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Sites of New Media Art: Using the Internet to Explore Touch, Sociality, and Preservation

THESIS

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF FINE ARTS

in Art

by

Erin Marie Gordon

Thesis Committee:
Professor Juli Carson, Chair
Professor Antoinette LaFarge
Professor Bruce Yonemoto
Assistant Professor Bonnie Ruberg

2018

DEDICATION

To

my parents,
whose support kept me sane,
my friends and loved ones,
who are saints,
and Tina.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Sites of New Media Art: Using the Internet to Explore Touch, Sociality, and Preservation

By

Erin Marie Gordon

Master of Fine Arts in Art

University of California, Irvine, 2018

Professor Juli Carson, Chair

This paper explores the varying ways in which new media art currently interacts with the Internet, the network, and Web 2.0; it additionally touches upon the relationship between new media works and their often-tenuous situation within the institution by curators (e.g. in museums, galleries, etc.), as well as social media's impact on sociality. A loose definition of new media (works using computers, code, digital video, and the Internet, among others), which is a term constantly in flux due to positioning and relevancy in relation to art and technology, is established in order to further explicate artworks that are primarily used to think through overarching related concepts.

My thesis exhibition *Do You Want to Quit? Intimacy, Site, Self* serves as a both a starting point for research and a larger case study in which to situate the following research; the artworks included in the exhibition inspired correlations between materialism, community, and the archive as sites of inquiry in relation to new media art. I believe that interacting with new media art through touch exemplifies its importance for and with these three themes, and that both affect theory (as well as emotion in general) and experiencing art firsthand are crucial in parsing through this work.

INTRODUCTION

In an essay for *Artforum*'s fiftieth anniversary issue in 2012, scholar Claire Bishop posits: "Whatever happened to digital art?"[1] Despite the backlash that Bishop received after her essay was published, this leading question and its ensuing controversy are very much present in the world of contemporary art, which has institutions and galleries dedicated to only *it* and its postmodernity (or lack thereof). However, I do not feel that something has happened to digital art, but rather, digital art has been oft-separated from the rest of the so-called fine arts. Shortly after her initial question, Bishop wonders why digital works have not thoroughly "[filtered] affect through the digital," and with this remark, I firmly believe digital works, or artworks built with the technological, fully utilize affect with the apparatus and especially so in the institutional space.

The most pertinent part of Bishop's argument is the prescribed backlash in its aftermath. Curator Lauren Cornell co-penned a response to the essay with Brian Droitcour, relaying that Bishop's initial question was inherently flawed due to the author's general disinterest in the digital, as well as a focus—perhaps due to her position as an art historian—on mainstream contemporary art, or the kind of art that is known to value the material and tactile over the immaterial. It was an impassioned plea for new media, and the kind of response that elicited further dialogue from Bishop. Cornell and Ed Halter's anthology *Mass Effect: Art and the Internet in the Twenty-First Century* contains Bishop's original essay "Digital Divide" as well as a follow-up essay commissioned by the volume's editors titled "Sweeping, Dumb, and

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[1] Claire Bishop, "Digital Divide: Contemporary Art and New Media," in *Mass Effect: Art and the Internet in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Lauren Cornell and Ed Halter (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2015), 337.

Aggressively Ignorant! Revisiting 'Digital Divide'".[2] Aside from "digital divide" as a way of demarcating those who have access to technology and those who do not and framing it as a race and class-based issue, Bishop's digital divide takes place solely in the realm of art; perhaps situating it as a specifically art-based issue is its biggest problem.

It is not as cut-and-dry as whether or not new media art does x, y, or z like its analog predecessors, but moreso about the nuances that make it seem so unapproachable or uninteresting to those, like Bishop, committed to the so-called canon of art historical importance that privileges a very specific notion of form and technicality accomplished by pen or brush to canvas. Code—whether painstakingly composed by its author or manipulated through a program—asks for new ways of feeling through occupying digital space, and allows for an alternative replication of emotion and feeling that is typically accessed through figures, or occasionally the lack thereof, in modern and postmodern art practice. However, in many instances, interacting with a work that utilizes digital media in any capacity beseeches the viewer to stay with it for a duration of time; a digital painting might elicit doubt that it was painted using a brush and not a tablet, for example. While largely placing the blame on the editors at *Artforum*, Bishop admitted that she chose to trade an emphasis on the specter of technology that looms over works of art produced after 1989 for the idea that new media art was part of a "niche (like many others) with its own star system, discourse, and structures of dissemination."[4]

Although the following sections touch upon the shortcomings of Bishop's initial argument, my interest in the sensuality of new media and its presentation in digital and physical spaces is explicated in a tripartite thematic division prompted by my thesis project. Naturally,

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[2] Bishop, "Sweeping, Dumb, and Aggressively Ignorant! Revisiting 'Digital Divide,'" 353.

[4] Bishop, 354.

reflecting upon the exhibition that took place in January of 2018, as well expanding upon the

underlying concepts that formed and shaped it, is important for my curatorial practice.

Beginning with this exhibition, which included three artists with differing practices who

all use the Internet and digital media to inform their works, as a case study, my initial thesis that

a form of emotional labor takes place when interacting with the network (the network as it

underlines and shapes the Internet)—especially as a woman—inspired more rhetorical questions

than actual answers or conclusions. This is another theme of the following text: Being that the

nature of a curatorial practice has become more of an exploration of the unknowable, the

unanswerable; many of my own thoughts concerning the research I have been doing have

cropped up in the form of fragments or vignettes, yet I have come upon a general idea of the

most pertinent thematic inquiries to continue pursuing in the future. For instance, the Internet's

relationship with the network has produced countless artworks that either respond to that

relationship or treat it purely as a medium or an arbitrary means of reaching another conclusion. I

initially leaned on Alexander Galloway's definition of the network from the anthology *Critical*

Terms for Media Studies (his definition of the network has varied largely from this particular

example) to further devise what the network—and the Internet—even is as a concept; he likened

it metaphorically to chaos and ruin.[5] As poetic as this is, I later found Tiziana Terranova to have

a much more nuanced idea of the interrelationship between the networks and the Internet,

speaking to it as:

> […] a *network of networks*, or an internetwork, a topological formation that
> presents some challenging insights into the dynamics underlying the formation of
> a global network culture. As a technical system, the Internet consists of a set of
> interrelated protocols, abstract technical diagrams that give the network

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[5] Alexander R. Galloway, "Networks," in *Critical Terms For Media Studies*, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell and Mark B.N. Hansen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2010), 281.

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consistency beyond the rapidly changing hardware environment of computers, servers, cable and wires.[6]

This confluence of the two concepts speaks to information and communication; Terranova does not specifically speak to art practice, but it rightly figures into the exchanges of creativity between bodies. Encountering another body online through language or image is incredibly unique to the Internet, allowing us a kind of freedom to express emotions through the likes of code, messaging services, and blogging, among others. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun recently posited that new media is under constant renovation; the interconnectedness of the Internet, and in turn, the network, does not quite promote collectivity among its users, instead opting for an emphasis on the individual. She creates a more-relevant term for new media, writing: "The NOW constantly punctures time, as the new quickly becomes old, and the old becomes forwarded once more as new(ish). New media are N(YOU) media; new media are a function of YOU."[7] It is possible that this theorization of new media as a subjective media transcends the tendency of art theory and criticism to "other" art discourses that appear to be broad or even generally hard to define.

