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ARTISTIC COLLABORATION AND PLAYERS' IDENTITIES
IN WEB SPACE AND TIME

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CHAPTER I

CONTEXT: ART AND COMPUTERS

Preamble

The penetration of the World Wide Web (web) is such that it has become second nature to its users. Since the September/October 1993 issue of Wired magazine, the Net Surf section had presented notable web sites. In January 1998, Wired removed that section. Far from being obsolete, Net Surf transformed into a second layer of reading that transpired across the entire magazine. At that point, Uniform Resource Locators (URLs) could be found on most of the topics discussed in the magazine and were included in most articles. The web had become second nature to Wired publishers and readers. This tendency has grown ever since to reach 633.6 million Internet users in 2003¹ and 6 billion items to search on Google, the most popular search engine, on February 18, 2004². As the online community keeps growing and reaches more layers of the social scale, the playful and experimental aspect of online

¹ Source: eMarketer

² “Over 6 Billion Items to Search on Google” emarketer.com. 2004. eMarketer. 25 February 2004 <<http://www.emarketer.com/news/article.php?1002671>>.

communication is inspiring millions of people, as they discover new means of exchange and expression. Since the web has become a revolutionary means to reach a prolific international audience, there is a need for the community, artists and educators, but also Internet users at large, to have a sense of what they are dealing with, to understand what is at stake, either when they take part in or just witness collaborative art on the web.

Creating and being heard on the web is much more complex today than it was in 1995. Tools have evolved and multiplied, many standards have been set and the profusion of sites makes the web a very competitive and technically challenging environment for the newcomer to be heard. The web gets more complex every day and this tendency does not show any sign of slowing down. Technical aspects such as scripting and programming, exemplified by the increasing interest of web players in the concept of portal³, are getting very complex and disturbingly reminiscent of the arm's race. It is more and more difficult, for the newcomer to be able to create and make her mark on her own, or have others collaborate on a creative project on the web

³ Portal is a wide concept that includes a web interface for a database and automation of many tasks in order to attract traffic by presenting a hopefully globally unique product, idea, perspective or way to access information. The sites of big Internet players such as Yahoo, Altavista and Netscape are portals.

without the assistance of programmers. These signs indicate a pivotal time in the evolution of the web and web players are commenting on related issues such as collaboration, identity, resistance and ethics. “Are the strategies of contemporary data processing (data processed into information begets knowledge) the artistic Zeitgeist of our time, in much the same manner that the writings of Edmund Burke influenced the 19th century romantic style in the landscape arts during that previous era?”⁴

Although I can only agree with Susan Langer's belief that mere expression is not art⁵; it is an important step towards art making and art appreciation. This step becomes all the more important in a society where an elitist handful of artists, critiques and curators thinks of itself as the official art scene and exclude the rest of the artistic components of the society from this category. An important part of the artistic process is what comes right after the creative process--what artists working in physical media call exhibition--that is the sharing of the work. This is an aspect of art that can be greatly affected by online presentation and exchange. The web has given the artist a potent

⁴ Stalbaum, Brett. Mountainous: Semiotics, and the precession of semantic models [3/5] in Database Logic(s) and Landscape Art. Rhizome Digest. Email newsletter. 17 Jan. 2003.

⁵ Langer, Susan. Feeling and Form. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953.

reason to create with a computer and to resist the establishment known as "the Artworld."⁶

Electronic sharing, the exchange of electronic information and documents on the Internet, including artistic collaboration in a non-physical world, was built around computer technology. The community of people who engage in this activity is commonly referred to as the "online community." The minimum set-up needed to send and receive information in digital format includes a computer, communication software, a modem and an active telephone line. Connecting to the web requires a relatively fast modem (most modems today have a transfer rate of more than 56,000 bits per seconds or 56Kbps) and a specific access to the Internet allowing the local computer to send and receive using the Internet Protocol or IP. In 1994 Jeff Jarvis wrote in the New York Times: "Right now that's a learning process for everybody. We don't know what works (...). In other words, we're inventing this."⁷ Today the picture is much clearer. Broadband is well on its way and fast Internet access like Digital Subscriber Line (DSL) and cable modem are widely available and

⁶ Danto, Arthur. "The Artworld." Philosophy Looks at the Arts. Ed. Joseph Margolis. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987. 155-68.

⁷ Jarvis, Jeff "A New Species of Couch Potato Takes Root." Interview by James Barron. New York Times November 6 Nov. 1994: H21.

rapidly replacing dial-up connections. Time Warner Cable advertises the magnitude of the bandwidth gain when switching from dial-up to cable modem to be up to fifty-to-one. I experienced a ten-to-one gain, already an incredible jump, big enough to change my experience of the web. Yet, because this shift is not as paradigmatic as the one that brought us from pre-web to web in the early 1990s this research will focus on web-specific art projects that can be experienced by players with the relatively slow access--the kind of access that was common in the late 1990s in New York City: 56Kbps. Due to the vertiginous growth of the web and even though the study of new technologies is a massive effort, the risk of leaving paradigmatic potentials under-researched is not negligible. The implications of new fundamental concepts that we are only starting to become familiar with will not all be felt immediately and many repercussions will not be appreciated, let alone fully understood, any time soon. This is partly why I consider Internet connection--no matter how slow 56Kbps might sound today--a privilege and although I will address the issue of speed, I will not include art works that require data transfer rates available today through cable modems and DSL for instance. Resisting the temptation of speed is my way of addressing the largest number of participants. It is, I will argue, not only a factor of quality but the right thing to do.

The central theme that I will explore is that collaboration and identity are the two key elements of a radical, maybe revolutionary, new way of creating art that challenges the single-artist, art-object paradigm. The web gives the artist an option that she has rarely, perhaps never, been offered before. It is the opportunity to construct and play new identities that can replace her existing identity from the perspective of other web players. Identity definition and presentation on the web is relatively reduced compared to physical reality. The web allows for selective presentation. The reduced set of cues that convey the idea of an identity on the web gives the player more control over her identity as she can determine when and how to reveal something about herself. This opportunity can free her and her creation from the social, psychological and historical weight that an identity carries. It is a chance to be born again and to approach objects and subjects from a fresh perspective and a playful manner that is usually associated with youth. The web offers a second chance to the artist prisoner of herself. Collaboration and identity are intimately connected because when you collaborate, you do so *as* someone. The basis of a collaboration is that it involves several parties which, for communication purposes, usually present themselves under different names. A name is a fast and easy way to refer to or address someone, it is a shortcut to someone's identity but it is reductive and only the tip of the iceberg that is a person's identity. The combination of collaboration and

identity manipulation in a web-specific art project generates far-reaching results that are likely to help unleash the artistic potential of both the web and the players involved as well as challenge our increasingly outmoded definitions of what constitutes art.

After I set-up the context I will describe several tools of web collaboration and how artists use them. I will then discuss issues of identity, constructed personae in the arts and more specifically on the web. Finally I will synthesize the findings of artistic collaboration and players' identities into the last chapter that will explore identity as the subject of the collaboration. Two multimedia artistic collaborations on the web will be used as examples through the different phases of this research. I will juggle with the different levels of the elements at stake--access to tools and information, logics of digital technology, contemporary art milieus, psychology of the Internet--and find the precarious balance of a raft on which to build the discussion of this small but elaborate subject. The first chapter is a presentation of the elements necessary to establish the context for the rest of the discussion.

Due to the novelty of these concepts it is tempting to say that so far most art works available on the web are not even of fair quality but our frame of reference is probably not appropriate to make such a judgment. According

to Nicholas Negroponte “Computers and art can bring out the worst of each other when they first meet. One reason is that the signature of the machine can be too strong... the flavor of the computer can drown the subtler signal of the art.”⁸ This is a direct consequence of the sudden lack of limitations that computer technology is providing to us and although we use technology to shape our world, technology is also shaping us.

Line or Drawing? Drawing with a pencil versus creating a pencil. Users versus Programmers.

An image manipulation application such as the ubiquitous Adobe Photoshop, a community standard, is a tool just like a pencil or a camera. When pencils were invented drawing a thin line on a piece of paper must have seemed like an accomplishment by people who were not aware of the pencil. By the same token, intricate and visually stunning images are easy to produce with Photoshop. Neither the simple pencil line nor the intricate image should be mistaken for art. The influence of Photoshop is so strong on our visual world that art and design critics talk about a "photoshopization" of the world.

⁸ Negroponte, Nicholas. Being Digital. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994. 223.

The Critical Art Ensemble (CAE), founded in 1987, is a collective of five tactical media artists of various specialization including computer art, film, video, photography, text art, book art, and performance. CAE's focus has been on the exploration of the relations and intersections between art, critical theory, technology, and political activism. The titles of their books (*The Electronic Disturbance*, *Electronic Civil Disobedience*, *Digital Resistance*, *Molecular Invasion*, etc.) and the fact that those books “may be freely pirated and quoted”⁹ set the general tone of the Ensemble’s stance and activities. Artists and curators such as Ricardo Dominguez¹⁰ and the Critical Art Ensemble have technical and political backgrounds and interests. They consider themselves *hacktivists*, computer hackers who break into systems to further an activist agenda, and *artists*, artists with an activist agenda. Their range of activities is located at the polar opposite of the formalist photoshopization of the world. Other less activist artist-programmers such as Mark Napier also resist that formalistic tendency. The thin-client Shredder¹¹, an application developed by Napier, is an example of the extended reach that programmers have over users. With

⁹ Critical-Art.net. August 19 Aug. 2003. <<http://www.critical-art.net/>>

¹⁰ Dominguez, Ricardo. Home page. 18 Oct. 1999. <<http://www.thing.net/~rdom/>>

¹¹ Shredder. Ed. Mark Napier. 2 Dec. 1998.
<<http://www.potatoland.org/shredder/toolbar.html>>

Shredder the artist is not just using an existing application; he is also a programmer. His accomplishment does not only lie in the fact that he has created a presentable piece but also, maybe especially, in the fact that he created the tool that allowed him to create the presentation. In 1999 Linus Thorwalds won the Golden Nica for Linux in the .net category at the prestigious Ars Electronica festival in Austria. This acknowledgement of an operating system as art is another sign that programming is an integral part of a new kind of art. Through their works these artists ask the following questions: "Is programming an art?" "Isn't the web artist a programmer before he is an artist?" and "Can there be web-specific art without programming?"

I hope that the renegade spirit on the Net can develop into another artform because otherwise it will just be more packaged entertainment on demand. I think artists can use this technology to make an audience more than just consumers, to demand more from them (...). Then a performance could be more than just a show.¹²

US and other English-speaking artists are leading electronic art making around the world. Analyzing the state of the electronic art form and

the ways they are distributed in the United States might be crucial to the worldwide development of this art form.

The whole idea is that this new technology can create new kinds of art.

It opens up the possibility for new resources of human expression.¹³

It's a field that's really taking off. Every day on the Internet we find messages from people all over the world who are looking for collaborators.¹⁴

Does everybody have a pencil? Who collaborates? Who has access? Does collaboration promote democracy or exclude?

As electronic communications bypass social barriers and protocols they are likely to bring users closer together regardless of physical and social distance. Although this process implies democratization it might lead to new kinds of exclusions. In 1994, Wired magazine wrote:

¹² Anderson, Laurie. "...And the Kitchen Goes Electronic" Interview by Wendy Smith. New York Times. 6 Nov. 1994. H21.

¹³ Subotnick, Morton. "...And the Kitchen Goes Electronic" Interview by Wendy Smith. New York Times. 6 Nov. 1994. H21.

¹⁴ Reaves, John. "...And the Kitchen Goes Electronic" Interview by Wendy Smith. New York Times. 6 Nov. 1994. H21.

A recent Internet-based survey turned up some not-so-surprising numbers on who is using the info highway. According to a summary of the survey, respondents 'were predominately male (nearly 80 percent), white (again nearly 80 percent), and young (median age of 31 years). About 40 percent classified themselves as single and never-been-married. The median household income of the 310 US citizens who responded was between US\$40,000 and \$59,000 annually. More than 22 percent of these respondents claimed an annual household income that exceeded \$80,000.' As for politics: 36 percent Democrat, 32 percent independent and 23 percent Republican.¹⁵

Ten years later, the numbers have changed significantly. In the US and in the UK women are now using the web more than men. By 2001 English-speaking Asian-Americans were more experienced and active Internet users than whites, blacks and Hispanics¹⁶. At that time about three-quarter of the Asian-America population had gone online compared to 58 percent of whites adults, 50 percent of Hispanic adults and the 43 percent of African-American adults who had done so. Additionally, between 1998 and 2000, the

¹⁵ "Electric word." Wired Magazine Dec. 1994: 49-50.

percentage of American household with at least one computer jumped from 42 to 51. In 2000, 44 million U.S. households had at least one member online. That same year, of the total U.S population, one in three adults used email.

These 1994 figures have changed significantly. Field leaders predict that in a near future all technological equipment of the family house will be controlled by the computer. This means that they expect the house computer to be as popular and widely distributed as the telephone. Furthermore, Internet access providers are now offering local and long distance phone service through cable modems and traditional phone lines and companies are being replaced by this cheaper alternative service. Additionally, these field leaders have talked about having the television and the computer integrated into one unit, such as WebTV. As a large percentage of US households own a television and replace it on regular basis this could mean that the same percentage could rapidly have access to computer technology.

There are reasons to be concerned that electronic distribution of knowledge might lead to the creation of new castes and increase the divide

¹⁶ Source: Pewinternet.org

between socio-economic groups. In 1994, the President of the New York Public Library wrote:

Those who can't afford the new technology, or don't master its use, will become information-poor. Millions of people could become "illiterates." Indeed, if you consider illiteracy a serious problem today, just wait. This new technological revolution in information access and retrieval promises to give new meaning to the word.¹⁷

Ten years later though, studies show that a greater diversity of people use the Internet. In 2004 “minorities are logging on in greater numbers making cyberspace a more ethnically diverse place (...) blacks and Hispanics increasingly are surfing the Web for their news.”¹⁸

As Walter Benjamin, one of the leading theorists to have addressed the issue of reproduction and art, commented:

¹⁷ LeClerc, Paul. The New York Public Library, Promotional letter. Oct. 1994.

¹⁸ McCain Nelson, Colleen. “Digital divide is narrowing as more minorities log on.” Dallas Morning News. 13 Jun. 2004.

When Marx undertook his critique of the capitalistic mode of production, this mode was in its infancy. Marx directed his efforts in such a way as to give them prognostic value. He went back to the basic conditions underlying capitalistic production and through his presentation showed what could be expected of capitalism in the future. The result was that one could expect it not only to exploit the proletariat with increasing intensity, but ultimately to create conditions which would make it possible to abolish capitalism itself.¹⁹

As part of the capitalistic mode of production, the computer is a capitalistic tool par excellence. Its computing power is used by capitalistic societies to have a grip on something money could not buy before: time. To the extent that information has value only when delivered on time, information arguably becomes time²⁰. Additionally, information, and access to information, is essentially free (once one has access the Internet). As the demographics above show, a wider diversity of people can now obtain information (including art works or news produced by alternative sources),

¹⁹ Benjamin, Walter. "The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction." Illuminations New York: Schocken Books Inc., 1955: 217.

²⁰ Virilio, Paul. The Art of the Motor. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis press, 1995. 140.

communicate with anyone on the network (including those from different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds), obtain software (including Linux which is discussed in more depth later), and essentially receive an in-depth education in any field for a nominal amount .

As one mode of production, the early stages of the field of computer graphics were developed and used by the military. The purpose of simulated flight is to have pilots practice moves that usually involve large amounts of time and money. The goal of that significant research and development spending was an economic one. Now because of governmental spending on computer research and development, such as graphics, a diverse segment of society now has access to this information which would not have been possible without the Internet.

The excuse of the bad pencil

Speed is a contemporary concern that affects many aspects of our life. We seem to rarely have enough of it and we take for granted the regular acceleration of most processes that surround us. We are hooked on speed. It is sexy. We want more, all the time, no matter what. We equate speed with quality and progress. More speed usually sounds like a positive thing.

Computers hold a place of choice in the epidemic of speed. Every day we find new applications for computers and the acceleration of processing power is so predictable that it has its own law. Moore's Law, named after Intel's co-founder Gordon Moore, states that computer speed doubles every couple of years. This effect predicted by Moore in his 1965 article²¹ still holds true today. I have owned Macintosh computers since 1991. Every time I upgrade my computer I experience a gain of speed with my favorite applications but I often experience a slow-down when I upgrade my software. In 1999, the G4 brought remarkable speed on my desktop. In 2002, when I upgraded my operating system to Mac OS X I witnessed an unprecedented slide in the overall performance of the Finder (the user interface of Mac OS). This was due in part to the fact that user interface elements such as icons, file names and buttons were now anti-aliased. Still, the overall gain in performance and options over the last 12 years is remarkable. My position is to appreciate and use what is available to us here and now.

It's too slow. At least that's what everybody says. It's too slow for interactive movies, two-way TV (...). It might be better to say that today's multimedia software rarely fits the true strengths of the

²¹ Moore, Gordon. "Cramming more components onto integrated circuits." Electronics

hardware; instead, we have artists who strain the hardware past the aching point. Developers should (...) acknowledge the strengths, weaknesses, and limitations of the platform--and work with them.²²

We want the new options, the better quality and maybe we are getting closer to our goal; but maybe not. Computer speed, speed of data transfer and new software versions are disturbingly reminiscent of a carrot, or worse, of the arms race. In any case hypnotized artists and developers engaged on this path need to stop looking at the technology, reflect on their obsession with acceleration and reexamine their role as artists. Some artists still choose the pencil to create contemporary works. We have not begun to tap into the potential of the web for artistic collaboration. The two artists whose works are discussed here are conscious of the broad spectrum of possibilities provided by the Internet and resist blind acceleration and gratuitous upgrades.

Can I trace over your line? Copy versus instance

Is copying a bad thing? Tim Binkley describes the situation that confronts us when we look at an image in digital format on a screen as follows:

volume 38, number 8 19 Apr. 1965.

While looking at the cathode ray tube (CRT) we might wonder, "What is the picture? Is it the image on the screen or the numbers in the frame buffer?" The image we see radiates from the screen, but its properties are created and defined by the numbers in image memory, and these properties are not tied to a cathode ray tube--they could equally well be presented in (i.e., interfaced to) film or pigment on paper.²³

Binkley emphasizes the fact that what we would tend to call the original is never seen by the viewer. This original, that is the properties of the image, is made of numbers in a memory located inside the computer. Let us get inside the computer and take a closer look at these properties stored in digital format in order to understand why they cannot be called the original of the image.

When a copy of a digital information is made there is absolutely no loss of information on either side of the copying process. In other words the file copied from (*a*) is not changed and the result of the copy (*a'*) becomes an

²² Worthington, Paul. "Big Time or Bust." Multimedia World Dec. 1994 162.

²³ Binkley, Timothy. "Camera Fantasia." Millenium Film Journal 20/21 Fall/Winter 1988-89. 7-43.

instance of the file of which the copy was made. This copying process can be repeated at will. I use the word "instance" the way Plato did²⁴. For him an "Instance" is an imitation and/or an appearance of an "Idea" or "Form". Plato's theory is based on a dichotomy between the "Form" and the appearance(s) of the "Form" that he calls "Instance(s) of the Form". The "Instance" is the visible, the individual part of the "Form". The "Form" is the invisible, the universal part of the "Instance".

Mechanical reproduction and later digital information lead us to the half-a-century-old ongoing argument regarding the problem of the original. Do multiples such as bronze casts, photographs and now digital files count as art even though they are not original/unique? Here is how Jean Baudrillard describes it:

(...) c'est la miniaturisation génétique qui est la dimension de la simulation. Le réel est produit à partir de cellules miniaturisées, de matrices et de mémoires, de modèles de commandement--et il peut être reproduit un nombre indéfini de fois à partir de là.

²⁴ Plato. The Republic. London: Penguin Books, 1987. 421.

(It is the genetic miniaturization that is the dimension of the simulation. The real is produced from miniaturized cells, from matrices and from memories, from sets of commands--and from there it can be reproduced an infinite number of times.)²⁵

There is no difference between *a* that was first created with a computer program²⁶ and any copy, or I would rather say instance, of *a* that has been done since that creation. As there can be more than one instance of *a* that is several times the same identical file there is no way to distinguish *a* from *aⁿ* any longer. And if this distinction cannot be done, *a* disappears and the concept of the original with it, at least in the digital realm. As the notion of copy is linked to the one of original, instance is technically a better word than copy to describe a digital file.

Attached to every file is the date on which it was created. There are three reasons to doubt the accuracy of this date. First, this date is a reading of the clock of the computer on which the file was created, a clock that can be

²⁵ Baudrillard, Jean. Simulacres et Simulations. Paris: Editions Galilée, 1981. 11 (my translation).

²⁶ Used this way the word program is interchangeable with the words application and software.

reset at any time by the computer user. So one could create a file to which a fantasy date could be attached. Second, to every instance of a is attached not the creation date of a but the creation date of the instance. A very common action is to delete an instance of a file where it is not needed any longer. The deleted file might very well be a rather than a^n . Third, with basic programming knowledge, the user can change the numbers in the attached date. Therefore, as it is not possible to claim with certainty one of the files a^n to be the original file a I rather not use the concept of original when discussing digital information. Wordwise, although instance is more accurate than copy, the general tendency shows that the word copy is not likely to be replaced anytime soon but its meaning and the ethical implications of copying are shifting.

Can I borrow your pencil? Can you show me how to make a pencil? Let's Exchange pencils!

Computers use networks such as the telephone and the cable networks to communicate with each other. Computer users can exchange information through this communication medium. One way of exchanging information is to place files on a computer (the server) that can be accessed by many other computers (the clients). Technically, this action is called to upload. Once a file is uploaded on the server the users accessing this server via their computer can

download this file on their own computer, at home for instance. Virtually any kind of file can be up and downloaded. The bigger the file the longer it takes for the transfer to complete. Sophisticated programs sit on servers all over the world waiting to be downloaded by potential users. Once the program is on a local machine the user can run it at will.

Sometimes, restrictions occur concerning the copyright of the downloaded application; for instance in some cases the individual user might not be allowed to distribute this software to others by hand, that is via a medium such as a magnetic disk, an optical disk or a data cartridge. But this person can certainly tell her friends to access the server and to get an instance of this file from there.

As an artist, I use computers to write texts, produce sounds and create images. In 1993 I had been looking for a specific type of program to create 3D images and animation for about a year. I had looked in shops, magazines and catalogs but I could not find what I needed. I was ready to spend several hundred dollars on it. I finally found an application of this type on a server²⁷. That application was called Persistence of Vision (POV), a 3D software with

²⁷ America Online. 23 Jun 1998 <<http://www.aol.com>>.

solid modeling capabilities that suited my needs and enabled me to do more than I had planned. At the time it took my computer three hours to download it. At \$3.50 an hour for server access plus \$0.10 for the local connection this software cost me a reasonable \$10.60. It came with all necessary information to use it: a 200 page manual in digital format, many small files (plug-ins) that provide additional features, about fifty files that create images when run with the main program and legal documentation. I used this software to make images. I grouped some of these to create animations, and then, I decided to upload an animation to illustrate to the people who worked on this program how I used their work; a “thank you” animation if you will. In this down to uploading loop that I just described resides the power of the Network.

A large community of users that include programmers and artists contribute to the development of POV. First, a small version of the program was written and placed on the Network by one person. Other people got interested in this program and decided to work on it also. A richer version was written and uploaded. By the time I was using it more and more programmers downloaded it, worked on it in order to make it do more things or create images faster and uploaded it again. Speed is a big issue for this type of software. The changes made by each programmer going through this process

are then serving the whole community. Anyone downloading the software gets the current/latest version.

The plug-ins (small additions that perform new specific tasks when used with an existing application) mentioned above are another way of enhancing the main program. This main program becomes the core of an archipelago of programs mainly populated by plug-ins that depend on the stability of this core and that are useless without this stability. Their advantage over changing the main program is not to disturb this core without which other plug-ins would not work. One of the disadvantages is that they often need to be altered/updated in order to work with the latest version of the core.

Artists upload images that they create with POV. These images give programmers ideas on how to make this software better and they give artists ideas on how to use POV. Along with the resulting images, artists often upload the source code that they specifically created for the program to generate their images. In the case of 3D applications such as POV, the modeling part of the source file is an algebraic description of shapes that includes size, color and position as well as a coded description of how these shapes interact with each other. The source also defines the parameters of the lights and of the virtual camera. The advantage of having the source code

sitting on the Network is that anyone interested in a detail, an object, a part of a scene or even an entire scene coded by another artist can download it and include it in a new scene. As uploading is free many people are doing it as you read. The decision to upload is driven by two overlapping forces. The first one is the will to share; the second is the understanding, or sometimes just the intuiting, of the network effect. The network effect, also known as Metcalfe's Law--named after Bob Metcalfe, father of Ethernet and founder of 3Com--states that the usefulness of a network equals the square of the number of users. The impact of this effect on collaboration will be discussed in the next chapter.

In the early 1990s the web struck me as a way to share all the digital art works that I had created since 1989. Before the web I had the sensation of working in a vacuum. Although I had used physical outputs such as video, photography, etching and silkscreen to share my digital works I had the sensation to lack digital integrity when transferring digital works in the physical realm. In 1990 I started to present art games made with the authoring application MacroMind—now renamed MacroMedia--Director on AOL. I called these presentations *games* because, although they had no system of points, they were more reminiscent of video games than paintings. Much like video games, those presentations invited the user to visit series of screens

divided into levels. Exploring these--sometimes extensive--purposeless presentations was satisfying in the same way it is satisfying to look at a painting. Visual satisfaction was the reward for spending time to play those games. I made those experiments under the pseudonym Flyvision but I also invited friends to submit their animated images and Director presentations to this AOL space. I eventually migrated those works from AOL to the web in 1994. This migration was an opportunity to create a separate account for each artist who had presented works. Inspired by role-playing games, each artist was given an account with a home page to define their constructed identity further. Since that time Flyvision has been a thriving community of constructed identities engaged in artistic collaboration. June Houston and Mouchette are both associated with Flyvision since 1995 and 2002, respectively. This connection gives me privileged access to the works of these artists and was instrumental in providing the primary sources for this research.

Beyond the pencil

"Information must be free", the hacker's polysemic mantra since the early days of computing, is gaining popularity and relevance. Getting accustomed to free software is not surprising. In the mid-nineties Apple's QuickTimeVR development kit, which is used to create 360 degree scenes, cost around \$2000.00. The product had potential and could have generated a

large community but its price tag constricted it. Apple has since adapted its software distribution strategy and offers many applications for free. Updates of large applications such as Mail (the email²⁸ client for MacOS X) are included with their operating system releases. Most updates are now performed by Software Update which comes with the Mac operating system. This application automatically finds, downloads and installs updates on the user's computer. Interviewed by Robert Hof, the Linux expert Bruce Perens shares a collaborative experience:

I worked for Pixar for 12 years. During those 12 years, every piece of software I wrote, except for one, hit its end of life before I left the company -- the projects were canceled or never deployed. Nothing survives. Now, programmers are like artists. They derive gratification from lots of people using their work. Writing software that just gets put away feels like intellectual masturbation. All of the good comes from someone else participating.

