talk about the death of Net Art. Yup, that's right, it's now officially officially, officially ...over and dead.*

*Or, as Mark Tribe calls it and MTAA officially agrees, "Undead"."*

-Mark River of MTAA as posted on Rhizome.org, 3/31/2004

To expand on this from personal experience:

At Susan Ryan's College Art Association panel on the future of technological art in 2002(I think 2002, might have been 2001) during the Q&A session, I boldly announced (in a bit of a illicit haze) that the day after the WB2000, that Net Art was:

"...dead as your poor old Great Aunt Edna, as it has been recognized and canonized by the Institution. So as with Expressionism, Neo-Dada, and all the other movements that continue to live on as shambling corpses, so will Net Art. So say your eulogies and write your histories, and respectfully lay the body to rest. I, for one, am not centering my work around Net Art any longer for this reason."

Now, this is not to say that net art is 'dead' per se, but at least in institutional discourse it has been chiseled into art history and so has been drained of its dynamism. To put it another way, in its recognition on major biennials as a genre, it has been labeled with certain Formalist criteria (not they are germane to the real genre at all), and thus codified to the curatorial profession as such.

With mainstream recognition, Net Art also becomes one of the 'Sally Struthers' categories of fine art that "Is in high demand, and makes great money", which is an analogy to the matchbook art schools with the 'aptitude tests' which ask the prospective student/acolyte to draw their rendition of the pirate or donkey on the cover. And we have seen the young artists flock to the genre for hopes of recognition and fame, like so many moths to the bug zapper.

Problem is, Cory Arcangel's work is dead now. Sure, it'll now be a hit in the galleries and Art News, etc., but with any major point of recognition, the 'real' progression of work is placed under the keepsake dome and frozen. It has been placed under the glass with the pin stuck through its thorax. With major credits like the WB, the discussion ceases to be about the work.

This may seem like I'm saying that mainstream success is death, and to an extent, I think that this is correct. Artists what wish to continue to grow beyond that stultifying categorization of Biennial, or Documenta, or whatever, exhibition, have to take that body of work and burn it. Now. Or at least make significant progressions in it. The groups that I have participated with in the WB seem to be doing just that; they continue on, but in a zombie state for the legions of the art world to séance with. The growth comes in those same groups having shed their Biennial 'skins' and reinvented themselves in the form of other projects, having more or less resemblance to their original frames.

Now, on the other hand, if Net Art decides to not give a damn about its ambitions and to morph into hybrid forms, or even to rebel against curatorial formalism in regards to their expectations of net art, maybe there's some hope. We'll continue on outside the expectations of 'using intrinsic structures of the Net as part of our work', or 'exhibiting sufficient technological virtuosity through code', as these are contextual limitations specified by technical concerns, and not by our methods of expression. I, for one will not let some curator (of which I am also one) dictate the format and structure of my work.

Sure, the genre will be considered 'dead' by the intelligentsia, but we'll know better. And the neophytes, sycophants, and aspirants will continue right on going on the hamster wheel chasing the withered carrot. We'll laugh ourselves silly; because we've been there, before the carrot was shriveled, and tasting the carrot realized it wasn't that tasty.

The difference is that in so doing, we've taken the red pill, ladies and gentlemen. As Neo and Morpheus had compassion for the human batteries of The Matrix, so will we. Not that we're gods, superhuman, or better than anyone else. Far from it. We've just gotten a little more experience, and from this have a broader perspective. That's all.

And so I ask the question: The end has come.

Now what?

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