Seth Price's *Dispersion* takes the form of a hybridized theory-practice artwork that is hard to categorize, and upon further review, what makes new media so exciting as a means to situate works that underline interdisciplinary methods. It is an essay rooted in art history that pertinently speaks to new media as a constant cycling-through of the old and the new, yet it is crystalized permanently online as a PDF that was originally designed in Adobe InDesign. Price's conversation regarding distributed media mirrors the ongoing conversation around distributed

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[6] Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2004), 41-42.

[7] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, *Updating to Remain the Same: Habitual New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2016), 2-3.

networks akin to Terranova and Chun's, and the project's execution as an essay (that employs language in the form of vignettes) utilizes language to speak to media—in whichever way it records and is recorded—and its ability to be a "mode of production analogous not to the creation of material goods, but to the production of social contexts."[8] Although *Dispersion* exists as a booklet and was physically integrated in Price's exhibition at Reena Spaulings Fine Art, its context within and around conceptual art directly feeds into the malleability allowed by new media works and, in its initial execution, prompts the following discussion around elements of new media artworks.

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[8] Seth Price, *Dispersion*, 2004, Self-Published Booklet, New York, Reena Spaulings Fine Art.

CHAPTER 1:
Do You Want to Quit? Intimacy, Site, Self: A Curatorial Reflection

In his book *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World*, journalist Julian Dibbell speaks to the specificity of the culture he lived within online in the 1990s: "...your words are no longer merely what you have to say—they are your very presence, they're what manifests you in the virtual world, and how you use them, consequently, tends to shape that world's perceptions of you in much the same way how you look frames what the real world thinks."[9] This sentiment is very much still shared today, although it might be more image-oriented than the text-based chatrooms of decades ago; the words we type, the actions we conduct online, are how we are largely perceived in the real world. The coalescence of our IRL—Internet vernacular that stands for "in real life" (or RL, as it was used in Multi-User Dungeons with object-oriented techniques, called MOOs, in the 1990s)—and online existence is a thin boundary that was explored most notably by Dibbell.[10] Is there a clear distinction between IRL and RL in 2018, especially in regards to words as they are disseminated online? If I use the Internet to search for artists' works, am I operating in IRL or RL or between the two? IRL and RL will remain pertinent concepts throughout the remainder of my inquiries.

Curator Omar Kholeif asks, in his essay "The Curator's New Medium," "Could an institutional museum curator or art collector seriously construct a cross-referential historical survey by using Amazon's friendly 'recommended for you' search function?"[11] The idea of

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[9] Julian Dibbell, *My Tiny Life: Crime and Passion in a Virtual World* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1998), 230.

[10] Dibbell, 230.

[11] Omar Kholeif, "The Curator's New Medium," in *You Are Here: Art After the Internet*, ed. Omar Kholeif (Manchester: Cornerhouse; SPACE, 2014), 79.

using Amazon's algorithm within the art institution is semi-satirical, yet its light foreshadowing is certainly plausible; I often wonder if it is even possible to curate without a search engine's algorithm or the algorithm elicited by a string of RL encounters and meetings. And this is where I arrive, months after planning, opening, and closing an exhibition for my thesis project: I collaborated with algorithms on this show, but more specifically, I collaborated with the Internet and the tendrils that comprise a network and its varied meanings, as well as the term "affect" and its varied meanings among scholars and theorists. If I use an algorithm in any which way to curate a show, and in this case, Google's algorithm, is this forever a part of the curatorial experience, regardless of its content and included mediums? Is social media vis-à-vis Web 2.0 now an essential part of the curation of contemporary art? And if so, what is left for me, as a curator with a vested interest in incorporating Internet-based and new media works into future shows? Lastly, is a physical art space that presents media works most accessible through the act of feeling?

Although I am positioning the Internet as a pedagogical tool as well as a collaborator, I find that the Internet's facilitation of communication is what has been most compelling as an emerging curator who grew up during the birth of Web 2.0. I once spent an absurd amount of time chatting with random people through their avatars on sites like Neopets, Club Penguin, and the Doll Palace, tying up my parents' phone line so I could connect to AOL for an hour or two. As I inhabited each avatar's identity, I created another bridge to another identity online, even if I was young (and curious). I collaborated with the Internet on this show, and I think, the Internet will always be my main co-conspirator in the implementation of any exhibition. It is more than tactility, more than the interactive potential of the Internet as a tool in curating; it is the ability to connect to something else—the unnamable—that ultimately generated this exhibition's subtitle

(Intimacy, Site, Self). What if I tried to curate an exhibition based on personal and public affect? An experience like this, one of sheer curiosity enveloped in an immersive art installation, brings me back to wanting to replicate something similar, but on an extremely small scale and with a budget to match. So, with the Internet, I imagined an amalgamation of works in the space where the exhibition would take place—the University Art Gallery on UC Irvine's campus.

Take Steam, a digital distribution platform primarily used for online gaming: There is an entire section of the store dedicated to "curator" recommendations, and more recently, Valve Corporation, the company that manages Steam, has unveiled plans to make the role of curator more conducive and integral to its interface. Are we adapting our own sensory experiences to the primary sensory experiences of others? Curating is, as much as I would like to scoff at this, a form of tastemaking. It is a vocation one can undertake in an unpaid, hobbyist, or volunteer capacity, and if someone likes what you're doing, maybe you could actually get paid for it. I once told a classroom of students that curating, as a term, is not really anything to frame within a high art context anymore, yet it's more democratic, more functional, and, oddly, more neoliberal. I spent all of the early aughts burning playlists to CDs, chasing the rush of hearing a "Wow, I really like this song—who is it?" My motivation at the time certainly wasn't "I want to do this for a living one day," but these early experiments preceded a genuine desire to do just that. You'll notice I have been somewhat personal in my tone so far; this is due to affect and its transmutability.

The bodies that deviate from cisgender (people whose gender identity aligns with their assigned sex at birth), hegemonic masculinities have a larger barrier to overcome when engaging with the network—this results in emotional labor as a means of mediating oneself when an Internet or non-Internet based community exhibits threatening behaviors against these "othered"

identities. Although many gallery shows come to fruition through friendly relationships or word-of-mouth, if I type in a few keywords into a search bar, I will find an interesting bit of information that will lead me to something else. I initially expanded upon the notion that the network causes its users—specifically female artists, femme folk, etc.—to physically and emotionally manage themselves in order to continue to fit within and actively participate in its culture. This thesis manifested in through exhibiting two interdisciplinary artists and one collaborative team (Angela Washko, Hannah Quinlan and Rosie Hastings, and Morehshin Allahyari) whose works play with the vocabulary of new media and the Internet. There were six works in total on view, including Angela Washko's *The Game: The Game* and *DO NOT ENTER (Room Sixteen of Panther Modern)*, Hannah Quinlan and Rosie Hastings' *UK Gay Bar Directory*, and Morehshin Allahyari's *She Who Sees the Unknown* and *In Mere Spaces All Things Are Side By Side*. The installation and run of the show operated in a few ways I did not expect; I believe that the exhibition is not properly "activated" until it is on view and with an audience.