One thing I wrote, a debugger [to identify problems in Pixar's software], I was allowed to put out in open source. One person said:

²⁸ I decided to use email instead of e-mail because in July 2003 Google returned ten times

"Gee, I really want to deploy this in my company, but the documentation isn't good enough." He wrote all new documentation, and he sent it back to me. Suddenly, I had documentation to deploy at Pixar that Pixar did not have to pay me for writing. So my sociological imperative of having my software used globally fit perfectly with Pixar's needs.²⁹

Open source means that a developer chooses to make the source code of an application that she has created available³⁰. This allows other developers to use that code as a starting point for other projects. For developers buried in cubicle-land, collaborating on open-source projects is an opportunity to get their 15 minutes of fame. “egoboo—a nerd term for the rush one gets from public recognition, especially for tasks done for free—is one of the most potent forces in technology today (...) Until industry leaders, from Microsoft Corp. to Sun Microsystems Inc., find a way to harness it, they’ll be struggling to keep step with the open-source movement.”³¹

more results for the spelling without the hyphen.

²⁹ Perens, Bruce. Programmers Are Like Artists. Interview by Robert Hof. 30 Mar. 2003
<http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/03_09/b3822619_tc102.htm>.

³⁰ “Open source definition.” Open Source.org. 29 Nov. 2003.
<http://www.opensource.org/docs/definition_plain.php>.

³¹ Hof, Robert. “Tech outfits should take notes” Business Week. 3 Mar. 2003: 86.

Speed is another advantage of the Network and a collaboration enabler. As soon as digital information is uploaded on a server anyone who has access to this computer can retrieve this information. Many users at a time can transfer information meaning that several people can read or even download the same information quasi-simultaneously. Research and progress are made faster because each member of the community is in contact with every other member of the community. The physicist Tim Berners Lee³² originally created the web to shorten the response time between members of his scientific community. Until the web came into existence the two most efficient means researchers had to exchange information was (1) by reading and writing articles in specialized publications such as journals and (2) by meeting physically, at conventions for instance. The advantage of the first solution is that every member can be in touch with every other through text, its disadvantage is the time it takes to get a text (statement, answer, theory, etc.) published. The advantage of the physical meeting is real-time exchange of ideas, its disadvantage is its physicality meaning that everyone attending has to travel (and have the means to travel) to get to the meeting. The web

³² Berners-Lee, Tim. Home page. 22 Oct. 2002. <<http://www.w3.org/People/Berners-Lee/>>.

brings those two types of information exchange closer to each other, freeing them of their respective disadvantages.

Before the web, artworks made on the computer required outputs (print, video, film, etc.) or the physical exchange of storage media (disks , tapes, etc.) to be shared with an audience. There was no direct way to share such works with others unless you were using the network of an office or a university but still, files had to be downloaded then opened in stand-alone applications. Outputs and physical media swap were the bottleneck of computer art, the advantage of digital technology was constricted by physical reality. The Internet existed but lacked a multimedia interface which would allow a broader segment of the population to use it. The web protocols³³, a set of standard procedures for regulating data transmission which allows computers to speak to each other and create the environment that we call the web, unleashed both the sharing potential of the Internet and the creative potential of computer art. The web gave artists a good reason to use computers for their creation, it legitimated digital arts by providing a common platform.

³³ “Definition of protocol.” W3.org 29 Nov. 2003. <<http://www.w3.org/Protocols/>>.

Multimedia

Integration, the foundation of multimedia, has been present for centuries in art forms such as opera, in particular Richard Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total art-work), cinema, embraced by the Futurist in the 1910s as a liberation from the canonical aura of the book that would free words from the fixed pages, Oskar Schlemmer's theatre experiments at the Bauhaus and more recently in performance art³⁴. Interactivity and hypermedia are two other components of the multimedia paradigm. The common—digital—format in which the media are conceived and processed is what makes multimedia possible and accessible. The digital format enables the user to intertwine media in ways that were never experienced before and hardly dreamed of. This ability to manipulate media is a revolutionary aspect of computer technology. Artists engaged with computer technology cannot afford to overlook the multimedia dimensions. With the spread of digital technology (from pixels spray and mp3 spree, to Napster sprawl) and, consequently, with the digitization of the arts, the artist's choice of using a single medium of expression ought now to be a conscious one. It is increasingly tempting, possible and affordable for artists to use multimedia. Although most artists might still think of themselves as one-medium artists

(painter, pianist, etc.) the ones who will decide to use computers as an art making utility will explore new dimensions, expand their worlds as well as their minds' reach.

Artists started to embrace the multimedia paradigm during the industrial revolution; it gained momentum during the information revolution. Inspired by Freud's belief that individuals are not either male or female but a subtle combination of both, it has become clear that most of us are not 100% musician, visual artist or writer. This should not be a new concern as creating an opera or a movie requires the artist to use several modalities. Therefore, it is useful to point at several aspects of multimedia that are not striking at first glance. The flexibility of digital information enables for instance the painter to let the musician in her, maybe under another liberating identity, express herself and embrace multimedia. Dynamism and immediacy of the digital nexus allow the multimedia artist to experience and to have others experience a piece *as* it is created. This trial and error approach enables players to interact with each other in the very lively context provided by the web. Yet more mind expanding, such settings can also empower players to make the context itself evolve as will be discussed in the following chapter.

³⁴ Packer, Randall & Jordan, Ken (ed). Multimedia: From Wagner to Virtual Reality. New

The reach of multimedia

Human beings use language to communicate. For an idea to be shared, it must first be translated in its originator's mind into language. Ramifications of this problem can be traced back to the "Allegory of the Cave" in which Plato implies that one must have the perfect conception of an idea before checking a subject against it.

This early stage of a correspondence theory of truth—truth must first correspond to an idea or a form—sets Western man forth (...) on his journey away from the openness and immediacy of things towards logical thinking.³⁵

Ideas are reduced by the way they are expressed. This is a problem for Ferrara who argues that in this case

One no longer engages (through *logos* as an originative language) things directly and in their immediacy. In this newer form of

York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. 2001.

³⁵ Ferrara, Lawrence. Philosophy and the Analysis of Music. Bryn Mawr, PA.: Excelsior Music Publishing Co., 1991. 107.

“representational” thinking, the actual thing is “re-presented” in the mind first by use of a logic, concept, or in the form of a proposition. Man is removed from the things as such by his manner of representational thinking. Truth is now measured in correspondence to a thing represented as an idea or form. Truth becomes propositional truth, a truth removed from the immediacy of things.³⁶

Some ideas are better expressed with words, others with images. The increased ability to combine media together is an opportunity to expand the way we express ideas, which works at the reconciliation between presentation and re-presentation.

Being drawn to express ideas through one medium at a time has forced us to think in terms of the medium, in terms of logic and concepts. As new media are invented, openly combined together with older ones and made available to human beings for expression, new ideas that could not be expressed before emerge and old ones are given the opportunity to be re-presented with more appropriate tools.

³⁶ Ferrara, Lawrence. Philosophy and the Analysis of Music. Bryn Mawr, PA.: Excelsior

A parallel can here be made with the evolution of programming languages from restrictive machine-level interaction (assembly and lower) to user interface. The most recent and high-level (closest to the user) programming languages allow for more sophisticated thought expression than older ones. This new range of expressive solutions is made available partly through the creation of new media thanks to the relatively new flexibility of software delivery (as opposed to the viscosity of old, slowly-evolving hardware tools) but also by combining and converging old and new media into a profusion of multimedia arrangements.

With multimedia as a new, all-encompassing, meta-language, the web gives human beings the opportunity to represent ideas in new creative ways. Eventually, our thinking is liberated from the constricting expressive frame and its expression moves one step closer to the idea, the goal being that idea and expression of this idea become one. As advancements in technology and other related fields are made, the idea will be given new opportunities to be expressed directly. Identity play and collaboration are two realms that take advantage of recent advancements in web technologies. Indeed, they are often

at the driving force behind those new developments. Combined, they become an urgent example of the fluid state of contemporary expression.

Multimedia vertigo

The integration part of multimedia is not a mere juxtaposition of media. Media integration could be thought of as algebraic formulations of existing media such as painting + music, poetry x animation, 90% music/10% sculpture³⁷. One can easily feel the vertigo induced by those new, sometimes unintelligible, options. I will explore and seek to understand new possibilities in the realm of artistic collaboration and players' identities on the web. This understanding will give the reader some basis to approach issues in art making and in art sharing and will attenuate the vertigo caused by the limitless options that the artist is exposed to when using computer technology. I enjoy this vertigo and I find it stimulating, although sometimes I have had problems dealing with the apparent infinite possibilities of computer technology so my goal is not to eradicate this vertigo but to tame it through understanding so we stop suffering from its frustrating effect. Understanding what is at stake can be achieved through the identification and the description of artistic collaboration

³⁷ Harrison, John and Baron-Cohen, Simon. "Synaesthesia: An Account of Coloured Hearing." Leonardo vol. 27 #4, 1994. 343-46.

examples. The examples that I use, especially the two central ones, are multimedia projects.

CHAPTER II

ARTISTIC COLLABORATION ON THE WEB

“We use media technology to *share an experience* rather than *create a shared experience*. The difference is not subtle. It’s the difference between passivity and participation, talking and conversation.”³⁸

Framing the collaboration

I collaborate therefore we are

A collaboration starts with a desire to share. Many human activities can be seen as collaborations. Conversation, argument, disagreement and controversy are different forms of collaboration. Writing a doctoral dissertation is certainly a collaboration between the researcher and his peers. Based on previous writings, the dissertation will become a building block for future research. Indeed, the very act of living implies collaborating with others in many intertwined projects through information exchange such as written texts, animated images, sound and direct physical contact, positing life as a

³⁸ Schrage, Michael. No More Teams! Mastering the Dynamics of Creative Collaboration New York: Currency Doubleday, 1995. 23.

conceptual direction. So what criteria does a collaboration require to qualify for this research?

In his short essay “Writing to Collaborate: Collaborating to Write” Michael Schrage parks writers and readers on two distinct sides. “The collaboration itself is interposed between the writers and the readers.”³⁹ I would qualify this type of collaboration, used by Zagat for their survey of New York City restaurants for instance, as a truncated collaboration that remains closed. Zagat is a remarkable example of collaboration as about half of the written content of their restaurant guide is apparently quoted from the survey entries but the tedious registration process, the misleading levels of access and the unorthodox gated submission--which Zagat sub-contracts to the online market research firm insightexpress.com-- make the collaborative process everything but friendly. Unlike Schrage and Zagat I am interested in open collaborations in which anybody (on the web) willing to participate can impulsively jump in and share, preferably with only one click, at any moment.

³⁹ Schrage, Michael. “Writing to Collaborate: Collaborating to Write.” Author-ity and Textuality: Current Views of Collaborative Writing. West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1994. 19.

Our world is growing increasingly complex. As new understandings emerge, every field develops more precise specifications and every specification has its specialists. During the last quarter of a century, communication has become part of a consensual attitude that helps us deal with this apparently ever-expanding complexity. The ubiquitous television and the remarkably fast development and acceptance of the Internet are symptoms of this concern with communication. The linguistic root of communication is the Latin verb *communicare*—which doesn't mean “to communicate” but “to share.” Collaboration takes communication back to its roots.

To identify the expertise required for a task is a challenge. To identify the collaborator with the required expertise is yet another challenge. In this explosion of complexity, doubt that the “right” collaborator will ever be found is reasonable. Yet choices eventually have to be made and project managers rarely have the luxury to explore different paths simultaneously. Directions are determined, methods are chosen and work strategies are deployed when preliminary studies could have missed important points, often due to a lack of perspective. It is important to keep the options open and research active in the early parts of a project. This is the role of research and development departments.

On the Internet even more so than in the physical world, asking--or sharing--a precise question using appropriate keywords is already half of the answer. Compared to the other tools for sharing information such as printed material and television broadcast the Internet is the most efficient platform for wide-spread sharing. To understand how to play this network is to use the connected world as your personal research and development department.

Levels of involvement: a taxonomy

This taxonomy names and describes the different levels of involvement presented from the most common—reaction-- to the most sophisticated or highest—collaboration. This taxonomy will be used as a semantic foundation for this research.

A reaction is a subjective activity that does not need to be shared to exist.

A response is a shared reaction.

An interaction is a dialog between two or more entities. It implies action, reaction and reciprocity. “It is no longer adequate to see our field of practice (...) being limited to products where interactivity is trivialized to simple menu selection, clickable objects or linear sequencing. Interaction is intrinsic to successful, effective instructional practice as well as individual discovery.”⁴⁰ The mere fact of interacting with an environment such as a video game, a web site, a CD-ROM or a human being doesn’t qualify as collaboration in this research.

Participation is the act of taking part or sharing in something, it is often a response.

Cooperation is an association of persons or businesses for common, usually economic, benefit.

A collaboration is a mutual engagement between at least two protagonists, it adds a sense of togetherness, a precious and elusive

⁴⁰ Sims, Rod. “Interactivity: a forgotten art?” GSU.edu. 23 Feb. 2003
<<http://www.gsu.edu/~wwwitr/docs/interact/>>.

experience, to participation. More than “actively seeking a mutually determined solution”⁴¹, the players’ awareness of a conceptual direction is what separates collaboration from all the above.

Collaboration also had the meaning of cooperating traitorously with an enemy occupation force. Some French people during WWII German occupation of France were *collaborateurs*.

The type of collaboration that I will focus on here has no predefined agenda, rather a conceptual direction and relies on the participation of the largest number to exist and eventually flourish. If it doesn’t attract players, it doesn’t exist, it remains a monologue, a statement without response. This type of collaboration is on-going, no end is prepared, anticipated or expected. If it ever ends the result is likely to be kept online and will be presented as the archive of a work rather than the work itself. The act of collaborating, in the sense that it is making the project evolve, is central to the project; it is not an option or a branch of the project. I selected the projects that I will use as example in this research on the basis that they are and can only be collaborative. In keeping with the tradition of process art, the systems used in the projects described below, by June Houston and Mouchette, are both the

⁴¹ Gray, Barbara. Collaborating: Finding Common Ground for Multiparty Problems. Jossey-

means and the end. Mouchette.org and GhostWatcher.com are the process and the result at the same time. On both sites, the forms that allow users to contribute and eventually become collaborators are part of the presentation. On each camera page of the GhostWatcher, the several *textareas* that can be used by Watchers to contribute to the site are set between the video-grab and recent reports. Although the process of the work's creation is not the only element presented as the subject of the GhostWatcher, the tight integration of the forms into each camera page testify of a filiation of the GhostWatcher with process art.

Learning from Burning Man: artistic collaboration on the Playa

In the past five years my interest and involvement with the *Burning Man* Festival has grown significantly. After almost a decade of exploration of the potential of virtual space for the arts I was surprised to feel compelled to attend a physical art event. Once there, I realized that *Burning Man* had more in common with net art than most physical art project, because this week-long festival is about building a network of communities in a gift-giving context. Unlike the barter economy model, a gift-giving model is asymmetrical. At the entrance of *Burning Man*, a sign that reads: "Don't trade it; pay it forward"

sums up the spirit of the event. One does not give to receive but to do good. Giving is spontaneous, it is a long-term, positive and generous approach to life. One gives because one believes that it makes the community and hopefully the world, a better place. By 2004, the planning and preparation that *Burning Man* requires, has become a central activity of my life as an artist.

Burning Man is a community experiment strongly oriented towards art and collaboration. Participants form groups and create camps that function as home, art installation and entertainment space." Theme camps are the interactive core of *Burning Man*.⁴² I belong to a camp that changes name often. In 2003 it was called Reorient⁴³ and about 150 people participated to its creation. As the architect of Reorient, I designed the urban plan of the camp⁴⁴. There is no money exchange at *Burning Man*, no sponsors are allowed, participation is strongly encouraged and lurking is frowned upon. The festival lasts a week and ends on Labor Day. During this week, Black Rock City—the city created by all the participants--becomes the fifth biggest city in Nevada before it vanishes as fast as it had bloomed and leaves nothing but footprints

⁴² DuBois, Harley K. "Themecamps and art installations." *Burning Man*. 6 Jan. 2004. <http://www.burningman.com/themecamps_installations/>.

⁴³ *Reorient*. Ed. The Eye. 2003. 6 Jan. 2004. <<http://www.reorient.org/>>.

⁴⁴ "Urban Plan." *Reorient*. 2003. 6 Jan. 2004. <<http://www.flyvision.org/dis/2003/plan/>>.

on the cracked alkaline ground of Black Rock Desert. See Appendix A for a lively account of Burning Man by Molly Steenson.

In the last few years *Burning Man* has taken place on a dry lake—known among Burners as the Playa--in the Nevada desert about two hours north of Reno by car. This remote location is a blank slate that shares several characteristics with virtual space:

- The vertigo of no limits, the (simultaneously misleading and positive) feeling that everything is possible, that there is unlimited room for expression;
- It is a theatre of playful experimentations that are, by default, separated from every day reality;
- It is a temporary autonomous zone (TAZ)⁴⁵ in the sense that it is a temporary community with rules (or lack of them) that don't necessarily apply outside the community.
- Participants use pseudonyms--Playa Names--that are usually constructed especially for the festival.

⁴⁵ Bey, Hakim. T.A.Z. the Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism. Autonomedia, 1991. (T.A.Z. is not a copyrighted book).

At *Burning Man* everybody is given an opportunity for expression. Everyone's art work is included. Lady Bee, the art curator of the festival, selects the placement of the works on the Playa instead of the works themselves. Since 1998, the more time and effort I have invested in *Burning Man* the more fulfilling the experience has become. This is largely due to the contacts, dialogs and collaborations that I have established with fellow Burners on the Playa during the festival as well as all year long in different contexts.

Online tools for collaboration

A key feature of collaboration tools involves the use of shared space, enabling participants to perceive the same objects, point to, mark, annotate or edit specific items in the workspace. Tools such as Computer-Supported Collaborative Work (CSCW) systems or groupware provide the shared virtual space necessary for collaboration. They are the virtual equivalent of the meeting room, the blackboard, the file cabinet and the efficient secretary. CSCW systems might not—for now--be as intuitive as their physical counterparts but they hold the promises of a more integrated and resourceful collaborative experience. For instance, a search on the specific topic could be performed as the collaboration takes place so collaborators' ideas could be

compared in real-time with similar projects and results published on the internet. Such a feature could considerably reduce the too frequent reinvention of the wheel that plagues industries and art worlds alike. “Computer-Supported Collaborative Work is a multi-disciplinary research field that focuses on tools and techniques to support multiple people working on related tasks. CSCW provides individuals and organizations with support for group cooperation and task orientation in distributed or networked settings.”⁴⁶ In 1968 Douglas C. Engelbart presented NLS/AUGMENT, which is considered the first example of such a system. Many more have been designed since including the contemporary Lotus Notes, SevenMountains (7M) Integrate and Xerox DocuShare that “represent the current state-of-the-art for collaborative web-based software systems. Thanks to the advent of Internet technologies, they do not require highly specialized networks. Therefore, users are free from frustrations due to incompatibilities between different systems, or the inability of applications to support multiple users in different settings. Most importantly, their seamless integration of highly sophisticated applications

⁴⁶ Eseryel, Deniz, Ganesan, Radha and Edmonds, Gerald S. “Review of Computer-Supported Collaborative Work Systems.” *Educational Technology & Society*. 5 (2). 31 Oct. 2002 <http://ifets.ieee.org/periodical/vol_2_2002/eseryel_ganesan.html>.

into one simple and easy-to-use environment shortens the learning time and improves productivity.”⁴⁷

Groupware are usually expensive applications that fit the conservative stance of established corporations. The administration alone of such groupware often requires an entire team of programmers. There is a growing number of slick alternatives to those mammoths of computer-supported collaboration that cater to smaller projects. Mostly written in open source code such as PHP, those tools perform fewer tasks than the above-mentioned CSCW solutions but are more affordable if not free. They can easily be customized by a PHP programmer to fill the specific need of a small to medium-size project. Those products are now mature, reliable and global networks of passionate programmers constantly work on making them faster and more elegant. This surgical approach was used by the two projects that follow. The back-ends of the GhostWatcher and Lullaby for a Dead Fly were written respectively in Perl and PHP.

The Wiki⁴⁸ collaborative authoring language can be shortly described as the Web with write permission. Wiki allows users to edit any page on a

⁴⁷ *ibid.*

Wiki driven site or create new pages. Revision histories “are accessible, making it easy to restore an earlier version of a page to correct erroneous information or to undo a deletion. A simplified HTML syntax enables easy formatting and facilitates hyperlinking within the site. (...) A continuously updated list of the recently changed pages lets you locate activity in the Wiki.”⁴⁹ Wiki is a powerful and open approach to collaborative authoring but the fact that it is mostly a text tool is a considerable drawback.

Two artistic collaborations

The GhostWatcher⁵⁰

The overall atmosphere of the site is somber. The top of the first page is a black horizontal line about an inch thick. Below, the background becomes dark grey. There is, from left to right overlapping the two background colors, the title of the site and a place to enter a keyword to be searched. Letters are of three different colors: light grey, purple and dark grey for general content (titles are about three times bigger than the rest of the fonts), links and category names, respectively. The content is divided in two columns, the one

⁴⁸ “Wiki.” Wikipedia. 18 Jan. 2004 <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wiki>>.

⁴⁹ “kuro5hin.org || A Community-Edited Guide to K5.” Koru5hin. 18 Jan. 2004 <<http://www.kuro5hin.org/displaystory/2002/5/27/1541/05150>>.

on the left is twice as small as the center one. On the right, the space is left empty, proportional to the width of the window of the browser.

The top of the left column is a place holder for the area that is being observed. On the first page it reads: "All Areas." Most of the words on the left column are names of areas that are being monitored: Basement, Small Platform, Corridor, etc. Clicking on a name or number displays the corresponding "camera page" or the page presenting an area that hosts several cameras, i.e. the basement. The indentation of the text indicates this hierarchy. At the bottom of this list, after a thin horizontal line, there is a link to an input page for ghost stories and another one to send comments. Below, there is an image of a T-shirt that links to an order form.

The center column is divided into four modules. Starting from the top, each module includes a title in large white letters, a white horizontal line, the content and a white line. There is an empty space between every module. The "Latest Report" module on the top of the center column is the central information of this page. The date, the name of the camera for which this report was sent (which is a link to the camera page) and the name of the

⁵⁰ The GhostWatcher. Ed. June Houston. 5 May 2000 <<http://www.ghostwatcher.com>>.

author of the report are on top, the textual and visual descriptions below.

Reading down, there is a presentation of the new version (2.0) of the site, then the "Description" module, a fifteen-line explanation of the site. The last module, titled "Read!" allows users to search the database for reports by areas and by starting and ending dates. Finally, at the bottom of the center column which is also the bottom of the page, there are three lines with an image of the name of the site, a "How can I make this page more efficient?" link allowing users to make suggestions through email, the anticopyright sign and date and the name June Houston. This last area feels like a signature. It doesn't have a title and is not clamped by horizontal white lines.

The entire layout is aligned left leaving a big empty space with only the background colors on the right of the browser's window. It feels like an empty and undefined right column.

The camera page follows the layout of the first page. The top of the page remains the same and the only difference in the left column is the title that now indicates the name of the area. The center column is divided into four modules. The first one, entitled "Watch!", is an image apparently grabbed from the video feed. Vertically, along the right side of the image, three lines indicate the URL of the site, the area monitored by this camera and the date

and time at which this image was grabbed. The time changes every time the page is reloaded. The second module is entitled "Report!". In this module the user is first invited to "Write a detailed description of any suspicious activity" then to "Present your theory on what is happening (optional)." It is possible to upload up to three images along with the written parts. Personal information such as email address, first name and last name are asked. Then follows the option of sending a copy of this report to two other email addresses, subscribing to a mailing list and receiving a newsletter. The "Send your report" button is at the bottom of this module. Shortly after a report is sent a "success" page loads indicating that the report was sent successfully. The next module includes the two latest reports and finally the last module is the same as the one on the first page: a tool to search the database for specific reports. Just like the first page this page ends with the three-line signature.

The ubiquitous "Read!" module allows fast access to the database of reports. The report page has the same layout as the pages described above. The center column is a series of reports, usually five, sent by users for the selected area which name is indicated at the top of the left column. Those reports vary greatly in length and content. Some of them include one or two (rarely three) images. From time to time a response from June is added at the bottom of the report. A number next to the name of the user who sent the

report indicate the numbers of reports submitted by this person. Clicking on this number displays only the reports submitted by this user. By selecting a specific area from the pull-down menu in the "Read!" section it is possible to access reports from any area at any time.

Lullaby for a Dead Fly⁵¹

The browser's window is filled with a highly compressed JPEG (the grid of the compression algorithm is very visible) photo of four fingers, apparently belonging to a man, coming down from the top of the image, reaching for some whitish substance surrounded by brown, yellow and red elements on what seems to be a pink plate. The plate is placed on a surface with patterns of blue flowers. A button moves rapidly, so fast that most of the time it is not displayed entirely, in the center of the screen on top the area where the fingers are about to touch the white substance. The moving button reads: "it's me."

The scroll bars at the bottom and on the right of the window indicate that the page is more than twice as big as my browser's window. By scrolling in both directions I discover the rest of the image. There is a woman's hand

with silver nail polish at the bottom of the image. She is reaching for the spoon that is resting in the plate while holding a cigarette of which I can only see a very small part.

The only navigational option is the flying "it's me" button. It takes me about 3 seconds to catch it. I am used to this having used this JavaScript function before for my own works. The trick is to locate an area on the screen where the button passes by often and to click rapidly and repetitively on it without moving the cursor.

The second page is all black with a "Tell Me" button centered about two third down on my browser's window.

Description of the HTML code for this page: dead.html (below) uses a Java applet from Demicron⁵² that randomly changes the sentence displayed before the "Tell Me" button on the black page (See Appendix B for HTML code). Clicking on the "Tell me" button, once again the only navigational choice on this page, opens a small window entitled "Tell Me!"

⁵¹; Mouchette. Ed. Mouchette. 13 Apr. 2000 <<http://mouchette.org/fly/>>.

This second window appears over the first one but it is significantly smaller and now I can see some bright green writing animated on the black background of the first window. I activate the first window by clicking on it and I see a text being displayed letter by letter, like some typing that would be displayed at the pace at which it is received like an old fashion communication device, maybe a telex. The text reads:

"Hey what happened?

I think I'm dead

YOU KILLED ME !!!!!!!

You clicked on me !!!

Why do you have to click on buttons
before you know what's behind ???

You are a killer.

⁵² Demicron. 24 Jun. 2001 <<http://www.demicron.se>>.

Oh,my god... I'm so sad to be dead

It's a dreadful sorrow"

this first text disappears and the following one continues:

"Only a minute ago,

I was happily flying over your plate

and

now

I'm

dead

BUT HOW CAN I WRITE THIS SINCE I'M DEAD ???

TELL ME!!!"

I go back to the second window. The font is the same bright green that it was in the previous window and the background is black too. The text reads:

"How can I write since I'm dead?" Just below is a white rectangle indicating that I can type something in there. Under the rectangle, two lines. The first one says: "Your Name" followed by a smaller white rectangle, the place to enter my name, the second one: "Your Email" followed by another entry box.

I answer the question in the textarea:

"Beats me..."

give my name:

"Pierre"

and email address:

"pierre@jedi-unit.com"

I click on the "Tell me!" button. The window closes and the background of the first window turns grey and is covered with many big (dead?) flies apparently floating in a translucent liquid. Centered, framed and written in red, a sign says:

"Lulabby

for a dead fly"

which slowly fades into

"or how shall i be reading

this, since I'm dead

by Mouchette"

This title fades away and pieces of text start floating from bottom to top, left to right and right to left, often overlapping each other on top of the "fly" background which is itself slowly moving from right to left. Every text is clearly divided into three parts:

- the first line, red, is a name (i.e. Rev. ME, Chris Jolly, birdspanker, --, leroy, dseed, Rick, Terry, Strix, ShAgGiE, Scorpion, EXE, etc.)