Using the aforementioned Bishop text from *Artforum* was a catalyst, albeit unknowingly at first, in generating my thesis exhibition; this bizarre exposure of art historical scholarship's unwillingness to engage with new media art outside of the black box context was troubling as someone who had an instinctual attraction to doing so. In drawing together the concepts of intimacy, site, and the self, it is important to address them as a response not only to the "network" in terms of technology and the Internet but also as a conceptual framework in the same way theorists like Alexander Galloway and Tiziana Terranova, among others, have discussed it. The red, blue, green, and yellow cables that line the interiors of Google's data centers make for a picturesque scene. The buildings often sit upon hillsides or near water, with

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photographs taken at the apex of the sunset. These are some of many possible physical elements

of what constitute a network. The servers that fill those buildings are what we ultimately connect

through when we connect to the Internet. Movements away from and back to the material

example of the network frame the exhibition *Do You Want to Quit? Intimacy, Site, Self*, as the

general function of the network, as a way to transport data, is ultimately representative of the

exchange of information between bodies.

Furthermore, feeling and affect through interaction with the Internet directly play into

this; the physical body has become almost conflated with digital identity, and if the body is

object-like, anxiety then becomes the central affect around which we orient objects, situations,

and our bodies (including the Internet).[12] In speaking to anxiety and intimacy as a reverberation,

I will first refer to it generally as a way of physically or emotionally engaging in connection with

another human being.[13] Sociologist Arlie R. Hochschild defines emotional labor as "the

management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display."[14] To feel is to

experience an affect as an external manifestation of that emotion through the physical means

afforded by the body.

In framing this research within ideas of the network's relationship with community and

social spaces as well as emotion itself, the management of emotion, and considering new media

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[12] Joan Copjec, "May '68, The Emotional Month," in *Lacan: The Silent Partners*, ed. Slavoj Žižek (Brooklyn: Verso Books, 2006), 106; for more on a psychoanalytic explication of anxiety (as well as *jouissance*), see Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan (Book XVII): The Other Side of Psychoanalysis*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007).

[13] Shaka McGlotten, *Virtual Intimacies: Media, Affect, and Queer Sociality* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2013), 1.

[14] Arlie Russell Hochschild, *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 7.

and specifically digital games as art within the whole sphere of contemporary art, referencing and reflecting upon my thesis exhibition is integral to furthering it. The nature of curating a gallery exhibition requires a huge amount of planning and forethought in generating the framework—the reason itself—for the show, and the process of communicating with the artists before and during installation allows room for critical discourse through the publication essay and during the course of the show's run. Many pedagogical and technical texts on curating contemporary art exhibitions have been released in recent years, such as countless volumes by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Adrian George's *The Curator's Handbook*, *What Makes a Great Exhibition?*, edited by Paula Marincola, and the *Curatorial Toolkit* made available as a free PDF by Canadian curator Karen Love. Although I admittedly skimmed these texts to get a feel for what established curators have done in their respective processes, formulating the exhibition itself was largely done on my own, with additional inspiration drawn from exhibitions I had seen prior.

The exhibition *Do You Want to Quit?* initially started with an interest in artist Angela Washko's work with the immateriality of the "gamespace" through her documented interactions with players on World of Warcraft (WoW). The gamespace is a starting point for discussing an art space as a space alternative to our reality, what games theorist McKenzie Wark would position as "atopia" as an alternative to utopia and dystopia; it is "a placeless, senseless realm where quite a different maxim rules: 'From each according to their abilities—to each a rank and score.'"[15] If we conceive of the gamespace as a space in which there are rules, an objective, and an idea of winning or losing (or both), the gamespace immediately lends itself to Wark through

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[15] McKenzie Wark, *Gamer Theory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 15.

allegory and utopia, and I wondered if Wark's theories would be applicable to contemporary curating, or curating of this very moment.

To bring this back to Kholeif's ruminations on the relationship between curating and the Internet, most of the software we rely on now, for instance, algorithmically tracks our moves online: What do we like? What do we ignore? Where does the gaze need to be directed to garner more clicks? And perhaps this is what I did in the process of dreaming up an entire exhibition: I scoured through artists' websites, I made my Google searches entirely too specific, I clicked through tags on blog posts and looked at whatever the artist allowed me to view online. That is what is kind of amazing about the Internet as a curatorial research source, too—it gives you every little piece of information on someone or something you could possibly want before you *actually* have to interact with another human being through the oft-awkward studio visit (which often happens via Skype and other chat applications nowadays, anyway).

This brings me back to my initial question: Why did I feel the need to leave the comfort of my computer screen and bring those images from the screen into a physical space for spectators to enjoy communally? Why does that even matter if we could all just do that on our own time, especially since artists often upload entire copies of their bodies of work onto their websites so someone like me (I can only assume) will email to inquire further? And why—the tired question that keeps getting more and more tired as someone publishes another book on it— have games in the gallery space? Who even cares?

The Internet is a strange place, and so when I decided to try to take an online game and put it into a "fine art context," it was an experiment in trying to capture a personal feeling and make it public—seeing what would happen if I made it into an emancipated spectatorship, or the way in which Jacques Rancière asks for closing the distance between the production and the

audience. He writes: "Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting; when we understand that the self-evident facts that structure the relations between saying, seeing and doing themselves belong to the structure of domination and subjection. It begins when we understand that viewing is also an action that confirms or transforms this distribution of positions."[16] How could I combine this idea of closing distance with the act of placing a game into the same context as other similar, yet very different works of media-based art? I, and I am sure many of you, have noticed that games are oft kept out of this "new media arts" context. Why are they usually sequestered to their own exhibitions and studies? Can they effortlessly be incorporated into the paradigm of the so-called "formal" art exhibition?

An exhibition called *#SocialMedium* opened at the Frye Art Museum in Seattle, Washington in 2014. Its tagline read, "You are the curator."[17] The museum collaborated with a design firm, Built By Civilization, to create a platform for building an exhibition with works (paintings) from its collection that were "liked" in a social web context by the public. The idea of the exhibition was, and still is, provocative for an art museum; it is a watered-down version of curating an exhibition, leaving the curating largely to anyone with a social media account. I actually appreciate this idea, as it points in the direction of the everyday art enthusiast, incorporated with the accessibility of the Internet. Is a particular painting beautiful? Does it move you? Then vote for it. Comment on it.

As well as referring back to the initial text, which was written prior to the show, I find it pertinent to define (and possibility redefine) my role as a curator with unbridled access to the Internet as well as my own subjective feelings and reactions to a work of art. During the winter

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[16] Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), chap. 1, iBooks.

[17] "#SocialMedium: You Are the Curator," Frye Art Museum, accessed April 1, 2018, http://fryemuseum.org/socialmedium.

quarter when my thesis was open, I received access to an online forum for an undergraduate

class for which I was the teaching assistant; the ability to view the exhibition through the eyes of

the 150 students who attended it for extra credit allowed me to see if my thesis worked in any

semblance of a way I hoped it would. The following three comments were taken verbatim from

that online forum, and I believe they accurately represent the wide array of responses from the

students:

> As I made through the room absorbing the mystery of the atmosphere and music,
> I strolled over to 'The Game' and all of a sudden felt like I was in another
> installation of a SAW film.
>
> I agree with you 100% that the exhibit was creepy. I was the only one there when
> I went and I think that might've affected the way I saw all the artworks.
>
> Quite frankly, the whole exhibit was kind of unsettling to me and it definitely
> made me uncomfortable. However after reading the pamphlet that was provided I
> understand why certain feelings were provoked during my time there. For
> example, the last work called "The Game: The Game" was an emotional
> rollercoaster. Just walking to the other side of the wall to a red screen provided a
> very ominous vibe. The whole virtual simulation was very unsettling and did
> make me question whether or not I wanted to quit the simulation. However, this
> was a great example of how intimacy was presented in the exhibit; how the
> physical body can be affected by a digital identity.[18]

The word "creepy" was used in nineteen of the students' comments. Many of the students

were not art majors; they came from all over campus to take a core course and fulfill a general

requirement to graduate. Therefore, the term "creepy" does not necessarily bother me—it means

that some of my audience was being exposed to projections in a gallery space for the first time,

and that it succeeded in evoking some kind of feeling. Perhaps this is an "any-feeling-whatever"

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[18] "BONUS 2 | Intimacy, Site, Self," Art, Design, and Electronic Culture, accessed April
1, 2018, http://sites.uci.edu/art12aw18/discussions/bonus-1-intimacy-site-self.

in the vein of Deleuze's re-appropriation of Marc Augé's term "any-space-whatever."[19] Forums like the aforementioned present a real, tangible possibility for a future where we curate art exhibitions with media (or new media, or whatever it is called at that point)—a way of playing into the idea of collaborating with the algorithm, as well as the likes, comments, and other currencies of attention that respond to these collaborations and the very IRL feelings they evoke.

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[19] Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1985; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 5. Citation refers to the University of Minnesota printing.

CHAPTER 2:
New Media Materialism(s)

It was not long ago that I first saw Isaac Julien's *Ten Thousand Waves*, which came to

MoMA after previous iterations at other institutions (e.g. Victoria Miro in London, Museum

Brandhorst in München, the Museum of Contemporary Art San Diego). I am demarcating a

particular experience, maybe an IRL memory frozen in time as it were, through the Internet—

this is an exhibition from five years ago that I do not recall documenting, not that it would

capture the spectator-heavy component of viewing the installation itself. It was staged in

MoMA's atrium, with nine screens floating over the ground floor, each askew. Rather than

focusing on the content of Julien's work, using screens in such a strange distant-yet-immersive

way left a mark on me, especially as I sunk into one of the sectionals, positioned so I could semi-

comfortably crane my neck upwards in an attempt to focus on the broken narrative. I was in the

midst of screens and the constructed theatrical space mediated by the museum; my body's

experience of the work was dependent on where I chose to sit. Screens, and the beams of light

emitted by high-lumen projectors, are what create the experience and power of these immersive

installations, which I believe are entrenched and inextricable from new media.

In his seminal text on new media, Lev Manovich ascribed five principles to help

ultimately distinguish it from so-called "old media": numerical representation, modularity,

automation, variability, and transcoding. These are deeply explicated, and, unlike the

characteristics given to new media by curator Steve Dietz, they attempt the continuing project of

creating "general tendencies of a culture undergoing computerization."[20] Likewise, these

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[20] Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2001), 27.

characteristics are somewhat hard to apply at first glance in the gallery, yet they offer an intense and multifaceted evaluation of what makes a work of art come into being.

In a similar experience to my interaction with the Julien installation, I found myself working as a pseudo-visitor-services-associate-cum-art-guard at an unnamed museum in 2013. A collector walked past with one of the curators, all swagger with the bravado one comes to expect from such positions, and both walked into a side room to project Ed Atkins' film *Warm, Warm, Warm Spring Mouths*. I was not invited, obviously, but I watched, rapt, from the outskirts—how could a three-dimensional medium feel like it was utterly enveloping me? Atkins' characters, in all of their monotone lilt, express a "deluge of affective language [as] certainly a means of insisting on the pronominal, on a kind of counter-loop to the reproductive infinite of contemporary tech […]."[21] His works attempt to break through that dilemma with affective language, allowing the hypnotic quality of his voiceover to speak to the audience through the proxy of technology; this is a prompt for starting works that ask the audience to directly engage with their hands, rather than the gaze. And thus, I went down a wormhole of interest in technology-as-medium: I had also stumbled upon Molly Soda's work on Tumblr, barely caught Ann Hirsch's performances as Caroline on her YouTube channel, and become enamored with the Internet as a site, a multiplicity of sites, for curatorial and artist endeavors—how can I possibly do this? How do I curate works like these in a Web 2.0 world in a way that is actually interesting? Or is the physical, institutional space a soon-to-be decrepit mausoleum that is completely antithetical to curatorial discourse?

Materialism creates a kind of conjecture in regards to materialism through software and hardware and materialism in real space, as it is produced. It is the fabric that weaves in both the

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[21] Ed Atkins, "Ed Atkins," *October* 155 (Winter 2016): 7, https://doi.org/10.1162/OCTO_a_00243.

archive and the community and perhaps best characterizes the network itself and its multiplicity

of definitions that I have found and explored. Software-based art presents a kind of problem that

needs to be mediated through the form, nature, and operation of the archive (which is to be

addressed later). In speaking to materialism, it is the vessel through which I most directly refer to

the relationship between media and phenomenological or affective response with an emphasis on

physical experience and emotion. In this context, media functions primarily through the proxy of

screens; Marshall McLuhan, pre-eminent media theorist of the twentieth-century, wrote, "…the

camera extends your feet and your eyes: a movie camera carries your eyes out on your feet into

the world—it's mobile. And TV doesn't do that; it doesn't extend your eyes and your feet, it

extends your eyes and your hands: it feels, it handles, it scans the environment, by scanning, by

handling."[22] While McLuhan theorized the television, or the screen, as an inherently tactical

medium due to the involvement of the eyes, David Joselit proposes a connection between the

information society—the network—through the writings of McLuhan and Donna Haraway,

writing that "cyborgian perception patches technological prosthesis into a body's organic

sensorium, causing consciousness to extend beyond the human envelope."[23]

It is not so much that the television is the object of my inquiry, but it leaves open an

outlet through which to explore both the screen and its possibilities for understanding new media

art —what works are perceived through the personal computer and *how* they can be translated to

the physical gallery space. I am reminded most of the scene in David Cronenberg's 1983 film

Videodrome; the character Max Renn sees his love interest, Nicki, on the television screen, at

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[22] Marshall McLuhan, *The Essential McLuhan*, ed. Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone (London: Routledge, 1995), 280.

[23] David Joselit, *Feedback: Television Against Democracy* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007), 27.

which point the television appears to come to life—it breathes and undulates until he probes its surface and becomes engulfed by it. Although this is an obvious, and rather extreme, example of becoming absorbed by technology, it positions the screen as a source of feeling through a network.

There is also the relationship between spectator or user and the screen itself; interacting with the screen requires the development of an affective relationship. This relationship takes place on an interactive level, with the eye working though visuality vis-à-vis the screen. According to the late scholar Anne Friedberg, "Facing a screen, the spectator/viewer/user is caught in a phenomenological tangle—twin paradoxes—of mobility and immobility (the mobility of images; the immobility of the spectator) and of materiality and immateriality (the material space of the theater, domicile, or office and the immateriality of the cinematic, televisual computer image)."[24] Whereas this paradox is difficult to avoid when confronted with screen-based work, online artworks, with the tactility allowed through the keyboard, mouse, or combination of the two, allow for a different relationship between the spectator and the artist-through-their-work. The online project *Mouchette.org*, started by Algerian-born artist Martine Neddam in 1996, is a starting point for net art's ability to encourage audiences to touch the screen with their computer mice, with their words, or with their imaginations. While *Mouchette* concerns themes of community and the archival potential of likeminded digital works, speaking to the eponymous character explicated through this project underlines the aspect of touch, feeling, and connection through the screen, especially by her own invitation.