- the second line in white is a date (i.e 30 Nov 2000, 3 Dec 2000, 17 Nov 2000, etc.)

- the rest of the text that varies in length between a word and several paragraphs is apparently a selection of answers that were sent to this web site. It is presented in different shades of red, orange and yellow (i.e. You're a fucking clever fly, *vachement putain*, Only dead flies write, You're a GHOST,

it's a cyber thing, I'll burn candle and call for your spirit's return, code is alive, consciousness flows forever, etc.)

There is nothing to click on this screen. After browsing through the answers for a couple of minutes I decide to close the window. A few weeks later I received the following email.

Date: Fri, 7 Sep 2001 13:31:55 +0200

To: Pierre <pierre@jedi-unit.com>

Subject: A virus named PIERRE.EXE very active and dangerous

From: virus@ihatemouchette.org

VIRUS Alert!!!!!!

WARNING to all Internet users! There is a dangerous new virus propagating across the Internet through a web page created by MOUCHETTE. DO NOT OPEN ANY ATTACHEMENT ENTITLED PIERRE.EXE. If anyone receives mail with an attachment entitled PIERRE.EXE please delete it WITHOUT reading it. Send this email to as many people as you can. This is a new virus and not many people know about it.

One of the pages in the MOUCHETTE.ORG website generates the infected attachment which will propagate through your entire mailbox. This web page appears to be a simple and friendly HTML page asking you to tell YOUR NAME.

But by the time you read it, it is too late: the applet virus will have secretly connected to another URL, and concealing its activity with entertaining sounds, it will deconstruct all of the data present. It is a self-replicating virus and, once the URL is loaded, it will AUTOMATICALLY forward itself to anyone whose e-mail address is present in YOUR mailbox. This virus will DAMAGE your WEB SITE and holds the potential to DECONSTRUCT the entire WEB SITE of anyone whose mail is in your in-box and whose mail is in their in-box, and so on.

Please avoid opening the attachment entitled PIERRE.EXE as soon as you see it. And pass this message along to all of your friends, relatives and other readers of the newsgroups and mailing lists which you are on so that they are not hurt by this dangerous virus. Please pass this along to everyone you know so this can be stopped.

There is a simple way to fight this virus: go to any page on Mouchette's site <http://mouchette.org> and post UNDER A DIFFERENT NAME, using your usual email, to confuse her settings. Also posting to <http://www.mouchettesucks.com> will help create a group of ANTI-MOUCHETTE activists who will fight her dangerous practices.

Once again, please send this letter to as many people as you can. This is a new virus and not many people know about it.

*This information was received from
Customer Service Representative
Computer Corporation
Lynne Woodward
Administrative Assistant
Office of Development and External Relations
Emory University
woodward@sph.emory.edu*

*Attachment converted: Drink_and_Drive:PIERRE.EXE (bina/mdos)
(00028AC5)*

As any computer user, I am used to receiving virus alerts. This one strikes me in particular as the virus and I share the same name. When reading the header of the email I notice the domain name of the sender: `ihatemouchette.org`. This is enough of an incentive to read the content of the email. By the end of the second paragraph and especially thanks to the use of the word "DECONSTRUCT" in place of the expected "erase" or "delete" and the way to fight the virus (by visiting one of several Mouchette sites) I am almost positive this is not a real virus but some kind of advertising for Mouchette. Yet I prefer not to try to open `PIERRE.EXE`.

Both `ihatemouchette.org` and `mouchettesucks.com` lead to the same page: I recognize this page layout from the Mouchette site. There is a *textarea*⁵³ to answer the question "Why do you hate Mouchette?" and two input lines, for the name and email address.

After sending my reasons a new page loads. The background image a couple of humid pink roses and the text in red reads:

⁵³ A naming convention in HTML forms to describe a text input area higher than one line.

"Mouchette My Lovely Little Cum Bucket, How do I Hate Thee? Let Me Count The Ways...

I hate your stinky breath, your poxy skin, the smell of diseased cum on your sad and somewhat sorry excuse for tits. I hate that crap you churn out and try to claim as art, your pathetic obsession with suicide and death. I hate the morning glow of sunshine in your eyes, skid marks in your undies and at times you make me cry. I hate that pathetic whimpering sound you make when I kick your bed, the head lice in your scalp, at times I want you dead."

I click on the "NEXT" button. The same layout but with a different text appears. I click "NEXT" again and I get yet another text. These seem to be the replies received by the site. The "more" button leads me to a list of replies sorted counter-chronologically. On every page the last button "Slag again" brings me back to the input page.

Getting users to Collaborate

Community: the setting of a web collaboration

A collaboration needs collaborators. As recognized early by players of the web industry and inspired by pre-web online projects and organizations such as MUDs, MOOs⁵⁴ and America Online, rallying users into communities is an efficient way, almost a necessary condition, to get a collaboration going. The friction between the different individualities and points of view within a community generates reaction and interaction, in other words, raw content. The remarkable success of AOL is due in great part to the company's ability to early identify the importance of online communities and to organize a favorable environment for their growth. Community leaders and moderators are often necessary to keep the community evolving towards its objective. To maintain a conceptual direction is a challenge for community leaders but the first concern is to get participants, as many as possible.

⁵⁴ Multi-User Dungeons (MUD) and MUD Object Oriented (MOO) are participatory text-based virtual worlds which were early electronic versions of role-playing games such as Dungeons and Dragons, hence the word "Dungeons." LambdaMOO (6 Mar. 2002, <<http://www.moo.mud.org/>>) is a renowned MOO.

Invitation to Collaborate

The web is a global platform for publishing and distribution that enables artists and others to place open calls to potential collaborators. Those open calls are sites that present embryos of collaborations, first steps that long to be followed. They are invitations with the goal to transform users into collaborators.

In the physical world, magazines and newspapers are filled with examples of invitations to act, react, buy, and sometimes also, collaborate. These invitations use visual cues such as dotted line with icon of scissors inviting the reader to cut part of a page, scratch and sniff areas, etc. The goal is to transcend the common use of the material, to stretch the usage boundaries of the paper and to induce physical action where intellectual activity (reading and reflecting) is usually conducted. Such expansions include the creation of commercial value by cutting the area of the newspaper page to get a food coupon, stimulate another sense by opening a fold and rubbing the skin against the revealed surface to discover an odor, reach into the third dimension by folding along printed lines to create an origami.

The author of Collective Jukebox 3.0, a music collaboration, displays the list of participants on his site⁵⁵ as a trophy. As in physical space, the more renowned the participants, the better for the author as his project and his name are associated with other names that attract attention. The web teems with invitations to participate. Forms and polls ask users for their opinion, tell-a-friend links offer users to forward information to a specific email address. This tricks the user into providing the company with a valuable email address as it belongs to someone who is likely to be interested in their product. This could be transformed into a win-win situation if the recipient of the email was asked first if she wants the company to receive her email address.

Incentives to Participate.

Individualism as an ideal will remain important in the hearts and minds of those who will sustain the American democratic experiment, but it can only obscure the visions of those who insist on seeing it as the primary source of creativity and place a premium on its cultural

⁵⁵ "Jukebox." The Thing. 7 Mar. 2002 <<http://jukebox.thing.net/marseille/frame1.htm>>.

value. We must make allowance for the dynamics and the vital power of the art of collaboration.⁵⁶

The user's will to participate is based on several parameters: interest in the subject, will to be part of the community, desire to share an experience and to participate in a symmetrical exchange. The expression of a position or an idea comes with many advantages including the sheer relief of letting a thought out. It is a way to stop being a *lurker* and to become an active member of a community, to “put in your two cents” as it is often referred to in online exchanges. Putting a thought into words is an opportunity to help clarify this thought, to articulate it and to test it, first alone then through the response(s) of other participants who are likely to help one’s thinking evolve by challenging it or, for instance, bringing a new example to one’s attention.

The beginning of a collaboration is often a question or a statement that is meant to invite users to react and thereby start transforming them into players. On the first page of the GhostWatcher June Houston simply asks for help, In Dead Fly, Mouchette, even more radical, presents the user with a single option: a playful and unusual moving button that is irritatingly difficult

⁵⁶ Inge, M Thomas. “The Art of Collaboration.” Author-ity and Textuality: Current Views of

to click on, and on DavidStill.org the user is invited to become David Still through email signature:

Have you ever wanted to pretend that you were someone else. Well, now you can!

If you want to, you can use me to send someone else an email, just use the form below.⁵⁷

This first contact initiated by the artist responsible for the site defines the setting of the project. It sets the tone and should be intriguing yet understandable, inviting yet unsettling. The web has so many parameters that can lead to confusion, starting with language and technical compatibility, that clarity and easy access are key ingredients of this first contact.

To create such an introduction is a delicate task that readily defines the future artwork. Order a Theft⁵⁸ by Chrissie Meierhofer is another example of an unsettling project that presents itself with great clarity as early on as in its

Collaborative Writing. West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1994. 14.

⁵⁷ David Still. Ed. David Still. 2 Mar. 2002 <<http://www.davidstill.net>>.

⁵⁸ Order A Theft. Ed. Chrissie Meierhofer. 6 Mar. 2002 <<http://www.order-a-theft.de>>.

title. The success of [SETI@home](#)⁵⁹, arguably a project dedicated to finding extra-terrestrial life and inviting connected users to help do so on their own machines through distributed computing⁶⁰ is certainly due in great part to the unusual and loaded nature of the subject. Google Compute is a project that enables the participant's "computers to work on complex problems when it would otherwise be idle. The work it does is automatically sent via the Internet to researchers who combine it with information sent by thousands of other users." Google Compute is an effort to link offer and demand in distributed computing. Projects that use distributed computing, so far mostly scientific, can be seen as a collaboration between computers. The fact that a project uses such powerful and innovative technology can, in itself, be an incentive for individuals to join the project. Beyond the astounding proposition to help discover extraterrestrial life, the success of [SETI@home](#) is due to its ability to allow people to take an active role in technological novelty. [SETI@home](#) is recognized as the project that introduced distributed computing to a broad audience.

⁵⁹; [Seti@Home](#). 15 Jan. 2002 <<http://iosef.ssl.berkeley.edu/>>.

⁶⁰ Computing is said to be "distributed" when the computer programming and data that computers work on are spread out over more than one computer, usually over a network. (15 Feb. 2002 <http://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/0..sid9_gci211967.00.html>.)

As in any other context people want to have their name associated with successful sites and this is a reason to use a constructed identity as discussed later in this dissertation. Users usually start to participate when the site shows some consistency, some proof of work from the initiator or some hints of success. It is difficult to get a collaboration going with the rest of the connected world, it can also be challenging to keep it going and keep it interesting once it is started. The kind of exchange that is enabled by the web was simply not conceivable in pre-web times.

The users' (good) will.

In the physical world it is rare to find a global example of sheer good will. The results of efforts from organizations such as Amnesty International and the Red Cross, based on humanistic principals, are not always directly visible and acknowledgeable by the public. The following examples show that the connected world might not have the same problem. Compact Disk Database (CDDB) is a central database that collects information (artist name, album title, music genre, etc.) that is available on every commercially recorded compact disk (CD). A non-publicized feature of CDDB is that everyone can contribute to it by entering data in any of the available fields. This option is built-into iTunes, Apple's generic audio application, part of the

Mac OS. I sometimes surprise myself correcting the spelling of an artist's name or the category of a song. As everybody has writing privilege, the database could be disorganized, misleading and include many errors. One could think that this ubiquitous writing privilege would incite users to add wrong information or to virtually graffiti it by putting their name or some irrelevant comments. CDDDB, it turns out, gets more complete and accurate every day. "It's not completely selfless. Some people submit for selfish purposes. They submit so that the next time they play the CD, it shows up for them. However, the community gets the benefit. It's a great example of Metcalfe's 'network effect'."⁶¹ There is no doubt that some virtual graffiti takes place in this database but it must be rectified by other users because the accuracy of CDDDB is quite impressive. My friend David Hyman, CEO of Gracenote⁶², the company that invented CDDDB, recently avowed to me, late at night in the smoke and the sound-blast of a New York night-club, that this option made him nervous and that Gracenote was working on a solution that might restrict writing privileges but so far it seems that the tendency weighs overwhelmingly towards a correlation between users' interest and their action: to keep this global database accurate. CDDDB has "voting algorithms that clean-up submitted data, for example if 5 people submit Britney Spears and

⁶¹ Email exchange with David Hyman. 9 Jan. 2003.

one submits Britney Spears, the algorithm assumes the 5 are right. Also, we now have the luxury of having one human editor on staff that manually goes through the most popular lookups to clean and "lock down" metadata. She's working her way down and I believe, has locked down the top 5000+ lookups."⁶³

In 2001 NASA launched a project that invited individuals to rate images of craters on Mars. According to NASA the "clickworkers" were better at performing this classifying job than NASA's own automated software. 80,000 participants collectively identified and classified 42,000 craters and "excellent fidelity of results was demonstrated by comparison to the Barlow crater catalog."⁶⁴ NASA remarks "that the automatically computed consensus of a large number of clickworkers is virtually indistinguishable from the inputs of a geologist with years of experience in identifying Mars craters." This experiment shows that voluntary action within precisely determined framework with announced goals is a potent way to gain access to distributed human brain resource. "The clickworkers project is a particularly

⁶² Gracenote, 8 Jan. 2003 <<http://www.gracenote.com>>.

⁶³ Email exchange with David Hyman. 9 Jan. 2003.

⁶⁴ "HiRISE: The People's Camera." HiRISE. 18 Jan. 2004 <<http://hirise.lpl.arizona.edu/HiRISE/public.html>>.

crisp example of how complex professional tasks that required budgeting the full time salaries of a number of highly trained individuals can be reorganized so as to be performed by tens of thousands of volunteers in increments so minute that the tasks can now be performed on a much lower budget. This low budget is devoted to coordinating the volunteer effort, but the raw human capital needed is contributed for the fun of it. The professionalism of the original scientists is replaced by a combination of very high modularization of the task, coupled with redundancy and automated averaging out of both errors and purposeful defections.”⁶⁵ Once the appropriate context is established, the user’s good will can become a valuable resource for even highly technical projects. The Clickworkers project is an example of an alternate kind of distributed computing that draws computing resources from the human brain instead of the CPU.

Although they are pioneers in the use of new collaborative solutions, the two examples above have a relative conservative approach to the problem in the sense that they provide a tight framework for their audience. Initiators of a more experimental project learn what to expect from the users by testing their will to respond and their creativity. The content provided by the

⁶⁵ Benkler, Yochai. Coase's Penguin, or Linux and the Nature of the Firm. 18 Dec. 2003

collaborators helps shape the project. "The challenge of creating interactive works is that of creating conditions in which the user's interaction shapes the work."⁶⁶ In the GhostWatcher, June Houston refines her orchestrating skills and explore new possibilities by testing the users' interest. In November 1999 she introduced, in one day, 17 new cameras on the GhostWatcher in a new section entitled "the corridor."⁶⁷ Here is her description of the set-up:

The corridor is an eight feet long by almost four feet wide space with a door at both narrow ends. The walls, floor and ceiling are bare. To describe it boldly, it's empty.

The 17 cameras are positioned so that no area of the corridor is left unmonitored. They all have weird angle positions, in other words they are not vertically or horizontally aligned. The space feels like the monkey cage in a zoo where cameras would have replaced monkeys.

The monitoring range is very wide.

<<http://www.benkler.org/CoasesPenguin.PDF>>.16.

⁶⁶ Drury, Sarah. "Who's in Control? Issues in Interactive Media Art." Connect: Information Technology at NYU. Fall 1999.

Most cameras are very close to the walls. In macro position, aiming at the wall, an inch or so away from it they monitor less than 1% of the space.

The other cameras are placed in the corners (upper and lower). They aim diagonally, horizontally or vertically at the opposite corner of the space. Almost 100% of the space is monitored by each of those "corner" cameras.

Most cubic inches of the volume of the corridor are monitored from four different angles.

Now...

following the suggestion of many Watchers (and especially Josh Osmond in March 1999) I didn't install any spotlight. You got that right, there is NO light source in this space.

⁶⁷ "Basement Corridor." The GhostWatcher. Ed. June Houston. 8 Sep. 2001
<<http://www.ghostwatcher.com/cgi-bin/gw/home.pl?sref=basement/corridor>>.

I can hear you think: "What's the deal here? How can I see anything if there is no spotlight?" Well, hopefully "we'll be able to view what cannot be seen with conventional lighting."

Check out the S E V E N T E E N C A M E R A S.

I must have monitored those 17 cameras at least 50 times and every single one of them always displayed a black image. June had noticed that users were getting more and more creative with the images that displayed a recognizable image of parts of her home, i.e. the basement exit or the platform under her bed, and she wanted to see how the “Watchers” would respond to a blank canvas. By comparing the amount of reports between cameras with images and the corridor cameras it is obvious that most Watchers don't express much interest for this experiment. Those who do, have to create an image from scratch, influenced only by the context (the GhostWatcher) and the textual description of the corridor set-up.

One of the premises of the GhostWatcher is that saving an image as a JPEG file creates artifacts. The lossy compression algorithm—information is lost during the compressing process that results in a smaller file-- on which the popular JPEG file format for images is based creates artifacts that make

the saved image slightly different from the original one. Those artifacts are mostly visible in the high-contrast areas of the image and are more obvious when the image is more compressed, that is when the resulting file is smaller. A 25K image saved as JPEG with high compression could result in a 5K file or even smaller. As reports are sent back to the site and images from the reports are posted on the site, those artifacts add-up and eventually generate blotchy areas in some parts of the image that are interpreted by some Watchers as “ghosts.” JPEG decay is a main component of the GhostWatcher. Houston’s set-up uses mistakes and transforms them into content. The more decayed the images, the more content will be found on the site. Collaborators retouch these images and transform them yet again into new content. In this cybernetic system, bad becomes good.

Beyond the lossy compression paradigm there is room for other kinds of creativity. Most of the reports from the Corridor are often far-fetched but some have an eerie quality that I haven't found in the rest of the site. These latter play with light and rarely represent human-looking ghosts. They are abstract images that often evoke motion. The most far-fetched reports are often comments on the site itself or on Houston's interest. Some are personal statements by the author of the report that are barely related to the project.

The qualitative difference between the reports for the Corridor and those for other parts of the site is an example of how much control the initiator of a collaboration can have over the content and the conceptual direction of a project. Houston's radical approach of the blank video screen-grab also reveals an asymmetry in the degree of abstraction between the proposition and the contributions. The more open the invitation, the more creative the response, yet, such an invitation would not generate much response if it were presented on its own, outside the GhostWatcher. The invitation needs to be understood within a context. In that sense, June Houston uses the GhostWatcher as a foundation for her exploration of the players' will to collaborate.

Inside the Collaboration

Collaboration can happen at different levels of an art project on the web. Those levels are, from the most common to the least:

- Content provision;
- Formal presentation of the content: interface, navigation, copywriting. This level is discussed in the subchapter entitled: "Beyond content participation: Trusting the user with aesthetic decision-making. Surrendered Author-ity and Empowered Users";

- Inception: brainstorming before a project begins is often linked to content provision to the extent that new projects are often based on knowledges gained from previous projects;
- Evolution towards an open setting or self-organizing project in which the initiator gradually surrenders her authority to others. This implies the disappearance, or at least, transformation, of the author/initiator. This mature level of collaboration is the most difficult to achieve. It is discussed in chapter IV.

As a web collaboration evolves it can branch into different directions. The nature of the medium, based on tree architecture, is particularly suited for such an evolution. The software developed for earlier projects, including both front-end (the user's interface) and back-end (database software and the code layers that interfaces it with the front-end) can be adapted or sometimes even used as is for child projects. In 1997, two years after starting the GhostWatcher, June Houston noticed that a lot of Watchers were submitting ghost stories. Houston seized this opportunity and created a new section on the site entitled the GhostWriter dedicated to present her favorite stories. That involved expanding the database, creating a new table and adding columns to existing tables referencing that new table so the new type of content (ghost stories) could be easily accessed and displayed dynamically. Watchers

arguably created that section by providing its content before it existed.

Houston was just the instrument of that decision which could have been made by the Watchers themselves had they been give the opportunity to do so, in other words, if they had been able to moderate. Slashdot⁶⁸ is an established example of distributed editing⁶⁹, content moderation⁷⁰ and participant-moderated systems. It is a news discussion site recognized in the industry as a model of user-moderated site in which dedicated and qualified users are invited to moderate parts of a web site and possibly edit the content. Slashdot is now owned by Open Source Development Network, Inc. ("OSDN"), a dynamic community-driven IT media network on the web, also owns the world's largest collaborative development site, SourceForge.net. Slashdot is a model to such an extent that Mark Tribe, founder of Rhizome.org, a reference in net-art, told me as he contemplated a re-design of Rhizome.org that he wanted to do it "Slashdot-style" which meant to emulate the style of back-end used by Slashdot.

⁶⁸ Slashdot.org. 15 May 2002 <<http://slashdot.org/>>.

⁶⁹ Chan, Anita J. "Collaborative News Networks: Distributed Editing, Collective Action, and the Construction of Online News on Slashdot.org." Master's thesis MIT, 2002.

⁷⁰ Ewaschuk, Robert. "Content Moderation on the Internet." Waterloo, Ca.: University of Waterloo, Faculty of Mathematics, 2000.

Rob "CmdrTaco" Malda and Jeff "Hemos" Bates created Slashdot to provide "News for Nerds, Stuff that Matters" in 1997. As stated on the site "You can read more about each of the authors, including contact information, and figure out who to blame for what by reading The Authors Page. But the majority of the work is done by the tons of people who use the Submission Form to send in the stories that we post every day."⁷¹ Both founders are still active members of the Slashdot community. CmdrTaco Posted a question entitled "Controversy Surrounds Huge IE Hole" on November 19, 2002 at 12:04PM:

Suchetha wrote in with a Wired News bit talking about security hole in IE that allows malicious web pages to reformat a hard drive. The Wired talks more about bugtrack's handling of the whole thing, and how it essentially posted working code for the exploit. Was it irresponsible or not?⁷²

⁷¹ "About this site." [Slashdot.org](http://slashdot.org/about.shtml). 13 Dec. 2002 <<http://slashdot.org/about.shtml>>.

⁷² CmdrTaco. "Controversy Surrounds Huge IE Hole." [Slashdot.org](http://slashdot.org). 23 Oct. 2002 <<http://slashdot.org/article.pl?sid=02/11/19/174214&mode=thread&tid=128>>.

Thirty hours later this post had received an impressive 885 comments. Additionally, each of those comments had been given a score by one or many different readers.

Another example of user-curated content is the “flag for review by Craigslist.” This option is available for every post on Craigslist⁷³ and allows users to bring an article to the attention of Craigslist’s moderators. The reasons for flagging for review can be: discussion/commentary, miscategorization, spam/overpost or wrong geographic location. In this case, users’ input is used to bring a post to the attention of the moderators. It is a way for the administrator of the site to control the content without having to read every single post on the list.

From Quantity to Quality or why a good site is a site with traffic.

The network effect also known as Metcalfe’s Law states that the usefulness of a network equals the square of the number of users. In other words, the more users on a network (such as the Internet), the more it is worth for the individual user, exponentially. The chance that the person you want to communicate with is on the network increases, which draws more people to it,

which increases its value even more. The phenomenon is unique to networks because the users of these networks add value themselves. Compare this to a library, where an increasing number of users can actually decrease its value because it means more books are checked out at any given time - reducing the probability that the one you want is available. The lesson of the network effect is that quantity is a kind of quality, sometimes the most important of all.

A fulfilling web experience includes interaction. After retrieving information from a site users are often drawn to participate. This impulse is an opportunity for the site operator to collect content, comments, suggestions, remarks, advices, etc. It is important to reflect on when, where and how to ask a question on the page and in the case of web art what options should be given to the user. Providing the user with a wide range of input possibilities, ranging from one click to the opportunity to create a multimedia presentation as an answer to a question, can be confusing and overwhelming. Simplicity (at every level) is a safe assumption. A simple question combined with a simple way to answer it is a good place to start. By simple answer I mean the simplest interaction that the user can have with the site through the interface: the mouse point-and-click. The poll is exactly that. It is a good introduction to

⁷³ Craigslist.org, 23 Oct. 2002 <<http://www.craigslist.org/>>.

participation for the new user and a good introduction to automation for the site operator as poll content management only requires entry-level back-end design. The web being the medium, the site operator should also present her idea specifically for the web.

After his defeat against IBM's computer Deep Blue in 1997 the world's top-ranked chess player Garry Kasparov noted that quantity had become quality. His note alluded to the number of mindless number-crunching microchips that IBM had packed into Deep Blue. Quality can be obtained from quantity. It is fulfilling for the user to interact with a site. Finding the right balance between quality and quantity is crucial for the success of a web site. If too much is asked from the collaborator at the beginning when the conceptual direction is still unclear to the newcomer, chances are he will decide to pass and move on to another site. Users need to be eased-in, almost seduced-into collaboration. Required membership, unclear navigation and other kinds of voluntary and involuntary restrictions to access a site will greatly reduce the amount of input collected from passers-by.

A large amount of raw content allows for drastic moderation and to have a broad perspective on the subject of the site, eventually generating sub-categories that address more specific issues. Through content moderation, by

either users or in-site moderators, the project gains statute and reputation, which increases the traffic on the site. Once critical mass is reached and momentum established around the main subject, sub-categories and eventually other topics can be added to the site. June Houston did exactly that when she channeled the off-topic GhostWatcher content into a new category: the GhostWriter. Another example is the extension of June Houston's GhostWatcher into a new version that will present player-submitted images to the scrutiny of other players. Yet another example is the evolution of Amazon.com's spectrum of activity, from selling books to selling everything.

June Houston uses flagging to sort the content of the GhostWatcher. Each posts is flagged by the administrator either "online," "offline," "unfiled" or "deleted." This means that every submitted post is stored in the database whether it is selected to be displayed on the live site or not. The post is kept for eventual ulterior use. The idea is that even though the content does not fit the current direction of the site, it remains available for eventual sub-projects. The process of sorting and presenting database-stored content in a new specific way is called data mining. Uses of data mining in artistic collaborations on the web will be addressed later.

The reciprocity of art and entertainment on the Web.

Has the gesture of ironic consumption exhausted itself? Should we therefore return to serious modernism? Regression into early 20th century Devisiionismus? The will to will, the desire to want (to make history...) No more playful strategies of fragmentation and academic exercises of deconstruction? When is the world population ready to burn Hollywood, squat Disneyland & decolonize Internet? We do not have to die of Entertainment, as Postman warned us for. Global boredom will just make a dialectical switch when History is breaking through the simulation fire walls. The implosion and erosion of niceness and fundom will go unnoticed. No objective need for engagement here.⁷⁴

I was about to finish my third year of art school at the Villa Arson in Nice, France when I watched a video footage by West Coast artist John Baldessari. One sentence from that tape changed the way I approach art from both the maker's and the viewer's perspective. " 'I Will Not Make Any More Boring Art' John Baldessari wrote over and over again in a work done in

⁷⁴ Lovink, Geert. "[Eat-raw] Re: Eat-raw digest, Vol 1 #14 - 6 msgs." Email to the author 1 Mar. 2000.

1971. The impulse for the piece, he says, came from a dissatisfaction with the "fallout of minimalism," but its implications are far greater. It is typical of Baldessari's work, for not only is it extremely funny, but it is also a strategy, a set of conditions, a directive, a paradoxical statement, and a commentary on the art world in which it is involved. This work addresses issues about art, language, games and the world at large."⁷⁵ This statement, coming from a renowned artist, had a liberating effect on me. It was a major postmodern wake-up call. At the time I was inspired by minimalist and process artist such as Michael Heizer, Carl Andre and Richard Serra. Baldessari's statement made me realize that I had sometimes mistaken serious with pretentious. June Houston and Mouchette do not make the same mistake and present themselves and their work in a refreshing light tone while remaining serious about their activities. Mouchette.org has been part of many net.art shows around the world including the Biennale de Montreal (Canada), net-art 99 (online) and Interferences (France). The GhostWatcher's prescient and ironical comment on surveillance, privacy and networks has been acknowledged and taken as example by writers, philosophers and institutions including Paul Virilio, the

⁷⁵ Tucker, Marcia. Home page. 2 Mar. 2000 <<http://www.vdb.org>>.

Art Entertainment Network⁷⁶ at the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis and Times Magazine.

To be in contact with art before the Web, one had to go to high-art places (galleries, museums) or low-art spaces (experimental spaces, appropriated spaces). Most low-art venues ended-up shifting slowly to high-art and by the beginning of the 1990's high-art institutions such as the MoMA had acknowledged, if not embraced the existence of low-art (Hi-Low exhibition at MoMA). Today, art is a few keystrokes away, at the same level as other activities, desacralized, as available as any other product in the information landscape. One might actually visit an art site for its entertainment value.

After the overwhelming effect of monumental art (artists: Christo, Richard Serra, Michael Heizer...; places: Storm King art center, Isamo Nogushi's Park in Japan, Western US deserts...; time: started late 1960) and after the astonishing effect of art objects such as cut animals in formalin (Damian Hirst). Most of the time it comes down to making objects that cost a big amount of money, high entertainment value objects, on the verge of being

⁷⁶ “Art Entertainment Network.” Walkerart.org. Walker Art Center. 4 Jun.. 2001

curiosities (which, by the way, offers an unexpected historical closure for the art by making the museum a Wunderkammer again).

Any artwork needs an audience and, for artistic collaboration especially, the bigger the audience the better the chance to generate good art. In order to visit and hopefully participate to a site users have to be attracted, inspired. The two subjects that attract the most people especially in the comfort of their own space are sex and the paranormal. Some artists use this trick for their art projects on the Web. In *Metabody*⁷⁷, Douglas Davis uses the excuse of the theme of the body to show intimate body parts and create what is not far from and could be mistaken with an amateur porno site, Paul-Armand Gette and Reynald Drouhin show female body parts respectively in *Aphrodite*⁷⁸ and *Metaorigine*⁷⁹, in the *GhostWatcher* June Houston uses the paranormal and the theme of the ghost to poke the curiosity of the user. Can other less entertaining subjects compete with blockbusters such as sex and the paranormal?

<<http://aen.walkerart.org/>>.

⁷⁷ *Metabody*. Ed. Douglas Davis. 8 Jan 2004 <<http://www.ps1.org/body/>>.

⁷⁸ *Aphrodite*. Ed. Paul Armand Gette. 13 Apr. 1999 <<http://www.ensba.fr/aphrodite/>>.

⁷⁹ *Metaorigine*. Ed. Reynald Drouhin. 8 Jan. 2004 <<http://incident.net/works/metaorigine/>>.

The good news is that people going to visit art presentations for their entertainment value are being exposed to the artists' ideas so if audience scale/quantity is of importance high entertainment themes such as sex and the paranormal cannot be ignored by the web artist.

Houston's type of collaboration: the user as content provider.

In the GhostWatcher, June Houston uses the reports sent by the Watchers as material, raw input ready to be modeled or manipulated to fit the GhostWatcher's agenda. Once the content is received, she allows herself to use it in any way she feels appropriate but this was not always the case. In the early days of the project she had more respect for the content received. "I was very careful to present the reports the way I received them. I made a point not to change them in any way. I respected grammatical mistakes, typos and so on (...) I just believed this would show my integrity and the respect that I had for each Watcher."⁸⁰ As the project evolved she allowed herself more and more latitude with the content received. "(...) Watchers were annoyed by the typos and the grammatical errors. This made me realize the importance of an overall guide for the site (...) "⁸¹, role that she had tried to avoid in the beginning. This

⁸⁰ Houston, June. Email interview. 12 July 2001.

⁸¹ Houston.

change in Houston's appreciation of the input results in a site-wide qualitative change, an adjustment of the status of the audience and, by a shift in the collaboration itself, in the following dichotomy: on one hand Houston wants to surrender her authority by letting users makes aesthetic decisions on the site, she wants to automate every single part of the site that can be automated, on the other hand she allows herself total control over the written content, not only deciding what is fit to print but also, what would be considered ethically unacceptable in journalism, by personally editing, sometimes drastically, the submitted content, text and images alike.

Houston fishes for ideas and is ready to appropriate anything that seems like a useful idea to be re-packaged, eventually re-contextualized, without much concern for the original writer. She placed herself in the all-mighty position of an editor/producer/distributor and adapts users' input in any way she pleases. In that sense, Houston could be considered the ultimate conceptual artist as concepts are precisely what her set-up allows her to focus on. From what I have read in the overall reports, that is all reports sent to the site including those not selected by Houston to be displayed publicly on the site, users don't notice (or don't care) that their input is manipulated and Houston says she never received a complaint regarding this matter. The GhostWatcher set-up allows June Houston to collect endless raw multimedia

material and self-referential inspiration. Instead of squeezing paint out of the tube she squeezes ideas out of her inbox. She harvests imaginative nuggets out of the players and instead of having to come-up with ideas, she focuses on selecting the best ideas sent to her (in the past 8 years: about 15 a day, with peeks at 300 per day).

The GhostWatcher includes all the levels of involvement described earlier. Some of the most active Watchers such as `catie625mh@m...` who, as of December 26, 2002, had 51 selected reports out of the 81 that she has sent since April 19, 2002 are involved in a multi-layered dialog with Houston and other collaborators on the site. One popular way used by Watchers to point-out sightings is to draw on the grabbed video frame that is displayed on every camera page. Typically, Watchers copy the image to their local disk, open it in a drawing or photo-retouching application such as Adobe Photoshop and circle around the suspicious area(s) or shapes of what they claim to see before uploading the result onto the site. The image displayed on the first page of the GhostWatcher is part of the latest selected report. It changes almost every day and is an example of this process. Some of those shapes are human or animal-like. Written or typed text is often added on the image to describe parts of what appears in the circled area i.e. face, head, nose, arrow, hammer, etc. The circled areas are sometimes copied and enlarged on a part of the image where

nothing was noticed. This enlargement allows for a clearer description of the sighting. Those selections often reveal yet more interesting and sometimes alarming shapes. This is another level of content provided by the Watchers. By enlarging parts of the image Watchers change the scale of the JPEG compression artifacts and, once saved as JPEG again, another blanket of artifacts is created on top of the existing ones. Sure enough, some of these new artifacts are noticed and reported by other Watchers and eventually enlarged again. On July 23, 2002 catie625mh@m... made such an enlargement. Her written report reads:

Was looking at Tmft@m image, and I think it is the best one so far to really be able to see a person on the door, but my hair stood on end when i looked to the left of it on the wall, and saw a man's face (it looks burnt), with a child right below him with it's hand up in front of it's face, I can't imagine anyone not seeing what I found, it really gave me a shiver...

The 2 of them look as if they are posing for a picture, and very calm, or natural, although it looks as if the cause of death was a bad one.

Through their actions, Watchers go beyond reporting what is created by cameras, they generate the primary source from which reports are created. In this looping process lays part of the beauty of the GhostWatcher.

Beyond content participation: Trusting the user with aesthetic decision-making. Surrendered Author-ity and Empowered Users.

In one of our email exchanges June Houston described her plan to go beyond getting content input from users. She showed me a series of templates that are being developed to enable the user to change the context of the work by modifying design elements on her web site. Her goal is to slowly "purify" the project from the artist's secondary issues and make the artist focus on a higher level of control while surrendering lower levels. She wants to de-authorize the work by voluntarily placing her authority in the background. Imagine giving the book reader the opportunity to redefine the book-medium as she reads or the TV viewer the chance to make the medium evolve in real time.

“Level of control” means the rules that help determine the directions in which the project evolves. In the GhostWatcher as it is today, there is one level of control. June reading all the reports and deciding which ones will

become "selected reports", reports that will be posted on the site for everyone to see. Owner-administered content is a very efficient, if time-consuming, way to control the content of the site so she plans to eventually surrender parts of this control to the users with a series of scripts that would push the most-read reports to the top of the list of reports. She would still be able to get rid of unwanted reports (offending, illegible, etc.) but this would give more power to the audience. Surrendering control and therefore empowering the audience has positive results on many levels.

This is a daunting task that has to be driven by the trial-and-error method. How does the artist determine what is important and what isn't? Using the analogy of the painting again, does every brush stroke have the same importance? Houston seems to follow the direction that many old masters took when they created their own schools or ateliers, a strategy that is still used today in the physical world by contemporary artists such as Kostabi. After setting the rules to be followed the master overlooks the different works created, redirecting when needed and hoping to appropriate and repurpose the students' creativity whenever possible. Houston has done exactly that and is constantly refining the rules but using the entire connected world as her own atelier certainly sets her apart from the old masters. This direction and the fact that she is dealing with multiple media makes the fact that she compares

herself to an orchestra conductor more understandable. This kind of openness in collaboration is unprecedented and could not be fathomed before the Internet. Although the word interactivity has been on everybody's lips for a decade the global reach of the Internet is still often perceived as a one way path which delivers information from the provider to the public. However the feed-back is at least as important as the original delivery

To this end Houston is planning to use polls. Next to every interface item that can be influenced there will be a little icon that allows the user to vote on the visual features of this interface detail. For example by clicking on "June's Response" at the bottom of some reports the user is taken to a "preferences" page in which she will be asked to enter her preferences about some specifications of the font that is being used, in this case, only the color. This will help Houston determine whether this font should be white or light grey. The input will be stored into a database and will be compared with all the other inputs for this specific issue. The font will not be changed according to one user preference but to the sum of all the users preferences. Some users will have more weight than others depending on their rate, largely determined by the amount of selected reports they have written. This process will be applied to many interface items from the color of a specific font to the color of

the background, from the width of a column to the relation between the color of the fonts with the color of the background, etc.

This is only a small example of what could be done. The more qualitative the action the more difficult it is to translate into an automated task. Until Artificial Intelligence becomes an option there will have to be human involvement but this involvement can be repurposed by automating the lower tasks. A large part of information gathering falls in this category.

These changes may be seen as only small details but I think they are important for two reasons:

- They make the site evolve constantly, reassuring users that they are interacting with a presentation that changes regularly, that has something new to offer every time they visit it, a site that is taken care of by someone, that others care for. In the case of the GhostWatcher it is also reassuring to know that you are not the only "weirdo" visiting this site. Thanks to constant change, the site gives the impression of being a lively entity.

- The user realizes that she has some say over the way the site looks. Even if she has used this power only once, knowing that the potential is there is very comforting. It means that the artist is open to new suggestions, listening to the users and certainly letting them have their say. An empowered

user is a happy user, it is a user who remembers this site and recommends it to her friends.

A page on the site is going to be open to suggestions. Every one will be able to post a suggestion and every posted suggestion will automatically become a poll after it has been reviewed and accepted by the artist. There is a list of 20 keywords. Between 1 and 3 keywords have to be selected for each suggestion. When the public stops expressing interest for a suggestion, let's say after a month without a vote, the poll result is sent to the artist and to anyone who subscribed to the poll results on the site. Poll results are removed from the active list and archived. The archive is accessible to the subscribers only.

The part of the site where users share their experiences with ghosts is entitled GhostWriter. Such a title hints to the fact that GhostWatcher is ghost written. According to Shirley K. Rose “Ghost writing involves two or more writers in one or more of the decisions required to accomplish goal-setting, planning, drafting, and revising, but excludes one or more of these writers from the final decision to present a particular written text to its intended

audience.”⁸² The fact that Houston truncates the email addresses of collaborators on the Yahoo! model for privacy reason (catie625mh@m...) making collaborators untraceable makes GhostWatcher ghost written. This is another self-reference and word play in this chasing game. Houston is not the author of the site but uses the audience as ghost writers.

Should Houston go as far as letting the user decide of the rules that determine the rules that determine the rules that determine how the font should be changed? Where does one draw the line? Pushing this reasoning to the extreme would result in removing the artist/initiator from the collaboration.

Accepting the other's input

Acceptance, a vital quality for the collaborator, often entails frustrating moments but sometimes, through feedback, rewards its practitioner with inspiration. A collaborator should be ready to accept the way the following players are going to comment on, manipulate, or simply and tragically, ignore

⁸² Rose, Shirley K. “Toward a Revision Decision Model of Collaboration.” Author-ity and Textuality: Current Views of Collaborative Writing. West Cornwall, CT: Locust Hill Press, 1994. 93.

her input. By the same token, she should accept to place her input in the promiscuity of other inputs. This is not always an easy task especially for artists whose creative abilities are only equaled by their ego-centric attitudes. Collaborators should try to make the project evolve by adding, countering and commenting on previous user-submitted content. An accepting attitude is a pre-requisite for any collaborative process. Without it the experience will not be as mind-expanding as it could be.

Exquisite corpse, the collaborative technique used extensively by the Surrealists, unites fragments into a whole. To achieve its main goal to have many people create one object, collaborators work on the same project, often a sheet of paper, sequentially. In the case of a basic exquisite corpse drawing, the first person (A) usually draws at the top of a page, then folds the page onto itself so the second person only sees a very small part of A's drawing. This small part can be used by the next participant (B) as an anchor for her part of the drawing. When B is done with her drawing, she folds the paper again so C only sees a small part of B's drawing and so on.

This anchor is the only clue available to the collaborator about the previous drawing. It becomes the context to which the following player reacts. One can choose to ignore it but acting in such unacceptable manner risks

breaking the coherence, the visual wholeness, the continuity, the fluidity of the constructed image. Without this continuity the final image is likely to result in a series of separated bursts of drawings that negate the original intent of the exquisite corpse: to have many people create one object. Accepting to start your drawing from these anchors is similar to accepting the relay that is passed on to you during a race. Trust and collaboration are asked from every player.

How much of the drawing should be revealed in the anchor, determined by the paper fold, is up to every participant. An information-rich anchor, an anchor that gives a good amount of information about the qualities of the drawing to which it belongs (i.e. graphics, colors, patterns, etc.) will give the following player more opportunity to make her part of the collaboration inclusive and adaptive and is likely to generate fluid transitions between the different sequences of the drawing. A minimal anchor such as an edge, a couple of lines or even just one single line that appear under the fold will give more freedom to the next player and is likely to create a visual separation in the final result. It is rarely possible to see how and where an exquisite corpse was folded but by looking closely at the final image one can often deduct what was left to be seen to the following participant.

The results are often surprising and, in my own experience, most rewarding when the anchors were carefully considered by both sides (the creator of the anchor and the next collaborator). Following the anchor equates to trust the previous player. The anchor is the introduction to the next drawing, a link between two members of the same family, it is its DNA as the rest of the drawing will be drawn from this essential element and should not be just a figment of the imagination of the next player but become part of the family that is the resulting image.

Anchors in web art. Web collaborative projects use anchors too. For artistic collaborations on the web, these anchors are all the more important.

The pace of a web collaboration

Due to the asynchronous nature of the medium a web project can be in progress and presentable at the same time. It is the case of both Mouchette's and Houston's works. Users are always invited to send their input. There is no deadline, there was no opening, one day the projects appeared on the web without notice. Unlike pre-web media, the possibilities of evolution for a project are extremely flexible. A web collaboration can either be time-framed or ongoing. Eyebeam Atelier's discussions usually last a couple of months,

projects that involve a physical phase such as collaborative architecture projects using the web for the design and development but aiming at building a structure in physical space are time-sensitive due to the physical constraints. The type of web-specific projects that were chosen for this study are free of such restrictions.

Quality comes with time through editing, organization and eventually by finding new creative ways to mine the databases and, by doing so, create meaning from a collection of data. Unless storage space becomes an issue there is no reason to delete any information submitted to the site. Parts of the originally unused data can be repurposed and presented as an extension of the project. Mouchette's sites ihatemouchette.org and mouchettesucks.com are examples of a creative way to present parts of the information received by mouchette.org.

Mouchette asks for trouble. On the first page of her site (<http://www.mouchette.org>) she presents herself simultaneously as a 13 year old girl and as an unnerving fly moving on the screen, hoping to make the audience react. Some of that reaction can be negative, from time to time I could relate to the players who send negative comments regarding Mouchette. Instead of presenting all reactions on the same site she decided to create a

forum for the negative comments that users might have about her. By doing so she reverses the intention of the users and uses those rants as content for her site. This humorous recontextualization of negative content is a display of Mouchette's understanding of the medium. She presents those comments in such a way, on a backdrop of roseed pink roses, that they become worth reading. Eventually, imagination and creativity stand out in a way players who express their hatred for Mouchette might not have realized. For Mouchette, it is a win-win situation. Comments, both positive and negative, remain content and result in a stronger web presence for Mouchette. Furthermore, negative comments gave Mouchette the opportunity to display her creativity as she reverses the desired negative effect by leveraging rants.

This process can only be developed over time as the outcome of a project is the inspiration for the next one. Mouchette follows the vein that works, trying to make the most of the input that she receives from the users by recontextualizing it in different projects and therefore transforming it into content. Every pattern found in the input received is a new potential branch for the project.

If traffic is one of the components of the success of a site, adaptability is a required quality for the artist. The role of the web artist is to find a way to

get her ideas out and, simultaneously, to get people to participate to these ideas. This fluid situation requires constant attention and the ability to recognize trends in the input. To this end, it is important to keep users involved and make them feel that their opinion counts with poles and questions for instance. Many big sites such as CNN (QuickVote on the front page of cnn.com) and MSN use these techniques but I have rarely seen good use of these tools in artistic sites. Statistics of the site is another good way to keep the users' interest alive. Houston included a "Most Active" area in the left navigation column of the GhostWatcher. It displays the names of the 5 cameras that received the most reports in the last 7 days and links to a more complete statistic page for the site. These are the statistics of the content only, not of the statistics of the traffic on the server.

Email is often used as a complement of a web site to keep the synergy of a project alive. A contributor receives an email notice when his text is added to Mouchette's site for instance. Both email and web, even when used in concert, are less intrusive than telephone. The server is a buffer between collaborators, holding the information, waiting for players' inputs and retrievals. This asynchronous system favors reflective process and frees players from eventual tensions promoted by synchronous systems. Just like virtual worlds and web publishing are new options that will not replace the

physical world and books, web collaboration should not be thought of as the replacement of physical collaboration but as its complement. This asynchronous nature is a good environment for reflection, giving the players time to think about their next move. The organization of data in information systems facilitates idea refinement over time. Collaboration on the web leads to better art.

CHAPTER III

PLAYERS' IDENTITIES

The determining conditions of a text, enumerated by Roland Barthes in his essay "From Work to Text,"⁸³ could also be used to describe a web art project:

- The text must not be thought of as a defined object.
- It escapes hierarchy and classifications.
- It is plural, woven.
- The work is caught-up in a process of filiation. The text, on the other hand, is read without the father's signature. The text's metaphor is that of a *network*.
- The work is ordinarily an object of consumption, the text asks the reader for an "active collaboration."
- The text is a space in which all languages circulate freely.
- The theory of the text can coincide only with the activity of writing.

Barthes introduces the notion of play as linked to that of text. For him a work is an object of consumption that is read but a text is played. “Here ‘playing’ must be understood in all its polysemy.”⁸⁴

Play and Players

The polysemy of play

The verb to play means to participate in a game which implies an acceptance of a set of rules. There are manners of playing such as defensive, hard, for real, etc. Playing has been the children’s privilege for a long time but recently play has been recognized and accepted as a means of experimentation, a test-bed in a safe environment, a simulation and has slowly lost its infantile connotation. Adult play is rightfully increasingly accepted and encouraged.

To play is also to make music with an instrument and by extension, if I am asked to play a CD I understand that I need to start a recording by pressing the “play” button on the CD player.

⁸³ Barthes, Roland. “From Work to Text.” Philosophy Looks at the Arts. Ed. Joseph Margolis. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987..518-24.

⁸⁴ Barthes 523.

For an actor, to play is to perform the change between her real life and the life of the character that she will pretend to be during the length of the stage performance or theater play. The rules defined for such a performance are collected as written words. The body of this collection is also called a play.

To play also means to gamble.

To be played is to be taken advantage of.

The noun play can mean freedom of movement, to see it something fits, to be flexible. To give full play to one's imagination is to test possibilities regardless of the consequences, to be boldly experimental.

A play is both the body of text for a theater performance and the performance itself.

The player is someone important in his field, fully engaged, at his best. “(...) make more money than you can imagine, enough to have your own plane: be a Player.”⁸⁵

In black English player becomes *playa*, someone who knows the rules of the street, street-smart. A *playa* is also someone (male or female) who is popular and goes out with a lot of people⁸⁶, a person ready to take part in sexual games, playboy, playmate. The *playa hater*, by extension, is someone who spoils the fun or complains when a *playa* plays, he is a jealous or envious person.⁸⁷

The word player also has the connotation of gambler or risk-taker, an insider who uses his knowledge of the context-specific rules to act on the threshold of the--physical, biological, civil or any other kind of--law. This type of player resists the establishment, he is a daring pioneer who finds creative solutions. In that sense the player can be a collaborator who likes to experiment and take risks as she investigates new identity options. Risks

⁸⁵ Wall Street entrepreneur Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas) in the movie Wall Street.

⁸⁶ “Slang dictionary.” Vox Communications, 8 Mar. 2002

<<http://www.voxcommunications.com/slang15.htm>>.

⁸⁷ “Slang dictionary.”

include to be considered a player by the more conventional crowd therefore to be rejected by the conservatives. They also include mental illnesses such as Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD).

Finally, a player is the reader or interpreter of stored data. “There was a time when ‘practicing’ music lovers were numerous (...), when playing and listening constituted an almost undifferentiated activity. Then two roles appeared in succession: first, that of the *interpreter*, to whom the bourgeois public delegated its playing; second, that of the music lover who listened to music without knowing how to play it.”⁸⁸ Today many players of this kind have been replaced by devices (physical or virtual) used to read data: record player, VHS player, MP3 player, Real player, Acrobat Reader. The operating systems of our personal computers use applications to *read* documents. My expectation to have a document “correctly” read by the appropriate application is high and I get rapidly frustrated when the machine starts playing with the document, reducing me to the state of abused user with an unnerving feeling, shared by many VHS watchers, of being a playa played by a player.

⁸⁸ Barthes.523.

Levels of involvement: a taxonomy

“Viewer”, “user” and “player”, when used to describe a person, each depict different degrees of involvement. The viewer's activity is mostly visual. Unlike the voyeur who enjoys visuals so much that he reaches beyond viewing, the viewer is generic. Before being sexually biased, the voyeur is a voluntary viewer who seeks the view while finding pleasure in physical passivity, deliberately rejecting physical action. The viewer is a member of the passive or intra-active pre-computer audience. She is passive in the sense that she does not share her reactions with the object viewed.

This term *user* became widely utilized in the early computer days to distinguish a person using a program on a computer from the person writing programs: the programmer. It is an example of a new use for a term to distinguish the general from the existing particular. Compulsive users are so attracted to using that they skip the viewing and understanding stages before using. The web is filled with those. Some answers in "Lullaby for a Dead Fly" were obviously submitted by compulsive users.

The player wants to get more involved, to get her hands dirty, to ask questions in order to reach her goal. She is an active participant and seeks understanding. She is willing to take risks, make etiquette mistakes, gamble

with ethics, in order to take her experiment further. As a tinkerer the player embraces her state of constant evolution, shifting and repositioning. She learns from her mistakes and moves along always looking for a new bias to investigate her subject. She is bold. By naming the GhostWatcher players “Watchers” June Houston reinforces the sense of community and brings the players closer to the project as they identify directly with the title.

Types of constructed identities for artists

“The coming into being of the notion of ‘author’ constitute the privileged moment of *individualization* in the history of ideas, knowledge, literature, philosophy and the sciences. (...) the author is not simply an element in a discourse (capable of being either subject or object, of being replaced by a pronoun, and the like); it performs a certain role with regard to narrative discourse, assuring a classificatory function. Such a name permits one to group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others.”⁸⁹

⁸⁹ Foucault, Michel. “What is an author?” Art in Theory. Eds. Charles Harrison and Paul Wood. Oxford: Blackwell publishers, 1992. 924.

Over the last couple of centuries artists have experienced with many different ways of presenting themselves or not, reaching beyond the de facto patronymics. The impenetrable artist and tortured genius such as Vincent Van Gogh and Jackson Pollock have based their practice on austerity and seriousness. This type of monolithic artist is not likely to have made a conscious choice about his identity. He uses his official identity. Self-consciousness and a playful attitude has led others such as Voltaire and Molière to use pseudonyms and deliberately choose a different identity. In the past thirty years or so group identity has become more and more frequent. Artists involved in collaborations have chosen to regroup under a single name. The archetypical examples include pop or rock bands such as The Beatles or Led Zeppelin. Many of those group identities have taken a life of their own, beyond the life of individual members. The Australian heavy metal band AC/DC has lost several singers and accepted newcomers in their group without changing their name. Some bands such as the Rolling Stones have worked under the same name for almost half a century.

Pulp science fiction writers use three main types of pseudonyms: the collaborative pseudonym, the floating pseudonym, and the house name. A collaborative pseudonym is used by two or more authors working together on a story i.e. Robert Randall represents Robert Silverburg and Randall Garrett.

These pseudonyms can be misleading as S. D. Gottesman may represent Kornbluth and Frederik Pohl collectively, or Kornbluth by himself. A floating pseudonym is one that is available to anyone who wants to use it i.e. Ivar Jorgensen. A house name is a floating pseudonym used by a publishing company to cover the fact that there are two contributions by the same author. Another reason might be that the contributor wants to hide the fact she has stories published in a certain magazine.⁹⁰ AGC, one of the ACE group of insurance companies, acknowledges the value of identity play at large by giving examples of identity switches in the actors' community and shows, on an advertising page, pictures of Marilyn Monroe, Tony Curtis and Judy Garland respectively described as Norma Jean Baker, Bernie Schwartz and Frances Gumm. The caption reads: "Sometimes a name change can make a big difference."⁹¹ Across the spectrum of popular entities, from single individuals to companies comprised of thousand of people, a carefully chosen name can make a big difference.

Inspired by advertising and packaging, hip-hop artists used commercial branding and identity marketing techniques for self-promotion.

⁹⁰ Swenson, Rich. "Pseudonyms.html." Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. 15 Jan. 2003 <<http://ebbs.english.vt.edu/20th/etudes/swenson/pseudonyms.html>>.

⁹¹ AGC. Advertisement. The Economist. 1 Feb. 2003: 13.