Mouchette, loosely named for the title character of Robert Bresson's 1967 semi-neorealist coming-of-age tragedy, represents an eternally almost-thirteen-year-old girl who exists within

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[24] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2006), 150.

her website, crystallized within a forlorn-looking portrait in a small thumbnail. At the beginning

of the project, thiss thumbnail was plastered on posters around Amsterdam in anticipation for the

Triple X Festival in 1997.[25] Neddam, who came forward as the artist behind *Mouchette* in 2010,

describes the character as an ecology in which users operate; they exchange thoughts through

brief snippets of informal text when prompted by Mouchette's misanthropic statements and

questions.[26] Considering that people who interact with the website continue to contribute today

speaks volumes about the avatar's lasting effect on her audience. It is also possible, as stated

previously, that Mouchette provokes a very specific kind of response from her audience due to

the site's reliance on hyperlinks, many of which crawl, move, and squirm over the surface of the

screen. Shrieks are programmed into the background, a point for considering both the viscerality

of the project as a work of net art and the affective nature of digital art that Bishop initially

ignorantly decried in 2012.

In the Bresson film, Mouchette chooses to kill herself after a string of violent encounters;

after an automatic download after the main webpage, Neddam's *Mouchette* exclaims "Enfin un

nom qui a du 'sens'!!!!" or "Finally a name that has 'meaning'!!!!" in small text at the upper-left-

hand corner of the screen, before a series of hyperlinks (often in the form of an image of a fly or

a button behaving as if it were a fly on the screen) lead to her "virtual" death.[27] It is an

interactive film with a nonsensical plot and a multitude of unpredictable endings, and it behaves

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[25] Michael Connor, "A Girl Made of Language: Martine Neddam's Mouchette" *Rhizome* (blog), December 12, 2016, http://rhizome.org/editorial/2016/dec/12/a-girl-made-of-language-martine-neddams-mouchette.

[26] Connor.

[27] "fly," Mouchette.org, accessed April 1, 2018. http://www.mouchette.org/nom/flyf.html.

similarly to Twine, a program used by artists and non-artists alike as a quick and affective storytelling tool that is accessible both on and offline.

Twine is an open-source software, developed by Chris Klimas in 2009, that has gained popularity among users interested in writing interactive fiction. With an emphasis on hypertext—text on a screen that is both clickable and meant to link to related websites or images—Twine does not necessitate skill in specific coding languages to for success using its platform. Yet, adding HTML, CSS, and Javascript, among other coded flourishes, creates a more visually lavish project. With Twine as a starting point, the utilization of hypertext is crucial in understanding new media as an interactive and physically-engaging experience, as well as media installations that disorient a body in ways at odds with more typical methods of viewing art (e.g. standing a regulated distance away from a painting).

Although it is mostly intuitive and intended for the non-coder, Twine requires a brief introduction on using its basic features in order to create a very simple structure for a novel. Educator and game designer Anna Anthropy once provided a brief guide for new Twine users that has since been remove from her website. Twine continues to be used to build text-based games, often narrative-driven, wherein the words take precedence over the images may or may not accompany them. Creating a story in Twine is similar to spinning a web, or what we conceive of as a network—everything is connected and can be traced back to something else. Porpentine Charity Heartscape's 2014 game *With Those We Love Alive* is an example of an artwork that utilizes gameplay through virtual and physical spaces, and was also made with Twine. Relatively simple in terms of game dynamics, it was featured in the 2017 Whitney Biennial, and invited the Whitney's public—its art world insiders and infrequent

museumgoers—to consider the possibility of producing art with more "unconventional" methods.

The game begins with a brief set of directions; you need a pen and some headphones for a more private experience with the music that accompanies the work. A blue gradient embellishes the background of the first few click-throughs, allowing the player to both sit with the ambient soundtrack and make sense of a semi-nonsensical narrative laced with tropes of science fiction. Heartscape has created a fully-realized world through text, recalling the MOOs of the 90s and the safety of navigating a foreign space on one's own. *With Those We Love Alive* was the only work of Heartscape's in the Biennial to be projected onto a wall. The game, personal in its craft with carefully worded hyperlinks, introduces the potential for the power of public gameplay (that exists away from online streaming sites like Twitch) in an institutional space; it is "communal role-playing therapy."[28] Heartscape initially intended for her work to have its gameplay within the Biennial straddle the experience of being alone in one's home with a computer and using a computer in an Internet café. This, I feel, speaks to the subjective, deeply personal (and relative) experience of interacting with new media works. Works like Heartscape's are imbued with the intimacy of reading a novel and turning its pages, as well as the experience of squinting at a bright, backlit computer screen with the option of changing the outcome with each refresh of a webpage (due to Twine's use as software for creating visual novels).

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[28] Alexander Iadorola, "Porpentine Charity Heartscape," *Mask Magazine* 40 (May 2017), http://maskmagazine.com/the-carnal-issue/work/porpentine-charity-heartscape.

CHAPTER 3:
Community

Community is a crucial aspect of maintaining and facilitating the network, if we are to think of it as an inherently social device (and maybe, as a stretch—technologically social). The affective component of these communities also what possibly keeps the infrastructure intact; interpersonal relationships online are huge indicators of a person's experience with the network as a whole, but also their experience online. Emotional labor as an idea, as a way of holding together communities within a collective economical framework, is a means of parsing how communities are created online and with/through art. Also, what are these communal social spaces, and how do we build upon or destroy them with or against technology? How do we allow a communal social space to be isolated from its community with the camera? Does the Internet destroy or build social spaces?

Take this example: I am strolling leisurely through a forest, albeit slowly. I am looking for a special stone, and I will know it when I see it. I have only three choices for where to go next. That's it. This is in an installment of the *Secret Paths in the Forest* CD-ROM series, crafted by Brenda Laurel and her team at Purple Moon in the 1990s, and the scenario I just described was the point-and-click style of gameplay that catapulted *Myst* into a decade-long stint as the bestselling game of all time. It was vastly popular among young girls, spawning a dedicated online community within the website's forums. The fact that this point-and-click narrative, among the others produced by Purple Moon, elicited such a fervent response among its audience,

which was largely preteen girls, feeds into the ability of interactive games to connect directly

with a community—a community built from a common or shared experience of gameplay.[29]

Many artists are responsive to how new media communicates visibility, temporality, and, oddly enough, narcissism's natural want for the gaze of the other. This requires heavy conceptualization, especially when confronted with technologies that call for the kind of know-how or fundamental knowledge of how to build upon its concepts such as the algorithm, which plays heavily into these artworks. Though Frances Stark does not necessarily directly confront the Internet as other artists who use the Internet do, she uses the Internet's facilities to expand its capabilities as a medium; Molly Soda similarly built a following on the social media platform Tumblr, presenting her works as novelties (both of these artists will be discussed at greater length later). With this in mind, I would like to think of Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Alexander Galloway's conceptions of software as an integral cognitive element of new media. Software serves as the grounding, the coded quantifiable data that shapes operating systems and makes Apple's products visibly different from Microsoft's.

So how does the artist successfully engage with the Internet in a way that is not, in the sense that the Internet eternally grows with information and the artist does not constructively take advantage of this model, parasitic? This might be the most fascinating component of my research, being that social media platforms dictate popular culture in a way that is revolutionary, innovative, and even frustrating at times. That frustration paved the way for thinking critically about the social media platform as a grounds for soliciting validation in the form of followers or likes, both of which alert the user that other users are interested in viewing future content.

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[29] Brenda Laurel, "Notes from the Utopian Entrepreneur," in *Beyond Barbie and Mortal Kombat: New Perspectives in Gender and Gaming*, ed. Yasmin B. Kafai, Carrie Heeter, Jill Denner, and Jennifer Y. Sun (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2008), 27.