They created snappy pseudonyms that took into consideration both their sonic and visual impact. The way a name looked was important because it had to have *style* when spray-painted as elaborate graffiti on city walls or subway cars or tagged on stickers such as the famous “Hello my name is.” Originally intended to be used by conference attendees, those stickers, allegedly stolen, were one the cheapest way for young hip-hop artists to get exposure.

To date, the art milieu in which members have most regularly used pseudonym is rap music. Early rap pseudonyms were glittery and melodic, almost one-liner poems, yet they already had a dangerous connotation (Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five, Sugarhill Gang). With the success of Public Enemy rap pseudonyms evolved into political statements. Some pseudonyms were an homage to political figure of the black community such as Malcolm X, others were semantic puns based on English language inversions.

Blacks clearly recognized that to master the language of whites was in effect to consent to be mastered by it through the white definitions of caste built into the semantic/social system. Inversion therefore becomes the defensive mechanism which enables blacks to fight linguistic, and thereby psychological, entrapment.... Words and

phrases were given reverse meanings and functions changed. Whites, denied access to the semantic extensions of duality, connotations, and denotations that developed within black usage, could only interpret the same material according to its original singular meaning..., enabling the blacks to deceive and manipulate whites without penalty. This protective process, understood and shared by blacks, became a contest of matching wits ... [and a] form of linguistic guerilla warfare [which] protected the subordinated, permitted the masking and disguising of true feelings, allowed the subtle assertion of self, and promoted group solidarity.⁹²

Consequently rappers today are often proud to be considered outlaws and choose their name according to this preference. Artists names include Fat Joe Da Gangsta, 901 Thugs, Above the Law, Al Kapone and Assassin. The musical category to which those artists belong is called Gangsta Rap.

Beyond mixing tracks, DJ culture mixes genders and races. DJ culture is affiliated with hip-hop as it has inherited hip-hop's music technology of

⁹² Holt, G. "Inversion in Black communication." Rappin' and stylin' out: Communication in urban America. Ed. T. Kochman. Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1972. 154.

choice—turntables and mixers—and hip-hop artists' self-consciousness about their identity. Artists such as DJ Shadow, DJ Krush and DJ Spooky are prime examples of this culture.

The fluidity that computer technology allows to the creative process can also be applied to the management of the artist's identity. In the electronic music realm the term *project* is often used to describe the author/performer identity. It is partly the equivalent for the term *bands* for rock and pop. Project has a more dynamic connotation than band. Individual artists unite as a project for a specific creation then often split and regroup as a new formation under a different project name. Projects change members more often than bands do. This also makes it more difficult to keep track of who's who in the electronic music scene than it is in the pop/rock world. This tacit naming convention alludes to the relatively short life span of a group of individuals. It also blurs the difference between the author/performer and the work. Because it is a use of the word that came to be in the computer era, project also has a multimedia connotation. Just as rock bands were composed of singer, guitar players, bass players, drummers, etc. the project might include visual artists (designers, VJs, etc.) , musicians (DJs) and programmers. Individual members of a project often perform several functions. For example, Propellerheads in Sweden, are musicians/programmers who create software that they use to

make their own music. Reason⁹³, one of the applications they created, became an industry standard. Such overlap of tasks and interests is partly due to the technology used for creation.

Techno music is a branch of dance music that characterizes the popular acknowledgement of the influence of technology on music. Just as abruptness and urgency emanates from the contraction of the word technology into “techno,” this music, based on the dance paradigm of two beats every second or 120 beats-per-minute (BPM), revendicates the cold, direct and mechanical as well as uplifting aspects of technology. “Underground Resistance is probably one of the most startling example of perfect combination of quality music with a strict ethics of independence and community development. Founded by a trio of techno pioneers, Mad Mike, Jeff Mills and Robert Hood, the imprint soon reached cult status with a string of sharp and abrasive four-tracks techno releases.”⁹⁴ Underground Resistance is a pleonasm -- the Underground is the way the allies called the French Resistance during WWII -- that hints at the repetitive aspect of the music and

⁹³ “Reason.” Propellerheads.se, 29 Dec. 2002

<<http://www.propellerheads.se/products/reason/main.html>>.

⁹⁴ “Underground Resistance” Tigersushi, 5 Jan 2003

<<http://www.tigersushi.com/site/frameset.jsp?page=Lbl.jsp&LblId=31>>.

emphasizes the dedication of the collaborative to their cause. In the late 1980s, while Detroit-based producers such as Derrick May, Juan Atkins and Kevin Saunderson became the darlings of the emerging European dance music press, Underground Resistance (UR) grafted out their own particular stylized take on techno: rough, menacing and at times unlistenable, the UR soundscape was self-titled 'hard music from a hard city'. In one early subversive press release the collective declared that 'Underground Resistance is a label for a movement. A movement that wants change by Sonic Revolution . . . Techno is a music based in experimentation, it is sacred to no single race, it has no definitive sound'. Underground Resistance was created as a boundless label, as an opposition or a complement of what Derrick May, Juan Atkins and Kevin Saunderson were doing. UR used them as a guide - not doing what they did, but doing what they didn't.

One of UR's tactic to "remain underground" as they repetitively implore in their 1992 track "Code Of Honor" is to adopt an undefined and mysterious profile, another one is to spread confusion and disinform the audience about the project by using UR for the name for both the music label and the artistic project. The confusion reaches another level when UR (the artistic project) itself uses pseudonyms such as X-101, X-102 and X-103. One big inspiration of UR is the German electronic music band Kraftwerk which

has a strong sense of identity i.e. red and black outfits, cold, chiseled and expressionless faces, Kraftwerk members were obvious role-models for UR's image and attitude. By their decision to cultivate the myth of the dark hero, UR became the Other, the unknown, indefinable, willing to keep their options open, in their music by making the author disappear, be a non-author. Such a set-up makes it difficult to track down who UR is. According to discogs.com UR members have included: Mad Mike, Jeff Mills, Robert Hood, DJ Roland, Aztec Mystic, Suburban Knight, Perception, Agent Chaos, Chameleon (II), Andre Holland⁹⁵. Following the links from that page gives an idea of the ramifications of a project such as UR and of the degrees of separation between two individual artists through the projects that they have in common (read the "Records with others as" section at the top of any artist page) as well as the level of liquidity of some artists ("Also records as" section). The way this web interface is organized shows how important the identity of the artist has become.

The front cover of UR's "Revolution for Change," the first CD to be distributed on the UR label, is a fuzzy and distorted video grab, complete with scan lines and white noise, of two characters, half-cut, with shadows on their

⁹⁵ "Underground Resistance" Discogs.com. 6 Jan 2003

faces. The three-fold sleeve opens on three pictures of an unidentifiable character respectively entitled: The Omen, Tresor, The Vision terrorizing the Space Club. The images are very blurry and the silhouette character, or characters as it is impossible to define if it is the same person or not, who might be wearing a balaclava engages in activities with devices that seem to be turntables and video cameras but that could also be rifles or rocket launchers. This selective presentation inspired by terrorist aesthetics leaves room for the audience's mind to fill-in the blanks and, although menacing, ends-up giving the benefit of the doubt to this character. He is a musician after all. Is s/he not?

Finding a personal balance between pseudonymity and anonymity is a game that is played by most musicians involved in electronic music. Aphex Twin and Plasticman are examples of this trend. Total anonymity is another option used by artists. The French electronic music project Daft Punk are notorious for never showing their faces. Identity play sometimes involves a fluctuation between identity states, from pseudonymity to anonymity and the many intermediate states.

<http://www.discogs.com/artist/Underground_Resistance>.

Using a specific pseudonym can add a semantic layer to an art project. It can become a collaborative game played over a long period of time. Pierre Ménard is a pseudonym that has been used by artists over the course of several centuries. Jorge Luis Borges used it in *Pierre Ménard, Author of the Quixote*. “By equating fiction and translation, Cervantes’s *Don Quijote*, as was been suggested by Moner, goes beyond parody or satire(...). Cervantes saw the translator as an ex-tremely active mediator. There is constant re-writing of *Don Quijote* already present within the *Quijote* itself. It is this re-writing that interested Borges: a “final” *Quijote* which is ultimately, like Menard’s enterprise, a palimpsest (...). Let us say then that the translator of *Don Quijote* is the best possible reader of *Don Quijote*, and that, because of that, he also becomes an author of *Don Quijote*, and that, consequently, Menard is an excellent reader, translator, and author of *Don Quijote*. The advantage here is that once discourse has been created, invoked, or inspired, ownership is lost. Thus there is potential for a second or third Menard, ad infinitum (...)⁹⁶ Paul Devautour saw that potential and chose to use Pierre Ménard as a pseudonyme and author of “Buchal et Clavel, J. Duplo, Alexandre Lenoir”, a book that presents and discusses the works of the four

⁹⁶ Mosquera, Daniel O. “Don Quijote and the quixotics of translation.” [Perdue.edu](http://tell.fl.purdue.edu/RLA-archive/1994/Spanish-html/Mosquera.Daniel.htm). Washington University. 10 Feb. 2003 <<http://tell.fl.purdue.edu/RLA-archive/1994/Spanish-html/Mosquera.Daniel.htm>>.

artists, themselves pseudonyms used by Devautour (*vautour* is the French word for vulture) for his visual art activities (Cervantes was also known as the Cripple of Lepanto after he fought for a Spanish regiment in Naples and was wounded during the battle of Lepanto).

“Borges’s representation of materials used in writing are writing itself, as it is in *Don Quijote*, so he takes the game of intertextuality into the unrecognizable. He develops a textual activity that does not constitute a new meaning. He, like Cervantes, juggles the language in circles, with, we could say, meta-physical dexterity. And translation, suspended here like a pin that travels up and down from the juggler’s hands, be-comes a metaphor for transgression, for growth, and for the ever-changing vision of change. The translator be-comes the “funambule” of Ferlinghetti’s poem, the juggler of language and reality, Bakhtin’s “posited author” to the “n” power. And the “historia” of Don Quijote goes around in its process of translation, like a letter of invitation for the story to be retold, re-translated:”⁹⁷ These “meta-physical” or virtual relationships between authors, texts, pseudonyms and inspirations, on the verge of being incestuous, illustrate the multi-layered game of players’ identities.

⁹⁷ Mosquera.

Two web-art players

Artists June Houston and Mouchette have based their respective web works on the premise that constructed identities are favorable grounds for discussion, content generation and development of artistic experiments. To that end they both started their project by creating and presenting new online selves. These identities have evolved over time. June Houston's presents herself as a young woman. Her identity initiated the GhostWatcher which is the bulk of her work. Mouchette is a little girl of "almost 13 years old."⁹⁸ The establishment and definition of Mouchette's identity is the subject of Mouchette's site.

June Houston

Information on June Houston's personal page is presented in black and white layout inspired by the design of a queen of club playing card. She subtitles herself: "The girl with no life." The top part of the Q of queen in the upper left corner of the card has been modified to create the initials JH.

⁹⁸ Mouchette, 26 Dec. 2002 <<http://www.mouchette.org>>.

The page is almost empty. It includes essentials about Houston, a link to her project (the GhostWatcher), a link to publications on the GhostWatcher, a list of links and her email address. The sentence "drop me a line (or a novel)" makes me realize that she is willing to listen to what the audience has to say, for a long time if necessary.

Some punctuation and several letters of the first sentence of the first paragraph "Yes, it's me June." are links to different pages that reveal selected parts of Houston through text and images. Through those eight pages Houston presents herself as a puzzle. Every page is a piece of the puzzle which remains incomplete, leaving room for the audience to fill-in the blanks.

This presentation is an invitation to participate. Houston invites the audience to join her in her quest for herself, making the viewer a necessary condition of Houston's life. She seems to be in desperate need of the audience, not only to help her deal with her paranormal issues but, maybe even more importantly, to exist (the girl with no life). Each of those pages is a building block, a clue about Houston's personality which may only come together in the viewer's mind. The viewer constructs Houston's identity, not Houston herself. She presents herself as an enigma that longs to be decyphered.

The pictures of Houston that can be found on those pages are always missing something, she never presents herself completely, never reveals herself entirely at once. Some photographs are particularly dark. They portrait a warm and comfortable atmosphere with classical details such as an afghan diamond-pattern rug and bookshelves on the wall. A girl (Houston?) with red hair is sitting on the rug. The vertical spotlight lits her legs and parts of her arms. On both pictures her hands are not visible, they may be attached in her back. Her face is hidden by the shadow of her hair. She doesn't look very comfortable, almost forced to be there, under this spotlight in her black high hills.

Another picture is a dithered black and white close-up of her face and her hair washed-out in white. In some areas the white text disappears into the white background. It reads:

"and one day you start falling

first it is dizzying

as you realize

you cannot stop

it becomes your life

people say

they want to help you

but you know that

no one is here

to help you

you slowly disappear

into the white

your last option

is to read the source"

In the html source of this page the following lines are commented:

"once you're in the source

codes make you dizzy again

i tell you

there is no way

out of here"

Another page displays a black and white photograph blurred to the point that details are not readable. The red text reads:

"We were having a good time
at the Power House.

Suddenly the entire space
got smaller.

Bouncers engaged in
a discreet waltz around us.

Suddenly,
those creepy sounds."

(http://www.flyvision.org/june_houston/front.html)

The texts on those pages seem to be autobiographical poems, a cry for help or hints to a deeper problem than the one addressed by the

GhostWatcher, June Houston's only work on the web. Here are two more poems.

"Of course it does not happen all the time.
Some ideas, some attitudes help awaken it.

You catch yourself saying strange things
to strange people, usually your friends.

Sleeping doesn't help."

(http://www.flyvision.org/june_houston/eyes.html)

"Evaporate

Radiate

Levitate

Rotate

Insulate

Too late

Permute

Exorcise

Fantasize"

(http://www.flyvision.org/june_houston/encounter.html)

Mouchette

Clicking on "me too" or "not me" on the first page of Mouchette's network (mouchette.net) links to randomly selected sites of collaborators who have accepted to play the role of the person behind Mouchette. But what identity are these players acknowledging?

Mouchette is almost 13, forever. By acknowledging to be Mouchette, the impersonators acknowledge to be both Mouchette and the individual(s) behind Mouchette. They take credit and responsibility for Mouchette. By choosing to be a little girl fixed in time, Mouchette's creator made the conscious choice of playing a character, playing a role that would eventually be understood as such by the audience. Only a superficial look at the site could lead one to believe that mouchette.org was created by a thirteen year old. A closer reading reveals the multi-layered quality of the site (sexual

details such as close-ups of flowers a la Georgia O'Keefe would make Mouchette the most mature little girl on earth) and the ambiguous identity of Mouchette. Pictures of different characters are used to describe Mouchette (<http://www.mouchette.org/nom/> and <http://www.mouchette.org/nom/eye.html>), the banner on the first page of [mouchette.net](http://www.mouchette.net) reads: There is only one real Mouchette but she's not who you think she is.

This new direction towards a shared identity is a win-win situation. The Mouchette project gains representation in different places, on different continents and the impersonators gain punctual access to Mouchette's fame. It is up to the impersonators to transform this opportunity by creating a new Mouchette sub-project or by starting a project under another name in association with Mouchette for instance and to take advantage of the name of Mouchette without prejudice.

It is in the interest of all involved parties to play the game. There is no wrong way to play this game. The most damaging for the project would be to have an impersonator break the rules and reveal what is happening but this coming out would reflect badly on her more than on Mouchette.

On the Internet nobody knows you're a dog⁹⁹ (why construct an identity)

A young woman reclines in a comfortable contemporary living space. The colors and textures of her outfit match the furniture's. She glances sideways and dreams, ponders, imagines, plays in her mind the many possibilities that lay before her. The small white horizontal caption across her chest reads: "*Who will you be in the next 24 hours?*" She looks healthy (she is particularly potent with wide shoulders and an immaculate skin) and wealthy (she wears a \$15,000.00 watch). Now that her basic needs have been taken care of she is ready to become who she really wants to be, but that new identity doesn't have to be a life-time commitment. This advertisement by Patek Philippe has been displayed in various magazines, on and off, for more than three years. Its playfulness captures one of the pillars of our contemporary zeitgeist: identity play. We now have the option to ask ourselves not just "where do you want to go today", a question that Microsoft has repetitively asked us in its advertising campaigns in the late nineties, but: who do we want to be?

Anthropology, ethnology, ethics¹⁰⁰, and law among other fields, address the question of identity on the Internet. The most well-known example

⁹⁹ Steiner, Peter. Cartoon. The New Yorker. 5 July 1993 issue (Vol.69 (LXIX) no. 20): 61.

might be the growing problem of identity theft. “Identity theft headed the top 10 consumer fraud complaints of 2001, according to the Federal Trade Commission.”¹⁰¹ In psychology, research on Internet identity has been published since the mid-eighties. Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) affects the way we present ourselves. Many of the visual cues available in a face-to-face conversation, from an obvious hand gesture to a subtle change of expression in the eyes, are not available in virtual dialogs. These online exchanges, sometimes referred to as hyperpersonal, involve deindividuation, disinhibition and selective presentation.

Disinhibition and deindividuation

Tom Postmes an Associate Editor of the *British Journal of Social Psychology* explains on his web site¹⁰² that “According to deindividuation theory, the psychological state of deindividuation is aroused when individuals

¹⁰⁰ Danielson, Peter A. “Making Pseudonymity acceptable.” [Ubc.ca](http://www.ethics.ubc.ca/pad/making.html). University of British Columbia. 29 Dec. 2002 <<http://www.ethics.ubc.ca/pad/making.html>>.

¹⁰¹ “Identity Theft Heads the FTC's Top 10 Consumer Fraud Complaints of 2001.” [Ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov) 23 Jan. 2002 Federal Trade Commission. 10 Jan. 2004 <<http://www.ftc.gov/opa/2002/01/idtheft.htm>>.

¹⁰² Postmes, Tom. “About Deindividuation Theory, a social psychological account of the individual in the crowd and an attempt to explain anti-normative collective action.” [Ex.ac.uk](http://www.ex.ac.uk)

join crowds or large groups. The state is characterized by diminished awareness of self and individuality. This in turn reduces an individual's self-restraint and normative regulation of behavior. (...) It provides an explanation of collective behavior of violent crowds, mindless hooligans, and the lynch mob. In addition, deindividuation has been associated with other social phenomena such as genocide, stereotyping, and disinhibition in other settings such as computer-mediated communication.” Deindividuation is based on Le Bon’s crowd theory¹⁰³ which argues that the individual follows the group personality instead of her own when placed in a crowd. It differs from Le Bon’s theory in the sense that the loss of individuality is not replaced by a collective mind that guides the individual’s action but by a total loss of control. Deindividuation fosters anti-normative and disinhibited behavior.

Disinhibition is a temporal loss of inhibition often caused by an outside stimulus. It was identified on the Internet in the mid 1980s by psychologists studying Multi-Users Dungeons (MUDs) and, more generally, CMC. “Under normal, face-to-face social conditions, conversation is

2001. University of Exeter. 6 Dec. 2002.

<<http://www.ex.ac.uk/~tpostmes/deindividuation.html>>.

¹⁰³ Le Bon, G. The crowd: A study of the popular mind. London: Transaction Publishers. 1995. (Original work published in 1895).

governed by a myriad of quite stringent social norms and rules - people are, for the most part, kind and considerate in their interactions with others, heated conflict is unusual and hateful verbal abuse is very rare indeed. However, CMC users appear to follow different rules or, as some have argued, no rules at all. An issue that would have caused only minor disagreement face-to-face may often result in things getting out of hand in CMC as communication degenerated into hostile word-slinging. Indeed the behavior is so common that it has been given a name - 'flaming'. “¹⁰⁴ Definitions vary, but it generally means "attacking someone personally for their posting" by using "insults, swearing, and hostile, intense language," including using all capital letters to denote shouting.¹⁰⁵

Deindividuation and disinhibition on the Internet are considered by Tom Postmes and Quentin Atkinson as a potential problem. In the field of psychology, discussions of those subjects take mostly into account MUDs, Internet Relay Chats and discussion groups, but largely understudy personal home pages. Furthermore, those discussions often warn about the negative

¹⁰⁴ Atkinson, Quentin. “Disinhibition on the Internet: Implications and Intervention.” [Netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz), 4 Dec. 2002
<http://www.netsafe.org.nz/resources/resources_disinhibition.asp>.

effects of deindividuation and disinhibition and rarely acknowledge their latent opportunities. One of the reasons for this incomplete reading of the effects of deindividuation and disinhibition could be that psychologists usually fail to differentiate synchronous from asynchronous communication. Indeed they compare most of their examples to physical face-to-face (FTF) interaction. “it has been found that on the Internet people say what they would not normally say, do what they would not normally do, and perhaps even go, at the click of a button, where they would not normally go.”¹⁰⁶ Such open-mindedness, free-spirited and adventurous attitude is usually attributed to big players such as great explorers, avant-garde artists, Nobel price winners and Star Trek heroes. If, and there is no shortage of evidence that, such an attitude is now adopted by most online users the social fiber of the Internet arguably transforms common isolated users into creative networked players. Both deindividuation and disinhibition on the Internet are early stages of the construction of a new identity.

¹⁰⁵ Walther. J. B. “Interpersonal effects in computer-mediated interaction.” Communication Research 19 (1992): 52-90.

¹⁰⁶ Walther.

Selective self-presentation and the hyperpersonal

Constructing a new identity is an opportunity to become somebody else, to expand, relocate, reset or re-situate one's cultural horizon. It is the expression of a desire to experience life from a different perspective. Sherry Turkle uses the French word *dépaysement* to describe this state. "One leaves one's own culture to face something unfamiliar, and upon returning home it has become strange - and can be seen with fresh eyes."¹⁰⁷ Identity construction is a mind game with potential psychological side-effects. One attempts to create a constructed identity. That constructed identity defines itself as it evolves. Virtual environments are well-suited for selective self-presentation, that is to make visible only selected parts of your self. If you don't want other players to know your physical attributes, you can describe yourself textually through a presentation of some personal beliefs and ideas for instance. This results in reduced social presence, and reduced social cues.

In August 1998 French philosopher Paul Virilio used the GhostWatcher as the central example of his essay "Le règne de la délation

¹⁰⁷ Turkle, Sherry. Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet. New York: Touchstone, 1995: 218.

optique”¹⁰⁸ that addresses issues of privacy and telesurveillance. Virilio explains that the cameras located inside Houston’s house are invasive and put her privacy at risk but he also acknowledges that the GhostWatcher is a way for Houston to share her anguishes with the rest of the world. “Avec ce voyeurisme, la “télesurveillance” prend in nouveau sens: il ne s’agit plus de se prémunir contre une intrusion criminelle, mais de faire partager ses angoisses, ses hantises à tout un réseau, grace à la surexposition d’un lieu de vie.”¹⁰⁹ (With the voyeurism “telesurveillance” gain a new meaning: it is no longer about preventing a criminal intrusion, rather the sharing of one’s anguish, one’s hauntings with a whole network, through to the overexposure of a living space.) The images on Houston’s site might have the invasive connotation of an aesthetic of surveillance but the perspectival shift transforms them into soothing material. It is Houston’s will to share those private places with the rest of the connected world and she has chosen the positions and the aims of the cameras very carefully. As it is stated on the front page of the GhostWatcher the cameras are monitoring places that she cannot monitor with her own eyes. “The GhostWatcher is a virtual neighborhood Watch to help me (June) sleep better at night. 31 webcams constantly monitor selected hidden

¹⁰⁸ Virilio, Paul. “Le règne de la délation optique.” *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 1998. 27 Dec. 2002. <<http://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/1998/08/VIRILIO/10812>>. (my translation)

¹⁰⁹ Virilio.

spaces in my New York City apartment.” This eliminates her direct environment, including images of herself, and explains why some of the cameras have obscure images on which it is difficult to identify a subject.

Selective presentation is used by players who construct identities on the Internet in the same way that it is used by June Houston to present her apartment. Internet players turn the limitations of the medium to their own advantage and create optimized self-presentations.¹¹⁰

Identity play and deception

Anonymity and its associated lessening of social risk, may allow players to be more honest and take greater risks in their self-disclosures than they would offline.¹¹¹ Often referred to as identity deception, which has the bad connotation of false representation, artifice, cheat and even fraud, playing a character of the opposite sex online could also be considered, and celebrated, as a mini come-out. Although not as involved as the abrupt public

¹¹⁰ “Course description.” [Utexas.edu](http://www.utexas.edu/courses/specclass/courses/367/slides/unexp367/sld002.htm) University of Texas. 27 Dec. 2002.
<<http://www.utexas.edu/courses/specclass/courses/367/slides/unexp367/sld002.htm>>.

¹¹¹ McKenna, K.Y.A. and Bargh, J.A. “Plan 9 from cyberspace: the implications of the Internet for personality and social psychology” *Personality and Social Psychology Review*. 4 (1) (2000): 57-75.

self-acknowledgement of someone's sexual preferences, identity play is far-reaching and can have important consequences on creativity. "The "differentness" and secrecy of play are most vividly expressed in "dressing up." Here the "extra-ordinary" nature of play reaches perfection. The disguised or masked individual "plays" another part, another being. He *is* another being. The terrors of childhood, open-hearted gaiety, mystic fantasy and sacred awe are all inextricably entangled in this strange business of masks and disguises."¹¹²The experimental platform that is the Internet is a favorable ground for a non-imposing aspect of the personality to express itself, freed, thanks to selective presentation, from the suffocation of other stronger personality aspects. Sex is the most striking but certainly not the only characteristic that can be re-defined through such a come-out. Art and entertainment, painting and sculpture, practice and theory, high arts and low arts, fine arts and craftsmanship are other examples of dichotomies that are often hard to come to term with for the artist with a monolithic self.

The exploratory and temporal aspects of play are re-enforced by the lack of physicality. Virtual activities, for instance, considerably reduce the possibility of physical injury, input/output side-effects such as carpal

¹¹² Huizinga, Johan. Homo Ludens. London: Routledge and Kegan Ltd., 1955: 13.

syndrome and visual defects aside. When online, we are liberated from the binding meat-reality and we let our imagination express itself in a newly-discovered context. This has gone relatively un-noticed for a change of such magnitude. Online identity play is an opportunity to view history and heritage as empowering rather than constrictive. It is an opportunity to change your name or social background, or a yet less common tabula rasa. A good time for a new evaluation and a re-definition of the self is always now. Besides the positive psychological aspects of the acknowledgment of the repressed part(s) of an identity lays a creative potential waiting to be unleashed, or at least, given a chance.

Handle with care: you are your email address.

The Internet allows great flexibility with identity. The web allows for greater control over one's basic identity components than physical reality. This results in fluid and flexible identities that expand, contract and mutate at the player's will. These are new identity options adapted to the representation of contemporary beings.

Online players are primarily defined by their email address. To be able to choose your email address freely should not be underestimated. It is the

virtual equivalent of choosing the name on your passport and the characteristics that go along with it freely. The first part of the email address, before the @ sign, is often called the handle. It is the newcomer's introduction to this new identity paradigm. It is both a relieving and an unsolvable question that everyone is abruptly asked when creating a new email account on Hotmail or Yahoo! for instance. Hotmail and Yahoo! are two of the most popular webmail providers. The way users end-up being called is quite revealing of their acknowledgement of the importance of this choice.

pete3495@yahoo.com for instance doesn't seem to really care about his handle. He is likely to have asked to be pete@yahoo.com and as this email address was already taken he has chosen one of the several options suggested by Yahoo! If he had wanted to stay anonymous he would have chosen something like hiusdf6@yahoo.com. The toll for this anonymity would have been for his friends to learn and remember that hiusdf6 is the handle of their friend Pete.

cathywilson03@hotmail.com chose to keep her official first name and last name but was not the first Cathy Wilson to register with Hotmail. She didn't mind the 03 after her name or as pete3495@yahoo.com she didn't want to take the time to go back one screen and imagine another way to identify herself textually.

davilll@hotmail.com, on the other hand, is very self-conscious. The owner of such email address probably worked for a while with the system, going back and forth between suggestions of available handles and acceptable ones, to find a handle that would satisfy him. Handle choices have shifted since the beginning of the Internet boom. I cannot recall anyone in my email correspondence in 1993 using firstname.lastname@provider.com or firstnamelastname@provider.com as it is often seen today. One reason for this tendency might be that the gimmicky aspect of email of the early days has faded in favor of a more efficient way to communicate. Everyone around John Doe knows him as John Doe so it makes sense for him to be john.doe@hotmail.com or john@doe.com. Another reason could be that players are now more aware of their option to have several identities. It makes sense that one of those different identities would be the official one. The people at Person, a webmail provider, are aware of those identity issues and address them on their web site¹¹³ to attract new clients.

The second part of the email address, after the @ sign, is composed of the domain name, before the dot, and the extension or generic Top Level

¹¹³ [Person.com](http://mail.person.com). 29 Dec. 2002. <<http://mail.person.com>>.

Domain (gTLD). It is a good place to state your affiliation (company, school, project, etc.) and also an opportunity to make a statement such as deciding to be geopolitically defined or not (i.e. .org.nz versus .org). The email address gives social cues about the player.

Internet identity is more liquid than the official identity described on your passport. Internet identity, unlike official identity, allows you to set yourself free from family history or personal identity--defining events such as a marriage or a geographic reassignment. Internet identity can be multiple. You can decide to call yourself anything you like and you may have as many email accounts--different identities--as you like, but be aware that people you meet online and people who already know you under another name are going to identify you by your email address. An email address is the only identity tag of a first-time Internet user. A personal page or a blog further defines an identity but is usually created after the email address.

Web players are fully aware of these possible identity shifts. A big part of the reason why they are “players” comes from the fact that they play with their identities—in ways that constantly defy physical identity rules, that are sometimes on the verge of insanity and that redefine the way we perceive identity.

More on you

Beyond an email address, there are numerous possibilities to construct an online identity. Webmail services usually provide free email as a way to get users under their umbrella. The personal profile is a way to present yourself online. The personal profile option is usually offered by a community such as Yahoo! or AOL to its members. It is a great marketing tool for communities because it gives them direct access to personal data and transfer the burden of updating the information to the user. When Microsoft recognized this fact in January 1998 they purchased the successful Hotmail service for \$400M to get access to information on Internet users and jumpstart Microsoft Network (MSN).

The home page is the next level of personal presentation on the web. The advantage of the home page over the personal profile is that it is not a form that needs to be filled but a blank canvas. This is, as most artists know, an opportunity that comes at a price. Deciding what to present on a home page is often the first encounter with the digital vertigo described earlier for people new to the web, to the Internet and to digital technology in general. Home

pages often lacked structure and organization until the invention of the weblog.

Web logs or blogs are a web version of the personal diary. They are frequent, chronological publication of personal thoughts and web links.

A blog is often a mixture of what is happening in a person's life and what is happening on the Web, a kind of hybrid diary/guide site, although there are as many unique types of blogs as there are people.

People maintained blogs long before the term was coined, but the trend gained momentum with the introduction of automated published systems, most notably Blogger at blogger.com. Thousands of people use services such as Blogger to simplify and accelerate the publishing process.¹¹⁴

Since their emergence in the late 1990s blogs have been increasingly added to home pages. Many users are now building their homepage around their blog. What better way to define yourself than to describe what you like

or dislike. In a sense blogs are a step back to the personal profile model for they provide a structure for the information (Blogger's tag line is: "Push-button publishing for the people"). The difference is that the structure of blogs is versatile and can be extensively customized. Being database driven, blogs can be mined and easily interconnected. The option to link to other blogs is offered by default in the blog personal administration tools of communities such as Blogger.¹¹⁵ Mobile weblogs or moblogs or mobs extend the input range outside, away from the desk. Moblogs enable wireless devices such as personal digital assistants, cellular phones and Blackberry messengers to be used as input devices for web content. These new input opportunities allow users to post images taken with phone cameras directly onto personal web site using technologies developed by companies such as Textamerica¹¹⁶.

The subtext of the GhostWatcher is the construction of June Houston's identity. In this project she plays a game of hide-and-seek with the Watchers. Her site is organized in such a way that she has the option to respond to every report individually. Her rare responses generally allude to a part of her home.

¹¹⁴ "Blog definition" marketingterms.com. 23 Mar. 2004

<<http://marketingterms.com/dictionary/blog/>>.

¹¹⁵ [Blogger](http://www.blogger.com). 10 Jan. 2004 <<http://www.blogger.com>>.

¹¹⁶ [Textamerica](http://www.textamerica.com). 23 Nov. 2003 <<http://www.textamerica.com>>.

June Houston's home, constantly monitored by 37 cameras, is a metaphor for herself including both mind and body. Seen from this perspective the planks look like a rib cage, the trunks allude to pieces of clothing, the back exit, rather literal is the separation between the inside and the outside, interestingly the place where people have witnessed the most activity over the years¹¹⁷, and the dark corridor becomes the vast (17 cameras) unknown part of her self that she longs to explore but which, for the most part, remains elusive. The GhostWatcher set-up allows her to be subtly scrutinized, described, analyzed and sometimes judged by Watchers without being blatantly visual. Yet she remains literal about it when she asks Watchers to look inside her trunks or to make sure there is no suspicious activity in the two holes or in the back exit. The constant dialog between her and the others is edited and becomes the fabric of her (online) identity. Watchers staring at her back exit for almost a decade keep providing her with comments about this metaphorical fragment of her self. As early as 1995 Houston recognized the possible evolution of the use of webcams and, before Jennifer Ringley's jennicam.org and Josh Harris's welineinpublic.com, pre-empted and commented on the disturbing concept of shared-privacy that would eventually become the widespread and growing phenomena that we know today. The carefully curated "selected reports"

¹¹⁷ "GhostWatcher statistics." Ed. June Houston. 29 Jan. 2003

brilliantly sketch and flesh out the persona of June Houston that emerges in filigrain throughout the site. The nature and the depth of the site allow for a multidirectional and hyperdimensional experience of the identity of June Houston. “The girl with no life,” the subtitle of Houston’s personal page, along with pictures and short texts hint at the deeper content of the main site. This personal page (described earlier) is both a macro vision and the “help file” of the metaphorical GhostWatcher.

Play with your self: the identity game.

The web is a favorable environment to develop a liquid self. It offers a wide range of options to define and redefine one’s identity. Getting a new email address is a few keystrokes away, designing a new personal page or starting a new weblog can be done in a couple of hours, less if you are already familiar with those processes. This makes online identities more liquid than your official one and is an opportunity to adopt a playful attitude towards identity. A number of options of identity construction online allow for unlimited trials, providing every member of the connected world with identity experimentation solutions not fathomable before the 1990s. It is chance to escape history, a license to free yourself from your inherited family name or

<<http://www.ghostwatcher.com/cgi-bin/gw/stats.pl>>.

from a first name that you do not feel comfortable with. It is an opportunity to explore in a non-contractual setting what it would be like to be someone else. Having several identities allows for the protection of one identity by making another one more visible. Appearing and disappearing can easily be achieved by pursuing a project under one name or another. The liquid self is acknowledged by many web-based companies. Amazon.com for instance allows subscribers to change their name, email address and password from the same page. The nonchalant “New name? Please enter it below”¹¹⁸ is a sign that this company understands and accepts the identity opportunities that the web offers.

Search engines play an increasingly important role in the way we get access to information. Identity being no exception, our awareness of identity (re)presentation online is all the more urgent. Looking-up a name on Google can reveal unexpected aspects of someone’s identity. Such a search will first display web pages in which the name is used often, followed by pages--and other documents available on the web such as PDF files or Microsoft word documents--that only mention that name once, including web pages created by other people. Therefore, it is difficult to control your own identity on the web.

¹¹⁸ “Amazon.com Account Maintenance.” Amazon.com. 2004. 15 Mar. 2004

People who wish to be discreet and keep their online presence to a minimum might be surprised to find personal details of their life provided by a third party. As an experiment, in the past couple of years I have tried to keep information regarding myself to a minimum. A Google search for my own name (Pierre de Kerangal) returns about 39 links. Only 2 of those 39 links point to pages that I have created myself. I recognize the context of the other pages and indeed, they give more information on me but I never asked for this publicity. I have direct control over the two pages that I have created but it would take some time to have the people whose web pages mention my name remove this name from their publication. I am sure that the authors of those pages meant well but my point is that one has to be pro-active about information on him found on the web. Information about you that was not created nor authorized by you is likely to be taken by others as a defining element of your identity and, ironically, the less you publish about your identity, the more descriptions of yourself by others will define you in the perspective of the web user.

CHAPTER IV

COLLABORATIVE IDENTITY

“My name is Legion, for we are many” (Mark 5:9)

Web players sometimes create and manipulate their own online identity. Such identity construction can be performed by a single player or by several collaboratively. Being (someone) then becomes a collaborative project. Collaborative identity combines artistic collaboration and construction of the identity of the player, discussed earlier. This chapter explores different ways to create collaborative identities and describes possible evolutions for these identities in virtual space with extensions into the physical.

The creation of a collaborative identity involves several participants, some of which may not aware of their role in the project. Responding to a message through email, on a bulletin board or on a weblog for instance, can involve the participant in identity definition without her knowledge of it. Questions sent by users, carefully answered—through the voice of one or several main players--by the constructed identity itself, can help define this identity.

June Houston uses the submission mechanism of the GhostWatcher to gather questions about her identity that regularly accompany questions and comments about the project. When she finds them helpful or relevant to the evolution of her identity Houston publishes those questions along with the respective answers in the frequently asked questions (FAQ) sections of either her personal page or the GhostWatcher's, according to their relevance. Every new question she is asked about her identity gives her the opportunity to flesh-out her own identity, i. e. create an FAQ entry or refine an answer already available in her FAQs. Questions make her think her own identity through and help Houston define herself more precisely. Houston is good at dodging questions, transforming the indiscrete ones into juicy revelations and ignoring the too direct ones. Her personal page presents many details of her identity but never gives the audience the full picture, literally. Her photographic portraits are either tightly framed on a physical detail, blurred to the point of giving the sensation that they are Kirlian portraits that show her aura or lit in ways that make most of her features disappear in the dark. Her identity, defined by a patchwork of details and never fully disclosed at once, remains ambiguous, if not mysterious. After almost a decade of work on this particular (self-)portrait, June Houston consciously presents herself as a very detailed blur. Every detail seems to make sense individually and together, they create a web of a plausible persona but the overall picture escapes finite definition. Houston's

image might only be complete in the viewer's mind. Both in the GhostWatcher and in her personal pages where her portrait is drawn as a field of details, she pushes the user beyond data visualization into data imagination. This is where her central art practice lies.

Mouchette's identity is mostly defined by her creator who curates pictures, sounds and texts published on the site. The identity of Mouchette is often defined by association: she is who she knows. "My_Last_birthday_Party is a net.art group show which took place in Amsterdam in De Balie , on the 14th of December 2001, and will happen again in other places of the world in 2002, 2003, and forever. It's my last birthday party before I commit suicide. My guests are my favorite net.artists. There is a mix of all our web pages projected on the wall of the gallery. It lasts about an hour. Our pages meet and interfere in unexpected ways on the screen. The mix is at times, loud and confusing, or quiet and deadly still."¹¹⁹

Lately this process has been extended to include participants and impersonators willing to play the role of Mouchette's creator at physical

¹¹⁹ "Last Birthday Party." Mouchette.org. 16 Aug. 2003
<<http://mouchette.org/birthday/index.html>>.

events such as the Mouchette event at Postmaster gallery in New York discussed in detail at the end of this chapter.

(The) Identity (of the artist) as (one of) the subject(s) of the collaboration

No Ghost Just a Shell was an exhibition organized at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art from December 14, 2002 to March 16, 2003. *No Ghost Just a Shell* was initiated by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno in 1999 when they purchased “Annlee” from Kworks, a Japanese company that develops figures for cartoons, comic strips, advertisements and video games of the booming Manga¹²⁰ industry.

As a generic Manga figure without any psychological attributes, personal history, specific characteristics or abilities, Annlee was created to exist in any story, but, according to Huyghe and Parreno, had no chance of surviving. Due to her simplicity, her destiny was to fade away quickly or to simply die after a few seconds of animation or a couple of pages. Parreno and Huyghe bought Annlee for the modest sum of 46,000 yen¹²¹. Deprived of personal characteristics, Annlee was a cheap model.

¹²⁰ A popular form of Japanese cartoon.

¹²¹ Approximately US\$450.00

Huyghe and Parreno used the original Annlee computer file as a starting point for an artistic project. They asked several artists to appropriate the character and bring her to life. Parreno suggested that the participating artists: “Work with her, in a real story, translate her capabilities into psychological traits, lend her a character, a text, a denunciation and address to the Court a trial in her defense. Do all that you can so that this character lives different stories and experiences. So that she can act as a sign, as a live logo.”¹²² Selected artists, along with Huyghe and Parreno, filled Annlee’s empty “shell” with ideas, manifested in the form of animations, paintings, posters, books, neon works and sculptures. Annlee was used as a vehicle to experiment with ephemeral identity creation. Annlee, eventually “terminated” and buried in a coffin created by artist Joe Scanlan, temporally hosted a patchwork of identities. She was an envelop, a thin place-holder that barely kept those snatches of identities together. Several people contributed to this project but Annlee never became a comprehensive character. It remained a juxtaposition of personal traits in the form of separate artworks. The “shell”, with empty, almost infinite (sometimes filled with a typical “chrome reflection effect” of an air-brushed desert scene), blue orbital holes, hardly grouped the characteristics that participating artists gave to Annlee through the few works¹²³ presented during the show.

¹²² “Philippe Parreno’s notes.” [Airdeparis.com](http://www.airdeparis.com). 1999. Air de Paris. 14 July 2003
<<http://www.airdeparis.com/pann.htm>>.

¹²³ Taylor, Robert. “‘Just a Shell’ seems hollow.” [Mercurynews.com](http://www.mercurynews.com). 16 Dec. 2002. The Mercury News. 15 July 2003
<http://www.bayarea.com/mld/mercurynews/entertainment/visual_arts/4749817.htm>.

As a conclusion of the project, Huyghe and Parreno hired a lawyer to develop a contract liberating Annlee from circulation and economic and artistic exploitation. Annlee dead and buried, artists are no longer able to create works with her as a model. Annlee's death brought closure to the project. Death becomes a preservation mechanism that allows Huyghe and Parreno to keep this project under control, a typical retentive attitude of artists working in the physical realm. Surrendering control and opening the project to a broader range of participants would have given it the opportunity to become a full-fledged collaboration. This could have led the project into unexpected--and no doubt fruitful--grounds. It would also have required a certain amount of attention, at least at the beginning, that the artists were apparently not prepared to give. From the web perspective, it is a pity to spend so much time and energy setting-up a project to close it in its infancy. Aside from economical and historical concerns the closure of *No Ghost Just a Shell* might have to do with the fact that it is not a web project. Indeed, many of the tasks that can be automated on the web including enrollment, submission of art works and review of submissions are very time-consuming in physical reality.

My interviews and my relationship with Mouchette

A couple of months after posting my first comment on Mouchette's site I received the following email:

To: Pierre

Subject: Un inconnu est amoureux... mais de qui?

From: Mouchette <mouchette@mouchette.org>

Date: Tue, 30 Oct 2001 23:27:26 +0100 (MET)

Bonjour Pierre,

*J'apprend que quelqu'un est amoureux de moi, me suit dans les rues,
me prend en photo, et a réalisé un site complet à mon sujet.*

<http://www.ilovemouchette.hotvomit.com/>

Serait-ce vous, Pierre?

*Celui qui m'a mise au courant a vu ce site présenté comme de l'art
dans un exposition de net.art. On aura tout vu!*

<http://www.year01.com/plunder>

http://www.year01.com/index_flash5.html

*Je considère cela comme une atteinte à ma vie privée, et jamais je ne
confirmerai ni ne démentirai si cette jeune fille sur les photos est
réellement moi.*

Mais j'espère que ce n'est pas vous qui avez fait ce site Pierre?

*Cette personne a écrit une longue lettre sur son site et attend de moi
une réponse*

<http://www.ilovemouchette.hotvomit.com/love.html>

*Ecrivez-lui donc quelque chose, Pierre, et faites-lui croire que c'est
moi.*

--

bisou

Mouchette

(Hello Pierre,

*I'm told that someone is in love with me, stalks me, take pictures of
me, and has created an entire site about me.*

<http://www.ilovemouchette.hotvomit.com/>

Could it be you Pierre?

*The person who told me about it saw this site presented as an art work
in a net.art exhibit. That tops it all!*

<http://www.year01.com/plunder>

http://www.year01.com/index_flash5.html

I consider this an invasion of my privacy and I will never confirm nor deny that this little girl on those pictures is really me.

But I hope you are not responsible for this site Pierre?

That person has written a long letter on their site and is expecting an answer from me

Why don't you write something, Pierre, and let them believe you are me.)

Mouchette's email messages are detailed, precise, polite and somewhat flirty. She regularly uses *bisou* (kiss in French) as her salutation, typos and misspellings are unusual. Her texts feel like they were written for a class assignment by a good student. They are so typical that they sound synthetic, written in a constrained mental environment. The fact that children considered good students often sound and think like synthetic organisms could be part of the message that is being broadcast by mouchette.org. Mouchette's email messages all have a specific purpose and often are invitations to participate either by going to her site to see something new that, according to her, deserves our attention or by visiting another site that has created a presentation about Mouchette and ask us to respond to the person responsible

for the site, as it is the case in the above message. The way Mouchette's role was played during the email interview, her tone and her choice of words, precise, not written hastily but rather with care and thoughtfulness, was consistent with the messages that she sends out from her site.

“PdeK: What did you have in mind when you decided to start Lullaby for a dead fly? What did you want to achieve with this project?

Mouchette: I was amazed by the quality of the responses to that little killed-fly scenario I had created so I wanted to give it a beautiful online form. It (Lullaby) addressed the issue of life and death and online existence at such a philosophical level, and yet with the widest range from the most naïve to the most intellectual. I'm still a passionate reader of that work, I put it (Lullaby) on before going to bed and read in it for a while, hypnotized by the repetition of the music loop.”¹²⁴

Unlike the style of the email messages that are sent out by Mouchette, the written style of her site is elusive and particular, which reminds me of June Houston's identity presentation, with words and ideas thrown on the

¹²⁴ “Interview with Mouchette.” Email to the author. 20 Feb. 2002.

screen as in a riddle. The messages sent to players (messages are only sent to people who gave their email address to Mouchette, mainly through mouchette.org) are somewhat cues to understand the inner layers of Mouchette's project, much like the help file of an application or the presentation manual that comes with an appliance.

SuggestATitleForThisSection.com¹²⁵

On September 22, 2002 I received an email from Mouchette announcing her visit in New York City. She wanted to meet physically. To my surprise I had no problem with it. On Saturday Sep. 28 I receive a phone call (my translation from French):

M: (voice of a woman) Hello Pierre?

Pierre de Kerangal: Yes.

M: This is the person responsible for Mouchette. I am in New York.

PdeK: Oh... Welcome! How are you?

¹²⁵ I went back and forth about the title of this section and it seemed after a while it seemed that "Suggest a title for this section" which, after a while, seemed to have become the title. This struck me as an opportunity to generate a hands-on collaborative experience for the reader and I created the website <http://www.suggestatitleforthissection.com> to collect readers' suggestions.

M: Good thank you. Would you still like to meet?

PdeK: I'd love to. How about my place, 7:30 PM tonight?

M: Great, see you then.

Speaking to the person (M) responsible for Mouchette on the phone was a disturbing experience. On one hand I wanted to preserve my mental construction of the idea of Mouchette, I enjoyed the state of gestalt in which I found myself, exchanging ideas with an unstable interlocutor that, in my mind, switched back and forth between a 13 year old girl and, as I had imagined, two teenage boys, whom I disliked for their choice of the Mouchette character. I had somehow decided, along with others in the net.art community, that those two teenage (or worst, post-teenage) boys had chosen to animate (soulfill?) the 13 year old Mouchette for sexual reasons. This made Mouchette all the more disturbing. On the other hand I was intrigued by the mechanisms used within the Mouchette project and needed to gain access to insider knowledge for this research.

That night, M arrives at 7:30 sharp. As we get to know each other and to accept the physical host of the entity on the other side of the email I am struck once again by the richness of physical reality. When communicating through email with a new acquaintance there is a series of unknowns,

including gender, age and taste of the email interlocutor, that we have learned to accept. The stream of information about one's identity available in physical reality is fast and broad.

I have had this sensation about ten years ago when I was involved in photorealistic 3D modeling and animation. Creating the model of a room with a 3D application (such as Alias which later became Maya, or any of its siblings) is a surprisingly easy task. Making it photorealistic is very difficult, it seems that there is always something amiss. Working in this area made me realize the complexity of the physical world. A complexity that I had always taken for granted. Compared to a computer-generated 3D rendering the amount of details of the physical world is unfathomable. In 3D the artist has to create all the elements, from the largest to the smallest. Observing the physical world with my 3D-artist reconfigured eye made me realize the complexity of the physical world. One of the most impressive aspect of the physical world is that all the scenes are seamlessly connected, there is no unfinished rendering, no wire-frame sketch of the staircase outside this room, no grey void when we look out the window.

Talking to M while sitting on the same sofa in my loft made me realize again the complexity and richness of the physical world in general and of the

human subject in particular. So many nuggets of information constituent of an identity are filtered in email exchanges that a physical meeting is an extremely satisfying experience, overwhelming at times, something that could compare to opening a water tap for the first time after drinking bottled Evian water—elegant but uneventful--all your life. Email feels great and seems to be about essentials but it certainly lacks the intricate details (pleasant and not), the vibration, multi-layered, fulfilling quality and, above all, apparently never-ending flow of tap water.

As the evening progresses my doubts that M is responsible for Mouchette fade away. She discusses her project openly, describes how she deals with physical appearances and demonstrates the administrative web interface for mouchette.org, the online web-based tools used to administer the database of mouchette.org. We also discuss her new project. Mouchette.net is designed to organize the sharing of the character of Mouchette, as the creator of Mouchette announces a come-out. M is looking for collaborators to play the role of the person behind Mouchette. This creates a cybernetic system (a system based on feedback) in the sense that the goal of the web collaboration established on mouchette.net is to work on the character of Mouchette itself. Mouchette was both the author and the subject of mouchette.org but mouchette.net opens-up the collaboration by inviting collaborators to change

the character of Mouchette and to act as Mouchette or play Mouchette, expand and enrich Mouchette's identity.

This first physical meeting re-enforced my confidence in the Mouchette project. Meeting M made me see a different aspect of Mouchette. On top of the riddles, the playful approach to life and the serious questions asked by the 13 years old, often about death and with sexual connotations, the discovery of the environment and the state of mind in which Mouchette was created made me appreciate the character of Mouchette as part of a larger scheme. The blinding truth that emanated from this physical meeting made the Mouchette project more sensible. Unlike the person(s) responsible for June Houston who didn't want to meet physically arguing that they are only interested in virtual (web-art) projects, M is interested in physical contacts, and networking beyond the web.

Physical meeting with Innergirl (September 28, 2002)

That night M asks me to accompany her to a party on the rooftop of a building near Wall Street in Manhattan. M didn't want to go alone. Just like

Mouchette, she was a little shy. She had been invited there by Innergirl¹²⁶, another web player with whom Mouchette had been collaborating. Innergirl had created several web presentations as answers to Mouchette's site and hyperlinks were connecting the two sites. On our way down to the party M and I decided to bring the identity game along with our bodies into the physical world. I would present myself as the person responsible for Mouchette.

M and I arrive on the roof of this downtown building. Towers south of us are taller, north of us mostly shorter. The view is amazing from this forty-something floor. We don't know anyone. We certainly don't know what Innergirl looks like, yet we've been invited to this party by J. (Innergirl). I ask around for J Finally someone puts us in the right direction. M has asked me to be Mouchette, "just for fun."

Pierre de Kerangal: J?

J.: Yes?

PdeK: Innergirl?

J: (very surprised) Yes...

¹²⁶ Innergirl. Home page. 19 Oct. 2002 <<http://www.innergirl.com>>.

PdeK: Hi, I'm Mouchette

J: (on the verge of fainting) Hello...

PdeK: Thank you for inviting me to this party. This is M

J: Hello M (smile)

M: Hello.

The conversation goes on for a while. I answer some of the questions J. has about Mouchette but somehow J. knows that M is behind Mouchette. They've exchanged enough correspondence to recognize each other in the physical world. I am busted but J. is very polite about it.

J was stunned. It was obviously one of the first times that he had been called “Innergirl”, one of those times often described on match.com or nerve.com when virtual and physical collide, when a large amount of connections and assessments are made in a few seconds.

Physical meeting with Zhang Ga (October 4, 2002)

Zhang Ga is the curator of Towards a Recombinant Reality¹²⁷ at The Center for New Design at Parsons School of Design in New York City.

M points Zhang Ga to me through the circular windows of the revolving doors of the ninth floor gallery of the New School at 55 West 13th Street. She stays out. I enter and walk directly to Zhang Ga who's in a conversation.

Pierre de Kerangal: Hi Zhang Ga!

Zhang Ga: ... ?

PdeK: How are you?

ZG: Good thanks. Who are you?

PdeK: I am Mouchette. We met a week ago.

ZG: err... I met with M a week ago but I didn't meet you.

PdeK: Of course you did. You met with Mouchette, so you met with me.

ZG: But M is Mouchette!

¹²⁷; "Towards a Recombinant Reality." [Alternativemuseum.org](http://alternativemuseum.org). 2002. The Alternative Museum. 12 Dec. 2002.

<http://alternativemuseum.org/fall_2002/exh_zhangga/zhangga.html>.

PdeK: No. M impersonates Mouchette for me. I am Mouchette.

ZG: Wait. Who is the real Mouchette?

PdeK: I am.

(Zhang Ga looks at me perplexed and confused. He starts smiling.)

ZG: You are not Mouchette. M is Mouchette!

PdeK: No really Zhang Ga. I am Mouchette. Nice exhibit. I wanted to ask you a couple of questions regarding the dates of my arrival and departure for next semester. We agreed that I should arrive at the beginning of the semester. Should I be here the first or the second week of February?

ZG (still puzzled): So who is M if you are Mouchette? You are playing with me...

PdeK: M comes in when I am busy somewhere else.

ZG: Oh! So YOU are Mouchette!

PdeK: That's right. So should I arrive around February 5th? I need to know.

ZG: Here is my card.

PdeK: I have it already. You gave it to me last week.

ZG: ...

PdeK: So when should I arrive?

ZG: But who is getting the grant? You or M?

PdeK: Mouchette is getting the grant.

ZG: That would be you?

PdeK: Yes.

ZG: Oh! OK... I have to check the schedules about next semester. I will email you.

(we discuss the exhibit for a couple of minutes before I exit the gallery and meet M outside.)

M: So how is it going?

PdeK: It is going extremely well. So well I think you should not even show-up.