Gaining a follower or a like plays directly into the code-as-algorithm that shapes and runs

Tumblr and Instagram's daily operations. Tania Bucher experimented with the algorithm that

controls Facebook, EdgeRank, in search of answers pertaining to visibility as a digital self

portrayed online; she states in the beginning of her survey: "The regime of visibility associated

with Web 2.0 connects to the notion of empowerment, as it has greatly expanded the social field

of becoming recognized as a subject with a voice."[30] Users of these platforms find solace in

public approval, and within the framing of social media as an affective device, this can open up

the platform (along with its algorithms) as an effective tool in garnering critique for an artist's

work or ideas, no matter how constructive the actual criticism is.

As previously discussed, many contemporary artists lean upon the Internet as an

incubator for research or a platform on which to present current or in-progress works. And, for

products of Web 2.0, or artists who came to embrace the fruits of Web 2.0, the enchantment of

social media invites access to a larger, and possibly lower-stakes, version of the studio critique

(wherein artists and their peers critique each other's work); artists are able to vacillate between

the contexts of high and low art. These objects have mutated just as their platforms have mutated

and reconfigured themselves to adapt to methods of communication.

Social media as a constructive platform additionally encourages neoliberal ideals as the

basis for trading affect among users. I use affect in this sense to illustrate an immaterial currency

that complements the immateriality of the machine's inner-workings; in this way, neoliberalism

fits snugly into the role of an unregulated good that is coveted by those who share their lives on

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[30] Tania Bucher, "Want to be on the top? Algorithmic power and the threat of invisibility on Facebook," *New Media & Society* 14, no. 7 (November 2012): 1165, https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444812440159.

social media. Affect perpetuates the intertwining of life and art being no different or distinguishable from each other. Perhaps artists are able to, unconsciously, use social media to their advantage (and in this context, I am referring to artists who typically show in traditional galleries or institutions). I hope that in describing works of artists that build upon the idea of affect and social media, the platform will appear to be more likely as a successful alternate gallery space, whereas physical gallery spaces are often exclusionary and tailored to the needs of the art market; these factors often make the gallery model, which depends of artists for its sustainability, unappealing to those artists.

In speaking to artists and the commodification (even if unintentional) of feeling, the production of artworks and—to lump Internet culture into the conversation—memes meant specifically for platforms like Instagram and Tumblr shifts the speculative conversation of "What next?" for new media and curation to this alternate space that has grown out of Web 2.0. Often, memes are conflated with artworks, memes are fused with the idea of artwork, and consuming memes, in spite of their potential as "art," can preferable to consuming artworks.

The term "meme" originated in chapter eleven of Richard Dawkins' book *The Selfish Gene*, which was originally published in 1976. Although the work is obviously about genes, the question "What, after all, is so special about genes?" leads to a fervent discussion about replicators, evolution, and the idea that new replicators exist with an exponential ability to grow.[32] He writes:

> The new soup is the soup of human culture. We need a name for the new
> replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit
> of *imitation*. 'Mimeme' comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a
> monosyllable that sounds a bit like 'gene'. I hope my classicist friends will

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[32] Richard Dawkins, "Memes, The New Replicators," Rubingh Science, accessed May 3, 2018. http://www.rubinghscience.org/memetics/dawkinsmemes.html.

forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to *meme*. If it is any consolation, it could alternatively be thought of as being related to 'memory', or to the French word *même*. It should be pronounced to rhyme with 'cream'.[33]

Memes "propagate themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation"; as the absurdity in which they operate gains momentum through being liked, shared, or commented upon, they have come to present as humor or a visual break from reality.[34] However, the most compelling aspect of a meme is its oft-rudimentary aesthetic value, the ability to be whipped up quickly on a computer or phone, with websites and applications specifically designed to create one in a matter of minutes. Despite their seeming simplicity, they are incredibly self-referential and able to mock their own structure and imagery, whether it be original or re-appropriated, for the sake of the joke as a whole and its ability to appeal as sharable to a wide audience.[35] While memes often use similar formats and styles to delineate that they are, in fact, memes, many artists who largely use the Internet in their practices use this form of self-referential parody to not make memes exactly, but to use a kind of humor that strips away the "seriousness" of inhabiting the white cube, replacing it with the accessibility of the shared exchanges we have online through text and images. It is a two-fold gesture that, through this exchange, also places a critical lens on the image itself. Aria Dean refers to the meme as an overarching concept that connects through

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[33] Dawkins.

[34] Dawkins.

[35] For an interesting and humorous text on the "aesthetics" of memes (delineated as "Internet Ugly") and amateur Internet art, see, Nick Douglas, "It's Supposed to Look Like Shit: The Internet Ugly Aesthetic," *Journal of Visual Culture* 13, no. 3 (December 2014): 314-339, https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412914544516.

relatability, "[sustaining] a kind of cohesion in 'collective being,' a collective memory that can never be fully encompassed [...]."[36]

Instagram brings the shared vernacular surrounding memes and meme-making to a larger audience who participate secondarily in its algorithm through sharing images on the platform. Artists who use the platform often use memes to comment upon Instagram as a platform (in the tradition of the software framework that supports other programs, like current iOS or Android applications do) in which its user is limited to posting photos or videos of themselves in which they can be accompanied by brief captions and tags (the latter of which gives the user the possibility of gaining followers by common interest). These photos can be "doctored" with filters to eliminate small flaws or create a new kind of dimensionality that is considered attractive to other users. I have found, over the past couple of years, that certain artists have practices that have increasingly grown intertwined with Instagram because of its accessibility and instantaneity it allows in presenting one's process or ideas. As of this writing, for example, Instagram is frequently used by the artists K8 Hardy, Keren Cytter, and Frances Stark, who goes by the handle @therealstarkiller. The idea of social media's duplicity seemed muted or underwhelming until I saw Stark's Instagram posts shown in the Art Institute of Chicago during the run of her show *Frances Stark: Intimism*: Slideshows of her posts were given didactic text, creating the idea that social media somehow functions as an art object.

To consider Stark's Instagram posts as an extension of both her image and artistic practice directly correlates with the concept of the social media platform as serving as an alternative gallery space when confronted with new ideas and modes of presenting them. Her Instagram account posits the same kind of self-awareness that is seen in the work of Molly Soda,

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[36] Aria Dean, "Poor Meme, Rich Meme," *Real Life,* July 25,2016, http://reallifemag.com/poor-meme-rich-meme.

a millennial artist who bases her the entirety of her creative production on her interactions with a camera, though Stark's body of work occasionally deviates from paper to invade the digital sphere. In researching the idea of social media having a dual purpose, besides the ability to generate income for conventionally attractive men and women through advertising, Stark documents her life and works through her life as a working artist.

Through the use of emojis and brief offhand captions, her retrospective at the Art Institute of Chicago, entitled *Intimism,* conceptualized the digital image as having an existence in the physical world. This is perhaps the inverse of social-media-as-gallery-space, yet it still creates the conditions in which the average user of social media has access to an artist who is represented by a gallery and open to sharing these facets of her life with the Instagram community. For the solo show, Stark crafted a body of work from a binder of thumbnails taken from her account, regrouping and recontextualizing her images into new framed art objects.[37] She is unafraid of sharing the non-serious side of her personality that is associated with most Instagram accounts; the community element of the application is what pulls me into the idea of artist-as-curator, where the artist has full control in posting what he or she wishes to show the public in the order that makes the most sense. Artists of Stark's generation—many of whom have works rooted in the Internet—are invested in furthering their practices through the lens of social media.

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[37] Kate Nesbin, *Frances Stark: Intimism* (Chicago: Art Institute of Chicago, 2015), 5.

CHAPTER 4:
The Archive

The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota appointed Steve Dietz its Curator of

New Media in the 1990s (he was later fired from this position), where he founded their New

Media Initiatives Department; however, it is currently hard to find many works or programs that

could be characterized as "new media art" on the Walker's website. Dietz is a crucial

collaborator of both Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, scholars from the University of Sunderland,

where Graham currently leads their Master of Arts Programme in Curating (specifically,

interactive media and new media). In Graham and Cook's introduction to their book *Rethinking

Curating*, they cite Dietz' three characteristics of new media: interactivity, connectivity, and

computability; these characteristics play into new media's narrative as well as its preservation.[38]

And although I have discussed (to this point—assuming I reflect on my exhibition before this

section), albeit briefly, the film archive created by Quinlan and Hastings, their five-hour-long

work calls to mind artworks that doubly function as archives, and if acquired by galleries or

collections, the meta-archival potential of these works. In this section on the archive and its

relationship with the network, I will be considering Rhizome's strategy of collecting as well as

other less-obvious examples of artworks' longevity online.

Berlin, 1996: The artist Mark Tribe, then a recent MFA graduate of the University of

California, San Diego, noticed a lack of discourse around new media art and, more specifically,

its ongoing intersections with the European club scene and the wider world of contemporary art

as it stood at the time. Tribe and his friends drove to Linz, Austria for the annual Ars Electronica

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[38] Beryl Graham and Sarah Cook, *Rethinking Curating: Art After New Media* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2010), 6.

Festival, a media art festival with exhibitions, symposia, and happenings; this trip marked the

beginnings of Rhizome, a project founded that year by the Tribe, that continues to archive works

considered to be new media or of emerging technologies. In an interview from 2010 with Laurel

Ptak, at that time a Bard graduate student, Tribe says:

> I felt it was important that we begin to develop an aesthetic and theoretical
> vocabulary to discuss and to understand these emergent forms of media art. So I
> thought of it initially as an online platform for discussion, but also for
> presentation, so people could show each other one another's work. I thought
> about it as a place for the exchange of ideas and information. I conceived of it as
> an email list and a website that would be a front-end interface to an edited
> archive of the email discussion.[39]

Thus Rhizome came to fruition as a listserv, or a subscription email list, that reached

thousands of artists, curators, journalists, and academics. Named in passing for its reference to

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's collaborative work *A Thousand Plateaus*, a rhizome most

simply refers to roots, plants, trees, networks, packs of rats, or "semiotic chains, organizations of

power, and circumstances relative to the arts."[40] The listserv eventually became a content-based

website, or the platform Tribe envisioned, for the accumulation and commission of data-driven

works. Twenty years later, it now boasts over two thousand freely accessible works on its

ArtBase digital art archive, and offers a residency in partnership with the New Museum. Oddly

enough, Rhizome's accessibility in terms of its scope of artworks is its greatest downside, due to

a web design that leaves viewers searching for specific works potentially confused or bereft of

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[39] "Interview with Mark Tribe, Founder, Rhizome," *Art Spaces Archives Project*, last modified September 16, 2010, http://www.as-ap.org/oralhistories/interviews/interview-mark-tribe-founder-rhizome.

[40] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 7.

knowledge; this is due to the network-like nature of the site as a database comprised of many sub-archives.

Digitized art-based archives like Rhizome exist online in varying capacities, ranging from simplified texts listing exhibition names and dates to decades of records worth of exhibitions with accompanying photo documentation and didactic material; for instance, the New York gallery Artists Space has the catalogue for Douglas Crimp's 1979 exhibition *Pictures* available in its entirety.[41] This is not usually the case for institutions and galleries, as having decades' worth of history requires the tedium of scanning or digitally transferring incompatible formats and often requires already-limited grant money to accomplish. Pertinent materials are inevitably left out of the digitization of archives, and relatedly, Rodney G.S. Carter writes in "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence," "The archive, as a reflection of and the source of state power, is extremely selective when deciding what gets in. Only those voices that conform to the ideals of those in power are allowed into the archive; those that do not conform are silenced."[42] He links this to Derrida's conception of the archive as inherently violent due to the purposeful omitting of documents in the archive; thus, the violence is not necessarily bodily, but nevertheless manifests its physicality in sometimes more lasting, permanent ways.[43] Does the information that exists outside of the archive disappear? Does it cause its content to more effectively disappear?

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[41] "Pictures: September 24 – October 29, 1977," Artists Space, accessed November 20, 2016. http://artistsspace.org/exhibitions/pictures.

[42] Rodney G.S. Carter, "Of Things Said and Unsaid: Power, Archival Silences, and Power in Silence," *Archivaria* 61 (Spring 2006): 219.

[43] Carter, 219. For more context, see Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 7.

The archive is a contentious means of preserving any work of art; in the case of new

media art, it is constantly growing in the attempt to preserve works on the verge of obsolescence.

In many cases, keeping the work intact in some capacity in order to keep it relevant within the

financial structure that art largely exists within and around is up to its producer. Perhaps it is

most pertinent in this case to explore the archive's relationship to new media art and the network

through the collections of major institutions, many of which do not have departments solely

dedicated to new media works. McKenzie Wark asks whether there is a specific way in which

digital objects are collectible—is keeping the stored data under a digital lock or insuring that

encoded data is specific to its owner something that is regulated?[44] Collectors aside, institutions

of varying capacities are must always be evolving their own practices of preserving media

works. As Wark says, "it is not just the information about the artwork circulating in the world

that makes it collectible […] the artwork in a collection gains and loses value at the volatile edge

between information and noise."[45] Games developed for CD-ROM in the nineties contend with

this struggle between preservation and obsolescence, information and noise; many outdated

programs can be revisited and played with the aid of emulators (e.g. CD-ROMs and Nintendo

games).

Theresa Duncan was a writer, filmmaker, game developer, and businesswoman most

known for the commercial games for CD-ROM she produced in the 1990s, which included *Chop

Suey* (1995), *Smarty* (1996), and *Zero Zero* (1997). However, most of the rhetoric around

Duncan is based not on her work, but rather her death in 2007. This is what has been most

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[44] McKenzie Wark, "My Collectible Ass," *e-flux*, accessed May 1, 2018, https://www.e-flux.com/journal/85/156418/my-collectible-ass.

[45] Wark, 4.

troubling in researching Duncan, as it requires sifting through countless conspiracy theories and conversations around her physical appearance. After its premiere as a part of the New Museum's "First Look: New Art Online" series (which presents new commissioned works), Rhizome has made these three games available with funds raised through grants, crowdsourcing on Kickstarter, and a partnership with Mailchimp.[46] It uses the Emulation as a Service (EaaS) system (in partnership with the University of Freiburg), a "strategy for digital preservation" that recreates a "digital object's native environment and thus maintain[s] its original characteristics, look and feel, and utility."[47] The emulated computer is located inside one of Google's many data centers, leaving the gaming experience with an actual physical imprint. It is also important to note that the New Museum is a non-collecting, non-profit institution.