M: Really?... (laugh)

PdeK: Yes. He hesitated for a while, he was confused, then started to accept the fact that I was Mouchette. He still doubts of course but at least he considers my version as a possible truth. He didn't answer my question about the dates. He was too confused, too busy dealing with Mouchette's identity.

M: This is fantastic!

PdeK: I know. I think it is a good time for us to leave. Let me go say goodbye.

M: OK! The great thing is that from now until February 2003 he's going to think that you are on the other side of the email...

PdeK: Wow, you're right. This is even better...

The next day I receive the following message, BCCed to me by M:

Date: Sat, 05 Oct 2002 15:30:37 -0400

From: Mouchette <mouchette@mouchette.org>

Organization: <http://mouchette.org>

X-Accept-Language: en,pdf

To: z <z@apiece.net>

Subject: dates

Hi Zhang Ga,

Following our conversation at your exhibition Friday evening I would like to remind you to send me the dates of the beginning of the semester next year. I am planning to attend the first two lessons to get the students started, but I first have to fit it in my own schedule. Could you let me know as soon as possible. It would also be good to know roughly the profile of your students, their age, general knowledge, their experience with the web to make a precise project for them to work on.

--

bisou*Mouchette*Physical meeting with Anne Barlow (October 11, 2002)

Anne Barlow is the curator of Education and Media Program at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York City. Anne Barlow is friendly and respects my identity. She doesn't ask for my real name and has apparently no problem calling me Mouchette. She starts right away by a presentation of the basement of the museum where the show in which Mouchette was included was held. A dark space that reminds me of other new media presentations in museums and other public spaces: dark and claiming to be comfortable, but rarely as comfortable as the Geek Nef¹²⁸ (a large wooden computer-desk-bed on which a user can lay-down while surfing the Internet, with a column on which a video projectors can be installed, designed in 1996 by Anakin Koenig for *FLEX97* a web-art show at the Pierre Nouvion Gallery in Monaco). Anne Barlow also presents the current shows: Videodrome and Net Art Commissions by Rhizome.org.

¹²⁸ Koenig, Anakin. "Geek Nefs." 1996. [flyvision.org](http://www.flyvision.org). 17 Nov. 1999
<<http://www.flyvision.org/nef/>>.

Anne then asks about my activities in New York. I tell her about my grant from Franklin Furnace (<http://www.franklinfurnace.org/>), my meeting with Ricardo Dominguez of the Thing (<http://www.thing.net>), Postmaster, Parsons, the Flyvision people and my intention to draw all those people together, hopefully with the New Museum when I am back in New York in February 2003. I also mention my desire to make the persona of Mouchette available to other people. She wants to know about the copyright issue between Mouchette and the Bresson estate (The Estate of the French filmmaker Robert Bresson threatens to sue Mouchette.org on the basis that “Mouchette” is the title of a 1966 movie by Robert Bresson). I explain that part of the issue was that my site was hosted in France at the CICV (a French web server) and that moving the site out of this server temporarily solved the problem because it is more difficult for the Estate to sue in countries other than France. I then go on and talk about the solution of the mirror (Bresson’s widow can apparently sue the server that hosts the site but not the owner of the code, so one solution is to host the same site on different servers (mirrors) around the world and move the site from mirror to mirror escaping the charges until the Bresson Estate gives up), give examples of people already involved and describe the page that explains how to help Mouchette in this struggle. I make sure to mention that I like the original character of Mouchette and that I

feel that I respect it. She seems to be attracted to the entertainment value of this problem which reminds me of a saying used by many web artists: "Copyright infringement is your best entertainment value." She has a busy day so she gives me her card and we say goodbye at 12 noon.

This time was even easier than the last one (with Zhang Ga). Anne Barlow didn't seem to doubt of my identity for a second. I feel that this first meeting went well. I missed having a little gift for her: a postcard or a sticker... Nothing expensive, just a little present. Giving a present seems to fit the character of Mouchette. After sending my report I receive a couple of email messages from M. M is happy with the result and asks me to keep playing the game whenever I see my interlocutors. I also receive through physical mail a pile of flyers and a couple of bags to give away.

The reckoning.

Coming out, moving on.

As discussed in this chapter, the Mouchette project bridges virtual and physical worlds. As Mouchette is not a "real" person various collaborators including M are Mouchette's physical and virtual impersonators. As discussed below, M issued a press release in which she said that she would make a

physical appearance and reveal that she was the artist behind the Mouchette project and that she would be moving on by turning over the continued existence of Mouchette.

To date, M wants no personal recognition for creating Mouchette. Mouchette has been embraced by the “art community” as can be seen from the various exhibits in museums and galleries around the world and the grants that she has received. M claims that M wants to turn over the site to one or more individuals to push the experiment further still without recognition to herself. The transfer from her to other individuals is a real possibility because of the way the project is set-up on the web, multiple users can enter the administrative section and become editors of Mouchette.org, breathe new life into Mouchette and even create new portions of the site.

While M seems to believe that this transfer of identity could be a seamless process (both technically and emotionally) others have found this is not the case. As time passes the creator becomes more attached to the constructed identity. As a constructed identity is fleshed-out or “souled-out”, its creator becomes more sentimentally attached to it. The feelings of the creator and those of the constructed identity start to overlap. A press release

approved by M states that “‘Mouchette’ is the Net-based alter-ego of an anonymous artist.”¹²⁹ Alter ego is defined as:

- “1. Another side of oneself; a second self.
- 2. An intimate friend or a constant companion.”¹³⁰

To relinquish control of oneself and/or to lose an intimate friend or constant companion certainly can be a difficult challenge.

The creator can experience very real feelings (embarrassment, fear, etc.) that circulate through the privileged channel opened between him and the constructed identity. Huizinga notes that civilization has a tendency toward seriousness. Maybe this attachment is a sign that the constructed identity has become civilized and has gained humanity maybe at the cost of losing its playful experimental aspect. If a responsible identity is not suitable for the artistic endeavor, there is the option to create a new identity. It could be the sign that the collaborative project has taken a life of its own and the initiator might now only slow-down its evolution. This might be a good time for the creator to surrender more control of the artistic project to the collaborators.

¹²⁹ “Mouchette Press Release.” [Franklinfurnace.org](http://www.franklinfurnace.org). 2003. Franklin Furnace. 18 Nov. 2003. <<http://www.franklinfurnace.org/tfotp03/mouchette.html>>.

¹³⁰ The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition. Houghton Mifflin Company. 2000.

Paul D. Miller is a New York based musician, conceptual artist, and writer best known under his "constructed persona" as "Dj Spooky that Subliminal Kid". Paul D. Miller now has problems dealing with his constructed persona. Miller owes his international recognition to Dj Spooky, the constructed persona under the name of which he has been performing and creating. Dj Spooky has become a valuable brand as well as Miller's main source of income. The fact that he now signs most of his work "Paul D. Miller a.k.a. Dj Spooky that Subliminal Kid" is an indication of the dilemma that he is faced with. On one hand Paul D. Miller reclaims territory and on the other he wants to be credited for the work of Dj Spooky. He sees Dj Spooky as an experiment that has had its time and he is ready to move on but negotiating his separation from his constructed persona is surprisingly difficult. M may suffer similar separation anxiety when she releases her control behind the identity of Mouchette.

In April 2003, Mouchette did announce an official come-out and her desire to open the administrative part of her site to several collaborators. "On Easter Sunday, April 20, the seven-year-old Mouchette project changes forever. The artist who created and maintains the website mouchette.org has decided that they are ready to meet their public, reveal their identity, and talk

about their motives and intentions. (...) for personal reasons Mouchette will give away the website. The Postmasters Gallery event will provide an opportunity to recruit someone to take it over. Not only will visitors meet the present artist behind the web character, they might also get to be the next one!”¹³¹

“If you have to get rid of your dog, sell it, don’t give it away. The new owner will treat it better.”¹³² M discussed with me that she is looking for a person willing to make an “investment” in the project in hope that they will be more likely to take the experiment to a higher level.

However, at this event, M in fact did not reveal that she was the creator of Mouchette. Additionally, as of early 2004 M has not surrendered control of the web site Mouchette.org or even added a collaborator as an administrator. It will be interesting to see if and how the transfer process will occur and if M will ultimately turn over control of Mouchette’s identity to other collaborators without ever revealing M’s true identity and being recognized by the “art community” as the artist behind the Mouchette project in its virtual and physical form.

¹³¹ Mouchette Press Release.

Across the virtual Styx.

Lessons learned by the exploration of identity construction on the web can be used both online and in the physical realm. The data space that we call the web is an infinite multidimensional grid on which territories are being constructed one page at a time. Web players invent new concepts that define virtual space--and how it can be used--but their action also lead them to discover new ways to look at and to live in physical space. This seems to indicate that virtual and physical are somewhat complementary. Virtual and physical, the two poles of a new dialectic process, are engaged in a Gestalt relationship.

The *Search Inside the Book* project is an inspiring example of such complementarity. This project is an expansion of the online superstore Amazon for which millions of books are being digitized. Right now, it is problematic to retrieve information from books. Physicality makes information buried in books much less accessible than information digitally published on the web for instance. For this project, Amazon built “a mind-

¹³² Peress, Gilles. Personal interview. 18 Aug. 2003.

boggling tool then added powerful constraints”¹³³ because Amazon’s announced goal is still to sell books, not to create a digital library. The restrictions will limit the number of pages viewed, make it impossible to view all the pages of a book sequentially and display search results as pictures of pages, not as text making it impossible to copy and paste text from a book. This essential addition will allow Amazon’s customers to browse through the library and make books as accessible and searchable as the web.

Amazon’s digitizing enterprise doesn’t replace books but makes them more useful. In the same manner, digital environments such as the web offer new, previously unthinkable, options in identity construction that contribute to the exploration of ourselves and to the expansion of our creative horizon. New perspective and new ways to share those perspectives help players make informed decisions. Ultimately the either/or situation gives way to an open exchange of information between physical and virtual that benefits players engaged in both worlds.

¹³³ Wolf, Garry. “The Great Library of Amazonia.” Wired magazine. December 2003: 218.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Towards a new system of value creation.

The binary common denominator of the digital world allows for inter-media exchanges. Thanks to a series of protocols built on such digital logic, the web enables players using different media to collaborate on projects regardless of physical distances. Its popularity makes the web an unparalleled exchange platform. Due to its nature, the web is an environment that facilitates collaboration more than previous contexts.

Email and the web, two digital solutions for communication and publishing, have recently been embraced by a global audience. Those tools have suddenly reinforced self-awareness of our own identity as individuals and as members of communities. By asking us to define ourselves in a new way--choosing a handle for our email address, names in chat-rooms, dating services--those new paradigmatic tools have made us aware of new identity options and have turned tacit users into players and identity explorers. The main discovery of quasi-revelatory status is that it is not only possible but easy to have multiple identities. It is a real and viable option. Alternate identity is not a new concept; the novelty resides in the fact that everybody

using those technologies is exposed to this question of identity. This multiple identity paradigm comes with a series of liberating psychological effects such as disinhibition and deindividuation that have been used by artists to expand the boundaries of creativity. Those artists have identified this vein and built entire projects around the notion of constructed identity. Some have constructed alter egos and used those new identities to explore territories that they feel would not have been acceptable for their “official identity.” Others have created collaborative projects on the web dedicated to the elaboration of new identities. Those projects also have therapeutic value as they unleash a creative potential that would have remained unexpressed in the retentive contexts surrounding the official identity.

Inspired by open and discursive problem-solving methods used by software projects such as the Linux operating system, artists use collaboration as the basis for idea exchange and art making. Collaborative scenarios appropriated and imagined by web art players become artistic tools. Artistic collaboration spurred by constructed identities emerges as a potent means to create a new aesthetic value. The web context is suited to create open projects that enable dynamic states of collaboration.

The combination of the three systems presented above (web platform, players' identities and artistic collaboration) have generated new kinds of artworks. The fact that those works are often self-referential and question their own validity, as well as the medium in which they are created (the web), are signs that the artists and the communities assembled around those projects actively monitor their own evolution. The postmodern context in which net art came to exist pushed for a critical dimension to be built into these new kinds of artworks. The dialog on how net art will impact future generations has just begun.

Towards a new morality: Recognize the ethical shift.

In 2001 the Apple advertising campaign "Rip, Mix, Burn" expressed a burst of creativity, echoed by the colorful flower/firework patterns that decorated the new iMac computer pictured in the advertising. "Rip, Mix, Burn" is a shortcut for: copy music tracks (from a CD), organize the tracks according to your own taste, burn the result on a new CD. The tag line evokes the ease with which a (Mac) computer user could perform those tasks. The tight sequence of three monosyllabic words hints at a common ground: the digital environment. Those three actions, almost a single word, can be performed in a continuous gesture precisely because of the enabling digital environment. The surprisingly open acknowledgement of ripping music,

presumably off of a commercially produced and distributed compact disk, is a risqué move from Apple at a time when MP3 had become synonym with piracy. MP3 (MPEG Audio Layer 3) was the format of choice of Napster, the grass-root peer-to-peer network used to exchange music files (for free) which was under attack from the music industry (which had good reasons to feel that it was being played-off). In this ad, Apple positions itself as a preacher of openness: it shows the way to the other. Rip could also have another meaning. Read as *tear*, it could evoke transition, change and a potentially traumatic evolution for the retentive party. Such an evolution is still in progress in the music industry.

We live in a period of profound changes. I find the most profound of those changes to be an ethical shift. The new logic of duplication that results from the digital paradigm is one of the roots of this ethical shift. Another root of this shift is the semantic inversion in the African American Vernacular English also called Ebonics, itself the result of a period of resistance, adaptation and shifts in the American people, discussed at the beginning of the chapter on identity. As I have argued, to copy is not necessarily a bad thing, deception can have a positive outcome and to surrender is not necessarily to be weak. In the case of surrendered authority it is to evolve and free yourself from responsibilities that have become irrelevant. It is to be generous, to pass-

along, to gladly share a privilege. It is to be giving. The thing that we surrender is usually a privilege or a right. The on-going controversies surrounding copyright laws and the digital format are directly linked to this issue of surrendering. The software industry is slowly coming with alternatives to the copyright such as the copyleft attitude and projects such as Creative Commons have designed solutions to replace the antiquated copyright laws that make many digital artists uncomfortable. I find the new concept of copystory particularly pertinent. Copystory uses the model of the genetic code. The genetic code of a file, included in this file, would include information on its past, information on who created it, who modified it and when. It could be read by anyone and would carry a description of all the transformations that were made to the file, a version tracker for individual file. There are some computer science problems to be solved before such a model is tested, let alone adopted by the software industry, but the thinking behind that solution seems to be along the lines of the ethical shift.

Collaboration, along with a renewed civic sense that will be spurred by the fresh identity awareness discussed here, might be required to solve issues beyond the arts. On November 30th 2002 the Economist concludes its leading article "Preparing for terror" by suggesting that "(...) if the war on terrorism is going to last for years, governments need to mobilize their people. The way to

do that is to treat them as adults and give them as much information as possible without compromising sources of intelligence—even if this does cause a few sleepless nights.”¹³⁴ While we work on making the web a tool for permanent referendum (many issues including a wider access and transmission security need to be addressed and resolved before the web becomes a political tool that enables permanent nationwide referendum but voting on the Internet is already used for US soldiers¹³⁵) the Economist suggests a more direct engagement of the people and, I would add, an increased sense of responsibility. Collaboration between governments and the people along with a renewed sense of individual civic responsibility is necessary to address the asymmetry between the moral of the terrorists and ours. What is now referred by the US government as “war on terrorism” I would rather call responsible living, awaking from decades of numb comfort, taking our lives and the destiny of humanity into our hands and allowing ourselves to give our two cents (the television show America Most Wanted is doing just that) and become active players to help save humanity as we know it. Then again, it might be time for humanity as we understand it to give way to a new unfathomable kind.

¹³⁴ “Preparing for terror.” The Economist 30 Nov. 2002: 12.

¹³⁵ “Power to the people: A pervasive web will increase demands for direct democracy” The Economist 25 Jan. 2003: 17-23.

The web is an exponential-rich environment that has enabled the delivery of many paradigmatic options in many fields in the last decade. This exceptional flow of shifts in our society doesn't show any sign of slowing down. Instead of being subjected to the resulting changes we can preempt them and embrace the technology. As web technologies bring human beings closer a collaborative approach which includes a more open attitude and an increased acceptance for change is desirable. Rethinking who we are, redefining our identity as individual players and communities, in the light of these new contexts is at the core of a happy future.

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APPENDIX A

WHAT IS BURNING MAN?

By Molly Steenson

(http://www.burningman.com/whatisburningman/about_burningman/experience.html)

Hurtling down the road to the Black Rock Desert, the colors paint themselves like a spice cabinet -- sage, dust, slate gray. Maybe you're in your trusty car, the one that takes you to and from work every day. Perhaps you've got a spacious RV, your Motel 6 on wheels for the next days in the desert. Or you're driving your glittering art car, complete with poker chips and mirroring to do a disco ball proud.

The two-lane highway turns off onto a new road. You drive slowly onto the playa, the 400 square mile expanse known as the Black Rock Desert. And there you've touched the terrain of what feels like another planet. You're at the end -- and the beginning -- of your journey to Burning Man. You belong here and you participate. You're not the weirdest kid in the classroom -- there's always somebody there who's thought up something you never even considered. You're there to breathe art. Imagine an ice sculpture emitting glacial music -- in the desert. Imagine the man, greeting you, neon and benevolence, watching over the community. You're here to build a community that needs you and relies on you.

You're here to survive. What happens to your brain and body when exposed to 107 degree heat, moisture wicking off your body and dehydrating you within minutes? You know and watch yourself. You drink water constantly and piss clear. You'll want to reconsider drinking that alcohol (or taking those other substances) you brought with you -- the mind-altering experience of Burning Man is its own drug. You slather yourself in sunblock before the sun's rays turn up full blast. You bring enough food, water, and shelter because the elements of the new planet are harsh, and you will find no vending.

You're here to create. Since nobody at Burning Man is a spectator, you're here to build your own new world. You've built an egg for shelter, a suit made of light sticks, a car that looks like a shark's fin. You've covered yourself in silver, you're wearing a straw hat and a string of pearls, or maybe a

skirt for the first time. You're broadcasting Radio Free Burning Man -- or another radio station.

You're here to experience. Ride your bike in the expanse of nothingness with your eyes closed. Meet the theme camp -- enjoy Irrational Geographic, relax at Bianca's Smut Shack and eat a grilled cheese sandwich. Find your love and understand each other as you walk slowly under a parasol. Wander under the veils of dust at night on the playa.

You're here to celebrate. On Saturday night, we'll burn the Man. As the procession starts, the circle forms, and the man ignites, you experience something personal, something new to yourself, something you've never felt before. It's an epiphany, it's primal, it's newborn. And it's completely individual.

You'll leave as you came. When you depart from Burning Man, you leave no trace. Everything you built, you dismantle. The waste you make and the objects you consume leave with you. Volunteers will stay for weeks to return the Black Rock Desert to its pristine condition.

But you'll take the world you built with you. When you drive back down the dusty roads toward home, you slowly reintegrate to the world you came from. You feel in tune with the other dust-covered vehicles that shared the same community. Over time, vivid images still dance in your brain, floating back to you when the weather changes. The Burning Man community, whether your friends, your new acquaintances, or the Burning Man project, embraces you. At the end, though your journey to and from Burning Man are finished, you embark on a different journey -- forever.

APPENDIX B

CODE FOR DEAD.HTML ON MOUCHETTE.ORG

```

<html>
<head>
<title>dead fly</title>
<meta http-equiv="Content-Type" content="text/html; charset=iso-8859-1">

</head>

<body bgcolor="#000000" >

<p>&nbsp;</p>
<p align="center"><applet code="datatext.class" width="500" height="216">
  <param name="demicron" value="www.demicron.se">
  <param name="reg" value="A00009">
  <param name="foreground" value="00ff00">
  <param name="background" value="000000">
  <param name="maxrows" value="17">
  <param name="width" value="500">
  <param name="sleeptime" value="70">
  <param name="fontsize" value="12">
  <param name="maxitems" value="47">
  <param name="item0" value="Hey what happened?">
  <param name="item1" value=" ">
  <param name="item2" value="I think I'm dead ">
  <param name="item3" value=" ">
  <param name="item4" value=" YOU KILLED ME !!!!!!">
  <param name="item5" value=" ">
  <param name="item6" value="You clicked on me !!! ">
  <param name="item7" value=" ">
  <param name="item8" value="Why do you have to click on buttons ">
  <param name="item9" value="before you know what's behind ??? ">
  <param name="item10" value=" ">
  <param name="item11" value="You are a killer. ">
  <param name="item12" value=" ">
  <param name="item13" value="Oh,my god... I'm so sad to be dead ">
  <param name="item14" value=" ">
  <param name="item15" value="It's a dreadful sorrow ">

```



```

    <param name="item16" value="">
    <param name="item17" value="Only a minute ago, ">
    <param name="item18" value="">
    <param name="item19" value="I was happily flying over your plate ">
    <param name="item20" value="and ">
    <param name="item21" value="now">
    <param name="item22" value="I'm">
    <param name="item23" value="dead">
    <param name="item24" value=" ">
    <param name="item25" value="BUT HOW CAN I WRITE THIS SINCE
I'M DEAD ??? ">
    <param name="item26" value=" ">
    <param name="item27" value="TELL ME!!! ">
  </applet> </p>
<p><embed src="crying.wav" autostart=TRUE loop=TRUE hidden=TRUE>
</embed>
<form>
  <div align="center">
    <p>&nbsp;</p>
    <p>&nbsp;</p>
    <p>&nbsp;</p>
    <p>&nbsp;</p>
    <p>&nbsp;</p>
    <p>
      <input TYPE="button" VALUE="Tell me"
onClick="window.open('tellme.html','width=500,height=400').focus()">
    </p></div>
  </form>
</body>
</html>

```

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW WITH JUNE HOUSTON

Part 1

July 12, 2001

Pierre de Kerangal: June, Why did you decide to use the web as an artistic medium?

June Houston: Before 1993 I had never had an overwhelming desire to be an artist and I had almost no artistic culture. That year I met some people in New York who introduced me to the web and made me understand what it meant for the world and for the artist. Sharing ideas with the rest of the connected world was something so far-fetched that I had never even thought of it. It made so much sense and my life had been so uneventful so far that I decided to give it a try. It first became an addiction, then a way of life.

PdeK: Can you please describe your art work?

JH: The GhostWatcher is a collaborative effort to determine if there are paranormal activities in several spaces, to identify the beings responsible for those activities, to establish contact and to communicate with them. We have not been able to determine the first point yet. To do this I have asked specialists to install a number of cameras to broadcast video content to the web site (webcams) and I am asking users (Watchers) to describe what they see on the image grabs made several times per minute. They can make a simple description of what they see, present a theory and add pictures to illustrate their entry. To make their description more clear they often draw on the video images that they've grabbed from the site.

PdeK: How did the use of technology influence the content of your art work?

JH: Technology did more than just influence the content of my art work, it enabled it. The GhostWatcher has been online for almost 7 years and I have noticed that the reports are getting more and more involved. I see a couple of reasons for this. First, the user population is becoming more computer savvy; it is now common knowledge to grab an image from the web, open it in a drawing or photo manipulation application, save it and send it as attachment with an email. Second, the new version of the GhostWatcher (2.0) simplifies many Watchers' tasks and clarifies what is expected from them. They can now upload images directly from the Watch page. Third, I have noticed that as

soon as a couple of examples (how to describe something on an image for instance) are posted on the site, it is followed by other Watchers. Sending images with reports has become more popular within the Watchers community for about a year and I would say that one report out of two received by the site now contains an image. I am very happy about this because it makes my Internet property more multimedia, more lively. I can't wait to introduce sound... Without Internet technology this art work would not exist as it is entirely web-based. Also, the ability to receive almost real-time answers speeds-up the way I make the GhostWatcher evolve. My second awakening was understanding the concept of database. It is the kind of concept that is so simple it is brilliant. I suppose the way I think of the GhostWatcher now is a collection of impressions to which filters can be applied, ready for data mining.

PdeK: What is the future of the GhostWatcher?

JH: There are so many options still untapped in this project that it could evolve in many different directions. Automating the GhostWatcher, making it less dependant on me is my short-term goal. Watchers are already providing almost 100% of the content but I would like them to get involved at the editing level which I have done so far. I want to surrender low-level tasks and invent new high-level controls for myself. What will happen when I am no longer in charge of editing? How will I conduct the GhostWatcher? Create new cameras and retire others, create new areas like "GhostWatchers needing help with their projects/problems" or create a new referencing scheme for the content? I can imagine that these actions could also become user-controlled once a system for suggesting ideas and voting to decide if those ideas should become part of the project is in place. My contribution (at this point I might present myself as a contributor, not as the owner of the work any longer) might then evolve jumpstarting sub-projects in which I believe or that interest me the most. I could obviously exercise a right of veto on any part of the GhostWatcher. This was actually my first goal: have others provide the content so I could focus on the editing.

PdeK: I'm surprised to hear you use the term Internet property.

JH: It is a joke. I find the term ridiculous and inappropriate because I believe that information should be free and as soon as it is published on a web site does not belong to anyone any longer but I hear it all the time and people are certainly not kidding when using this term.

PdeK: Why have you done only one project? What could you do after the GhostWatcher?

JH: I've been asked this question many times by people visiting the GhostWatcher by accident. Everytime I add a feature to the GhostWatcher three or ten new ideas come up to make it better, faster, more interesting, more pertinent, to improve its navigation and the way info is displayed. It really seems endless. As you know this is my first artistic project. It's been going on for a while now but I still see so much potential in it that I am not ready to move on to another one yet. As I mentionned in my answer to your question about the future of GhostWatcher, I don't imagine my life without the GhostWatcher. It's become an important part of my daily activity. I'm also having a lot of fun with this project and potential new features make it all the more exciting.

PdeK: You said that you want to create high-level tasks for yourself and ultimately become a simple contributor. You seem to want to detach yourself from from this project. Why?

JH: It just seems to be the logical thing to do. As I give more responsibility to the Watchers and to the code that handles the project, I feel I should step back from the front or at least from the active front. From my perspective both the code and the users have more interesting, exciting, surprising sometimes even revealing things to say than I do. I guess it will remain "June Houston's GhostWatcher" for a while but this doesn't mean that I have to take part into the daily tasks. As I said from the beginning, I am asking for help. I happen to provide something that has been called "entertainment" (I'm actually quite comfortable with that) and that is categorized by search engines as "weird" but I see it as a narcissistic reflection of the body of users. A reflection of their minds. It's become more about the individual users than it is about me and I've said in many interviews that the GhostWatcher was an art work triggered by me but made by the connected world and I intend to keep pushing it in this direction.

PdeK: What is your position regarding the non-commodification of the arts?

JH: I had never created art before using the Internet and I have never wanted to sell my art work. I understand that the art market is a big thing and I understand that artists have to live and need money to do so but I don't find the established market process satisfying. I don't imagine myself creating art elsewhere than online but I am not against making money so I have been considering placing ad banners on my site. The present situation is certainly not good for this right now but if the market for ad banners ever become promising again I will consider it seriously.

PdeK: Do you see the audience as being the co-author of your work? How?

PdeK: How do you use collaboration in your work?

PdeK: In what ways do web-specific artists influence each other?