Chop Suey is a computer game created by Duncan in collaboration with Monica Gesue that was marketed towards young girls (keyword: *marketed*), a demographic often neglected in the video game industry, but was also propelled into a hasty rebuttal, and means to hastily address the backlash, to games like *Barbie Fashion Designer*. As a point-and-click adventure game, *Chop Suey* was initially well-received for its whimsical storytelling sensibility and colorful mismatched arrays of folk art; it follows two sisters, Lily and June Bugg, as they wander around Cortland, Ohio. Although the narration comes from the viewpoint of an adult (voiced by David Sedaris), the sisters' imaginations are the prime focal point of the game; it is also pertinent to note that their genders are merely one part of their identities within the game space, as the game itself is accommodating to anyone who wishes to play it.

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[46] "The Theresa Duncan CD-ROMs," *Rhizome*, last modified April 17, 2015. http://archive.rhizome.org/theresa-duncan-cdroms.

[47] "bwFLA—Emulation as a Service," bwFLA, accessed November 20, 2016. http://bw-fla.uni-freiburg.de.

Preserving images has transitioned from flat files to USB drives, cloud drives, and websites with user-generated content, among other modes. Rather than focusing on the methodologies behind preserving new media works and the like, the archive's role is as a central catalyst in provoking, legitimizing, and keeping new media works as functional as they would have been at the time of the genesis of the work's creation. And, pertinently enough, "viral" content has maintained visual exposure, its influence minimizing as the years pass until it becomes the subject of a conversation beginning with "Do you remember…?"; content on Vine, the now-defunct short-form video sharing platform, for example, has become buried in compilation videos on YouTube, which continues to house and produce viral content for either profit or preservation (or both).

In the spring of 2010, a video of an art performance was uploaded to Youtube depicting artist Natacha Stolz (under her alternate identity Gabbi Colette) performing "Interior Semiotics", an act in slight homage to Carolee Schneemann's 1975 piece *Interior Scroll*. At the time, Stolz was a student at the Art Institute of Chicago, and her audience sat, shocked, as she opened an expired can of SpaghettiOs, probed its contents, and then touched her genitals while urinating. Looking back the performance a year later, Stolz remarked to Rhizome,"Some people seemed shocked by the reveal. It's not something you see every day, but at the same time I don't think it's all that disgusting, or *too* shocking. But YouTube would disagree."[48]

Despite the nascent nature of Stolz's willingness to upload a "shocking" performance on YouTube in the attempt to crystallize the moments comprising her performance, then ripe with viral content (the Internet quickly moved onto the music video for "Friday" by then-thirteen-

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[48] Anonymous, "Blogrolls, Trolls, and Interior Scrolls: A Conversation with Natacha Stolz," *Rhizome* (blog), November 24, 2010. http://rhizome.org/editorial/2010/nov/24/blogrolls-trolls-and-interior-scrolls-a-conversati.

year-old Rebecca Black), users of the anonymous online bulletin board 4chan proceeded to find Stolz and troll her mercilessly, first at Stolz' invitation. While this taps into the idea of "community" as it exists around the spread—and, sometimes, toxicity—of viral content, *Interior Semiotics* as archived documentation of a performance piece and cultural flashpoint is more interesting as a pivoting point for speaking to the Internet, the network, and the strange task of preserving works without concrete physical forms. It exists in the strange space between former hyper-relevance and a distant memory; I asked a friend who frequented the 4chan board /b/ at the height of the notoriety surrounding "Interior Semiotics" and she replied, "Yeah, but I didn't get it." One of Dietz's characteristics of new media indefinitely applies here: connectivity, and its linkage of public encounters to personal spheres of feeling—if someone does not "understand" the work, they connect with it through its pervasiveness in their like-minded online community. It is more obvious than not that Stolz's performance incited such objection because of the abject relationship she created between body and apparatus (both the can of SpaghettiOs and the camera that filmed her, as well as the function of the platform of YouTube as apparatus), but by decrying the performance, Internet users still connected to it in the same way that they chose to connect to "2 Girls 1 Cup" by recording real-time reactions to the infamous adult film trailer and then uploading them to YouTube.

Most works of art intended for consumption, presentation, or preservation on the Internet do not get the kind of attention that "Interior Semiotics" did for its few months of 4Chan-fueled trolling. However, these works—the ones I find interest in during a period of happenstance as well as the ones preserved by organizations such as Rhizome, Video Data Bank, or the Electronic Arts Intermix—rely on the natural privacy that is elicited by the user of a computer and the computer itself through the act of not watching, not knowing, or not clicking that

hyperlink. How would a public respond in real time, as an audience, to "Interior Semiotics"? If it were not merely a student project and had carried as much critical and cultural weight as Schneemann's piece, it might have a place in a group exhibition; however, we, as casual users of the Internet, are relegated to revisiting it online and trying to piece together its specific importance during a few months back in 2010.

CONCLUSION

While materialism, community, and the archive have been used to re-inscribe and re-characterize new media works through the scope of the art institution, they have also thematically characterized the Internet itself as a relevant artistic tool that is constantly reimagining the future of art practice.

Curatorial practice functions as a site, of sorts, akin to the Internet; it tries to renegotiate the role of the institution (in this specific reference, the white cube) in favoring or decrying vast swaths of artworks which very well funnel into the art market itself. According to Boris Groys:

> […] every curatorial project has the goal of contradicting the previous, traditional art-historical narratives. If such a contradiction does not take place, the curatorial project loses its legitimacy. An individually curated exhibition that merely reproduces and illustrates the already known narratives simply does not make any sense.[49]

I agree with this statement; however, exhibitions continue to function within the realm of the "already known," further continuing the legacy of the art institution as merely supplementary to the depths of art practices, and my investigation of the ways new media has been working against this legacy through its material and experiential makeup is, and will be, a continuing research project. Is it possible that acquiescing to the inevitability of the Internet as a crucial part of curatorial and artistic practice within and around the institution could inspire more interesting future projects? LaTurbo Avedon, an artist who purports to exist solely as a nonbinary avatar online, has curated the online project *Panther Modern*—a constantly-evolving architectural mock-up of a structure that will never exist in the real world—since 2013. Avedon encourages artists to inhabit a proposed three-dimensional space that can add on to this speculative

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[49] Boris Groys, *In the Flow* (London: Verso, 2016), chap. 1, iBook ed..

institutional space.[50] As of this writing, the site houses sixteen unique artist's projects as "rooms," which range from interactive (like annotated YouTube content) to scrollable images. Avedon's project, though currently on hold, imagines the institution as a completely habitable website, assuming that the domain name is renewed promptly and the server functions properly.

The body—the self—is "multiple, fluid, and constituted in interaction with machine connections; it is made and transformed by language [...]."[51] It allows artists like Avedon to retain relative anonymity while conducting ambitious products with likeminded artists. It feels and reacts to works online and offline, but more-so when in control of driving the narrative forward. I click the arrow to go back to a prior page when I think I have "killed" the already-doomed Mouchette; being confronted with the responses of the users who had gone through this trajectory already, responding to her morose questions, makes me question if what I see on the screen is final (even if she is not a "real" girl). Digital and networked projects that operate under Manovich's baseline definition of what constitutes new media art elicit this strange otherworldly empathy through tactility; it is possible that these works possess a form of Barthes' punctum, that instinctual detail that establishes a connection with the viewer. I believe this it is still necessary for the punctum to remain a possibility in the physical institutional space, with its promise of forming a relationship between the bodies within its audience and the implied intimate relationship between the body and the computer.

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[50] "About," Panther Modern, accessed July 30, 2017. http://panthermodern.org/about.html.

[51] Sherry Turkle, *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 15.

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