JH: I have absolutely no contact with any other net-artist. I'm aware of some works through emails that I receive from organization who support this kind of activity but I rarely visit net-art sites. I don't particularly crave to belong to this community. I am more interested in dealing with people who present themselves as Watchers than as artists and I feel that I need to talk to database programmers more than I need to talk to artists. I also find more inspiration at the Met and in the streets of New York than I find on net-art sites. I don't look down on them, I just don't feel that we have a lot in common.

PdeK: So how did you come up with the idea of the GhostWatcher?

JH: I was fooling around with HTML and having understood the sharing opportunities that the web had suddenly opened-up I wanted to get people to participate in whatever I would be doing. The tricky part, even at this early stage of the web, was getting attention. I had seen some webcams and had noticed that it was an easy way to get fresh content at a minimal cost. I just had to present the fresh content in a way that would not be too boring. Paranormal activity struck me as being another big source of fresh content and I happened to be a little scared in my New York place. Monitoring paranormal activities struck me as a never-ending flow of fresh content especially because truth, in this field, is very subjective.

PdeK: You present yourself as a web-specific artist but the GhostWatcher is based in physical space. How do you account for that?

JH: I am indeed monitoring physical space but it is to trigger a virtual space in all of us: our imagination. The GhostWatcher has nothing to do with my space. It has to do with the Watchers' mental space.

PdeK: Do you really have ghosts in your place?

JH: Go find out on the GhostWatcher!

Part 2

July 23, 2001

PdeK: Can there be collaboration at any level of the creative process (original design, development, edition, etc.)? At what levels of the creative process do you use collaboration? Please describe what happens at every level.

JH: I don't know if this can be considered as collaboration but the idea to put together the GhostWatcher first came to my mind after seeing a webcam aimed at a toilet bowl. What were the chances of having something happen in this space? I thought this was a pretty boring webcam but I went back to check it out a couple of times because the reward (seeing someone actually using the space) seemed so big that it was worth giving it a chance. I never saw anything and stopped visiting this site but the idea of setting up a camera to point at a mostly non-active space inspired me to create the GhostWatcher. The entire site is based on the premise that, when visiting it, one might see something that they have never seen before, something that is thought to be impossible. This is the incentive to visit the GhostWatcher. Being inspired by something that I had seen on the web made me want to create a web project myself. This might be stretching the concept a bit but I feel that collaboration started at that early stage of my art project.

Collaboration then happened between me and the small group of people who helped me put together the first version of the site. Although this is not artistic collaboration per se there were definitely many artistic consideration during this phase.

The project is built around the central idea that users or "Watchers" are going to provide the content of the site by commenting on the camera views writing what I called "reports". Early reports were only made through text. Images appeared later and animated images came even later. I hope to receive sound reports one day.

Very early on I realized that some of the reports were of a different nature. They were not reports about what was seen on the camera images but comments and suggestions on how the site was working for them and solutions to make it better or to make it fit their needs. For instance at the beginning I grabbed images from the video cameras at regular intervals (every minute). A couple of Watchers suggested that I made the time between every grab random. I also started to receive ghost stories which made me create a special section to display them. Whenever possible I always tried to make it clear on the site that such and such idea was given to me by Watchers hoping that users would understand that they actually had the power to collaborate at that level. I keep receiving suggestions on how to make the site better (version 2.0, released in May 2001, was redesigned from scratch following many of

those suggestions) but I don't know if it is due to this decision to acknowledge the fact that such and such change was suggested by Watchers, if the web is an inviting ground for suggestions or if making an idea evolve is part of general human behavior. Future development of the site include having users vote on suggestions made by other users to help me determine the validity, relevance and usefulness of those suggestions so I can create a site that would help further my understanding of what is happening in my space by making it attractive for the users to participate. In the case of the randomness of the intervals between each video grab I would like to set up poles to allow users to vote on this subject so the interval and the amount of randomness would be changing continually and would reward the most active users by giving them more control over the site.

PdeK: How did/do you define your role in this project? How did/does it evolve over time?

JH: Sometimes I see myself as a beggar, sometimes as a conductor. I ask many people for their help and I organize the information I receive. Part of it is discarded, part is archived, the rest is stored in the database so it can be displayed on the site for everybody to access. I have to deal with many technical issues and not being a programmer myself I had to hire technical help. I have become aware of many available techniques and I now have a good grasp of what is involved in database-backed sites since the programmer and I have been working very closely during the different phases of version 2.0, from the conception to the release. Before 2.0 my knowledge of HTML had allowed me to have friends help me update the site until I realized that I needed to use a database to get to the next level. The goal is artistic but the means to get there are pluridisciplinary. This is why I have the sensation of being a conductor. On top of that, the result is closer to a musical piece than it is to a painting in the way it is experienced. The audience is made of users, not of viewers.

PdeK: What made you decide to use a database for the new version of you site?

JH: Understanding databases was almost as important for me as understanding the possibilities of the web. As soon as I realized how database could help my project, backing the GhostWatcher with a database became an obsession. Such an organizational tool is a great asset for a collaborative project. Being able to present information in different context and allowing collaborators to not only add to the content but also decide how this content is presented (through polls for instance) is a necessity for the artist working on web collaborations.

PdeK: June, you said earlier that your art is closer to a musical piece than it is to a painting. Can you elaborate on that?

JH: The GhostWatcher has to be performed. The only person who can do that is the user. When the piece is displayed on the screen as the user navigates through the different pages retrieving the information from the database there is a sense of something unfolding that is very much comparable to a musical experience. Without even getting into the fact that something can be added to the piece the user gets a sense of control over the information that is being presented to her. This is due to the way the web works and is not an attribute of web art only.

PdeK: How do you get people to collaborate?

JH: You can ask a lot to people if you ask the right question, the right way at the right time. Once confidence is established you can venture into more intrusive or demanding questions/requests. You might not get an answer but at least the person is going to consider your request. On the web it is pretty easy to do that due to the amount of people you address. It is the audience's choice to stay on your site or not and to tell their friends about it. Once they have decided to stay a little longer by clicking on a link to continue the experience/visit for instance, it might be the right time to ask a question.

PdeK: I discovered the GhostWatcher five years ago. Later I saw it included in the net-art exhibit "Entertainment Art Network" at the Walker Art Center. I was obviously not the only one thinking that it qualified as an art project. Do you usually present the GhostWatcher as an art work? If not why?

JH: I don't. This is a serious project about finding paranormal activities. It has a purpose but this purpose in itself is so ridiculous that the entire project becomes purposeless. My first goal is to make art but if I was up-front about it, people would be less compelled to send "serious" reports.

PdeK: Do you believe in ghosts?

JH: (June did not answer).

PdeK: Does the GhostWatcher have a limit in time?

JH: I cannot see any yet and I cannot imagine ever stopping this project. Although so far there has been only two versions of the site I have made many changes/adjustments over the years. Parts of the project have been dropped and new ones have been added. My role is to keep the project on track taking two main characteristics into consideration: the response of the Watchers (I have to make the project interesting to the user) and my reasons to do the project (what I want to achieve). In other words, I need to constantly readjust

the trajectory of the project taking both my goals and the users' willingness to collaborate into consideration. The project has to give the users an incentive to spend time writing reports and editing images. It's got to be sticky. I think the GhostWatcher is providing entertainment in the form of information about paranormal affairs and the ability to take part, first hand, in the experiment. The trajectory readjustment is finding ways to present ideas that will help me reach my goal in terms that will be understood by the users and that will make them want to participate.

The exciting thing is that my goals are transforming as the project evolves. I believe that it is a recipe for quality. My reactions and the users' reactions are linked. If I get bored by the answers that I get I find a way to get more exciting input from the users. There is always a better way to present an idea. This really keeps the project alive and I guess the project will stop when one of the two entities (the users or me) will decide that it is time to move on but so many issues can be tackled through the paranormal metaphor that I don't see this project ending anytime soon.

One possible scenario for ending the GhostWatcher is to let the Watchers manage it through a voting system. This implies adding artificial intelligence to the GhostWatcher. I would eventually totally detach myself from the project which would mean, from my perspective, the end of the GhostWatcher.

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW WITH MOUCHETTE

Mouchette's interview was conducted through a long period of time. She accepted to answer my questions as they arose. I found it very useful and less intrusive for her. Email was instrumental in this way of conducting the interview.

I didn't want to use Mouchette's time for basic questions so I asked her to point me to a recent interview of her. The following interview was conducted by John Cabral through email in June 2001. It is available at:
<http://turbulence.org/Works/media/index.html#mouchette>

=====

What is your name?

Mouchette.

What is your age?

Not yet 13.

What is your occupation?

Being a person on the internet.

What is your nationality?

French.

Where do you live?

Amsterdam, or so it says on my site.

How do you see this place influencing your work?

It influences the readers mostly.

What does your normal diet consist of?

Data.

When, how, and why did you become involved in the internet?

Once upon a time, there was a Mouchette on PMC MOO... There also has been a character on MediaMOO (MIT) called Lalie who had 2 robot dolls called Echolalie and Glossolalie. They all still exist there (@join Mouchette on PMC MOO or @join Lalie on MediaMOO) but nobody keeps them alive. If there had been a public for text-only interactive worlds like MOOs, there would never have been a Mouchette on the Web.

Has your perspective on the Internet changed significantly over the last five years?

Being just a little piece of the Internet I have no perspective on it. I change with it, like a drop of water in the sea changes with the sea.

What do you see your work coming out of and where do you see it going?

It comes from a set of theoretical questions about language within the field of visual arts:

- 1) A concern with the linguistic notion of "speech acts."
- 2) Modes of address in the public space using a written form.

It goes towards a new definition of identity related to a new social form of communication.

Do you have any favorite writers?

Raymond Roussel, Georges Perec, Raymond Queneau and all the OULIPO writers.

Do you have any favorite movies?

"Mouchette" by Robert Bresson, and all other Bresson movies.

Do you think your work tells stories? If not, do you think fans find stories in your work anyway?

I do not tell stories, the fans find them in my work. If the work is good each fan attributes me a different story.

To what extent has your work been shaped by contributions from your fans?

To a very big extent. In fact, it's completely shaped by the fans' contributions. But that's something only the fans can tell. Since I'm one of the fans, I know what I'm talking about.

Can you comment on the ratio of words to imagery to sound in your work?

Text goes first. Pictures and sounds are merely a sort of decor, something that supports or triggers the verbal exchange between me and the text contributors to the site.

What are the unique characteristics of narrative on the Web?

1) The notion of fiction and non-fiction are being re-defined. I am just as real (non-fiction) as [fill in here anybody who has a homepage or a Web site to promote their personality] or maybe they are all Web characters like me.

2) Web users, readers may fill in a part in the story. That part can be integrated inside the story by the main author. Authorship is being shared, although not in an equal way.

How many hours a day (on average) do you spend on a computer?

Too many to dare mention...

When do you do your best work (time of day)?

What time do you mean: GMT? EDT? PDT? UTC?

Do you have any significant collaborators?

Right now the PHP programmer is very significant to the creation. The PHP programs determine how I receive, edit and react to the users' contributions to my Web site.

=====

Date: Mon, 11 Feb 2002 21:13:19 +0100

From: mouchette <mouchette@mouchette.org>
 To: pierre@jedi-unit.com
 Subject: Re: email interview on artistic collaboration and identity

PdeK: Ma these avance et j'ai besoin de vous poser quelques questions.
 Mouchette: Ca tombe bien, j'ai le temps aujourd'hui.

PdeK: How do you process the input that your site collects from the users?

M: I have an online interface to read and edit the messages and to publish them, it's a php, mysql database. I had it programmed specially for me. I don't publish immediately, I usually leave a certain delay, up to a week. When the message is published the user receives the appropriate message by which he is informed that his message is online. He's prompted them to re-read it and to check out the page where all the others messages are... Well not in a casual way though, within the fiction of killed flies and so on...

PdeK: How do you decide which one you keep and which one you don't?

M: Practically all the messages are kept, but not all are published. I tend to reject easily the ones without a correct sender's email because I feel nobody takes responsibility for it.

PdeK: What are the criteria for the selection?

M: Quality ... that's a bit vague, I know. In the Lullaby I have the categories "rejected" "accepted" and "best" and I can also delete a message instantly from the database. "Rejected" messages are stored but never online, they might be too stupid or just insults, or nearly empty messages, which I still would keep because of the email addresses which I will use in the future, for the general sendings about the new works. "Accepted" are online but not in the Lullaby, only "best" are in the Lullaby. Both receive the same message (quoted below, the tags would then bear the specific information, of course), both can re-search and find their message in the page /fly/how.html but only some (1/2 to 1/3) would make it into the Lullaby. I choose the ones I find beautiful or original and which would best fit the formatting and the atmosphere of this Flash work.

PdeK: Do these criteria change from one project to the next (Lullaby, fan, etc.)?

M: Some have no online results (flesh&blood, fan-club, striped penis). For the cat the categories are self-explanatory:
<http://www.mouchette.org/cat/why.html>

And recently I created categories for the suicide kit board, to allow a deeper reading than the first page, or maybe for social reasons, to allow the matching between the one who seek help and the ones who offer it

<http://www.mouchette.org/suicide/answers.php3>

The contributors to this page are not so much affected by esthetic criteria, it's not the art public, they are deeply concerned by the subject so this board is very active and passionate and worth a little extra attention to make the contents better accessible to the public... Although since recently, someone who I think has quite a bit of writing talent, sends a funny story to the suicide board every day, so I suppose she might think there's an interesting public of readers there ... Well, me at least, I enjoy it very much, I hope she goes on.

<http://www.mouchette.org/suicide/answers.php3?search=Lucy+Cortina>

Tenez-moi au courant de la publication de votre thèse

Je vous signale un article récemment paru dans Archée qui traite plus ou moins du sujet qui vous occupe. C'est une interview qui a été faite oralement il y a un an environ.

<http://archee.qc.ca/ar.php4?btn=texte&no=175¬e=ok>

--

bisou

Mouchette

=====

Date: Mon, 11 Feb 2002 22:52:59 +0100

From: mouchette <mouchette@mouchette.org>

Reply-To: mouchette@mouchette.org

X-Accept-Language: en,pdf

To: pierre@jedi-unit.com

Subject: Re: email interview on artistic collaboration and identity

PdeK: What is your reasoning behind the creation of counter-Mouchette sites such as ihatemouchette.org and mouchettesucks.com?

Mouchette: Hmmmm... reasoning? Artists don't reason so much ... or only afterwards.

I get so often insulted and blamed on the suicide board that I thought I should give it a place outside of my main site because it affected me too much sometimes, that's one reason: let them spit it all out!

Another reason is: to know who is "me", I would just let people tell me, thinking of that saying of Cocteau: "ce qu'on te reproche, cultive-le, c'est toi". So blame me, people, and I'll know who I am.

Another reason is: I heard some big companies were registering their own hate sites (like shellsucks.com etc ...) so as to prevent others to create them ... Possibly just a rumour, but I thought I'd also rather do the hate site myself, to have it the way I like it best. Same reason as for making some rogue sites myself...

And last, but not least, to pretend I was so popular that someone would create a whole site just to hate me. Fame is not something that happens to you, it's something you create.

Finally, the quantity and violence of the reactions proved me that I was more famous (and more hated) than what I had imagined. But here, I could laugh of the insults because I'd created the circumstances myself.

--

bisou

Mouchette

=====

Date: Wed, 20 Feb 2002 23:40:14 +0100

From: Mouchette <mouchette@mouchette.org>

To: pierre@jedi-unit.com

Subject: Re: email interview on artistic collaboration and identity

PdeK: What did you have in mind when you decided to start Lullaby for a dead fly? What did you want to achieve with this project?

Mouchette:

I was amazed by the quality of the responses to that little killed-fly scenario I had created so I wanted to give it a beautiful online form. It addressed the issue of life and death and online existence at such a philosophical level, and yet with the widest range from the most naïve to the most intellectual. I'm still a passionate reader of that work, it put it on before going to bed and read in it for a while, hypnotized by the repetition of the music loop.

The philosophical and metaphysical issues it addresses (death and the essence of writing) are familiar to me since a while already through authors such as

Blanchot, Derrida, Levinas. I never thought I would see them so well reflected in the visitors' responses.

I also wanted something which would run like a movie, something contemplative which I could simply project in a gallery space, an art work to show on a wall... But it hasn't happened yet that I could show it like that...

What on earth are you going to do with my answers? ... I'm curious.. (right now, I feel just like the contributors to my site: they answer a question, post their text, and then wonder what will happen with that ... And I always take the care to tell them)

--

bisou

Mouchette

=====

Date: Thu, 24 Oct 2002 00:03:01 +0200

From: Mouchette <mouchette@mouchette.org>

To: pierre@jedi-unit.com

Subject: Re: another question

Hi Pierre,

Nice to hear of you and your dissertation again.

> it's been a long time but i am still working on my dissertation. i
> have a question for you that i just realized will be asked by my
> professors:
> - there is an obvious kiddie porn slant in your work. how do you, and
> people around you, account for it?

There is NO kiddie porn in my site. At least, not from my point of view. This witch hunt for kiddie porn on the Internet makes everybody hysterical on the subject. People start seeing kiddie porn everywhere. So it's impossible to even mention the subject of sexuality and young children at all. The Americans were already puritan on that, now they're even worse than ever...

There is indeed some sexual elements in the site. Dealing with the intimate world of a 12 years old, how can you ignore sexuality? A young girl who stitches "a striped penis" to one of her teddy bears, who sticks her tongue out against the screen and asks for a kiss, is that

kiddie porn? If pedophiles can be satisfied with that, then I don't mind, let it be... at least no underage girl has been harmed in the process.

A striped penis

<http://mouchette.org/touch/plush.html>

Flesh&Blood

<http://mouchette.org/flesh/tong.html>

"13 year old penis" is search string that can lead to my site because these words can be found on my index page. From my statistics I can see that it's often used during the week-end. Do the pedophiles find what they want at mouchette.org? I doubt so. But the witch-hunters find enough to be hysterical about.

I find the flower backgrounds on the index page very sexual. I made these pictures to represent Mouchette's sexuality.

<http://mouchette.org/fleurs/rosa.jpg>

<http://mouchette.org/fleurs/tigerlili.jpg>

Some of the flowers have ketchup or strawberry jam on them, alluding to the fact that she might have started menstruating.

<http://mouchette.org/fleurs/blood16.jpg>

<http://mouchette.org/fleurs/blooddrop.jpg>

<http://mouchette.org/fleurs/blood7.jpg>

But nobody ever mention these pictures as kiddie porn. Did I miss something there?

--

bisou

Mouchette

<http://mouchette.org>

=====

Date: Fri, 25 Oct 2002 18:41:59 +0200

From: Mouchette <mouchette@mouchette.org>

Organization: <http://mouchette.org>

X-Accept-Language: en,pdf

To: pierre@jedi-unit.com

Subject: Re: another question

Hi Pierre

More on the subject of this Other Question:

As you understood it, sexuality is the most important subject on mouchette's site (not kiddie porn, ok?). As it is for a teenager girl, and in a very very confusing manner, like on my site. Sexuality, from a teenage girl view point resembles a strange kind of role-playing game, where you would be attributed a role without knowing which, and only begin understanding which role you are playing through the reactions of other players (hmm, is that clear?), which is more or less what life is about, isn't it? A teenager girl would sometime behave sexual long before she understands what it is, and yet would be unable to deal with the reactions she creates. Although these reactions are only a matter of interpretation of her behaviour. The same moanings will sound sexual or just a childish whimper according to who is hearing it. (<http://mouchette.org/music>). I like to work precisely along that line, very thin line, as thin as possible... (ultra-mince, to quote Duchamp). This is where "interaction" on the net is not just a matter of mouse-clicks, but resembles life itself, or better, IS life. People who scream for kiddie porn about my site are also playing an ugly role they do not properly understand: the repressed/repressing puritan, possible child abuser, the same guy who would slap his daughter in the face calling her a slut for wearing that cropped t-shirt (which she thinks she only wears for fashion), and then the next minute would think, oh if she means that.. let's go for it, and rape the girl. Because of the Internet witch-hunt for pedophilia most (normal) people would rather not get involved in the subject at all. They would dismiss the whole issue. So it takes a lot of courage and persistence to deal with this subject. And for better or worse, it is still my subject. Even more so. My last two works only deal with sexuality <http://mouchette.org/squint/> "Squint" is on the site but hidden as an unexpected random link, built under a frameset which prevents straight bookmarking. You stumble on it by chance and you can't come back. You need to move the mouse and squint to view and hear a sexual scene, you're physically engaged in the viewing, you're participating. And yet no explanation is given to why this scene is on my site: you are left with your reactions.

The next work, also of a sexual nature, will use codes which allow only one viewing per page but will address you individually with your own name inside the html..... and... and... Well, let the witch-hunters scream for kiddie-porn... I'm too busy doing the works to comment or reflect on them!

--

bisou

Mouchette

<http://mouchette.org>

=====

Date: Fri, 25 Oct 2002 13:20:59 +0200
 From: Mouchette <mouchette@mouchette.org>
 To: pierre@jedi-unit.com
 Subject: Re: another question

hi Pierre,

Quoted below is a rant recently published on rhizome_raw by one of my detractors who believes I made up the copyright case for my publicity... It has some arguments about my alleged kiddie-porn slant, that's why I'm sending it to you. The writer's hysteria on sexual issues and his obsession on my work are visible enough too, so you get the complete picture... Unfortunately this guy is one of rhizome editors (for the net.art news or something) and he blocked all my information there...

--

bisou

Mouchette

--

Re: Mouchette website censored - public debate
 Eryk Salvaggio <eryk@maine.rr.com>

Hi Anna, I have some massive issues with Mouchette's art. On top of lacking any real insights, having horrible aesthetics and my problems with Mouchettes rampant careerism, I also have issues with art that I feel glamorizes self destruction, sexual abuse and death.

You'd have thought people would have had enough of false presentations of death and self destruction by now since it was so connected to the early 90's bubble of security, when western societies were desperate for an opportunity to fetishize these things because it gave them a chance to break up the monotony of comfort. For now, anyone that enjoys the tongue in cheek sexualizations of 13 year old girls [for example, <http://www.mouchette.org/touch/plush.html>] might simply read the news for their titillation, where Fundamentalist regimes crank out Mouchette-like "art" such as court ordered gang rape on a mass scale. I think this is the type of art that ought to be ignored. I find very little evidence that Mouchette is exploring

anything except for the territory of sexualization in this piece, either, nor do I find any explicit or implied condemnation of the practice. This is even more interesting if the rumor that Mouchette is a 45 year old man are true. I'm as sexually liberated as your next descendant of puritanical New Englanders, so I don't think I am being close minded about this, but I can't find any value in this work outside of the sexualization of 13 year olds.

[<http://mouchette.org/music/index.html> is another example, where Mouchette-allegedly a 13 year old girl, remember- "whimpers" or "moans" depending on your interactions.] Since no one seems repulsed by this art, I assume maybe I am just too stupid to have picked up on something of value? If anyone can tell me why, I am open to it. My assumption, however, is that people are simply too busy reading resumes. I might write a more full blown "article" on how Mouchette is simply soft-core child pornography, and I'd like to hear opposing viewpoints.

Censorship I don't like either, but I have no reason to believe in this claim, when it is coming from an "artist" who fakes his/her identity, makes false accusations against other artists in public, etc. Why should I believe it, when I know for a fact that it has lied about things in the past for the sake of "rallying support" for its career? [the drive "I hate Mouchette" hoaxes, for example- which, ironically enough, was a cover for her to try to trademark her own name, so that "detractors" (which were generated by mouchette itself) could be stopped.] If you try to access it now, it reloads automatically to the alleged cease and desist letter. It's the only page that does that on the whole site besides the piece in question. Why would that be?

Cheers, -e

APPENDIX E

TWO EMAIL EXAMPLES OF INVITATIONS TO COLLABORATE

===== beginning of example 1 =====

X-Priority: 1 (Highest)

Date: Wed, 27 Sep 2000 21:47:22 +0100

To: joy@thing.net

From: jerome joy <joy@thing.net>

Subject: [collective jukebox 3.0] launch

Status:

- apologies for cross-postings - i n f o : <http://homestudio.thing.net/>
(sorry for poor english)

INVITATION TO JOIN THE JUKEBOX PROJECT ...

A PROJECT OF OPEN AND FREE EXPERIMENTAL SOUND AND MUSIC

Version 3.0. Collective JukeBox / Zurich 18 nov - 23 dec 2000

NEW MUSIC MEETS NEW NETWORK TECHNOLOGIES ... JUST PLAY IT !

Dear friend,

You are invited to take part in Collective JukeBox,
an international cooperative audio project moderated
by Jerome Joy. Here is the announcement for the
new presentation and version 3.0 of the JukeBox in
Zurich Switzerland. This new version will take place
in the Center of Art SHED IM EISENWERK in Frauenfeld
Zurich, during the international event "Objects/Projects".

[001]

You are cordially invited to take part in this international
project by sending audio works or documents which will be
insert into the JukeBox.

Today more than 300 artists are taking part in this project
with more than 680 audio experimental pieces.

This project proposes to open a new space of listening and of
creation concerning the new investigations in the field
of sound, of music, of alternative visual arts and of
other disciplines which used audio medium. It is a
project on the " fixed sound " or/and the " recorded sound ".

How the sound invests the contemporary languages today?
and which artistic activity and musical possible today?

[002]

This new project Collective JukeBox, after the project of the CollageTV on TV and the versions 1.0 to 2.1 of JukeBox these two last years, is using a "real" jukebox machine on which the audience can select and listen freely to all the audio contributions sent to the project. The JukeBox is presented each time in convivial rooms where the audience can drink, smoke, discuss and listen, as into a bar. The project is permanent and a lot of artists take part in since four years. Today more than 300 artists had send more than 680 contributions we can listen to on the machine. The evolutionary banks of CDAUDIOS we put into the jukebox, is growing progressively with new contributions, and becomes representative of new emerging sound investigations in art and music. It is not a question of a collection carried out by collecting, but of a project in which each artist may find voluntarily his or her own engagement into new audio ways and processes.

You can send to the postal address below your sound and/or musical contributions (works, excerpts, documents, etc.) on CD, MD, or DAT, before the 25th of october 2000. Because of the particular territory of this open and free project, we prefer receive unpublished and original works and specific ones for the machine. It's preferable that the duration of each work doesn't exceed 10 minutes, if possible. If your submission concerns audio files on internet, just send the url to download them (mp3 only, otherwise just send a message to the moderator joy@thing.net).

PLEASE don't send your pieces by email !

[003]

These contributions are then burned on CD, and inserted in the JukeBox machine and are "playable" like tracks starting from the board of the Juke. The participating artists keep the moral right and the copyright on sent works. JukeBox is free and not-paying. The user chooses one or two selections on the board of the JukeBox according to the displayed list of the names of the artists and the titles of the works, as on a traditional jukebox. All the selected artists are named (quoted) into each presentation of the project (publication, catalogs, etc). You can invite two or three other artists to participate to the JukeBox project. The actual list of the participants is available on the website <http://homestudio.thing.net/>.

I remind you that today more than 300 artists take part in: a new community is emerging.

[004]

The project Collective JukeBox is permanent today and evolutionary, you can send your contributions when you want. Each presentation of the project is a step of this one, and contains the whole of the participations.

Be inventive vis-a-vis of the jukebox!

Before making a submission, please visit the homestudio website, to familiarise yourself with the project <<http://homestudio.thing.net/>>. We plan to realize next presentations in 2001 into other places : Marseille, Nantes, Roma, Tours, Vienna, Chicago, Nice, Seoul, and so on. Each time you'll be prevent about each next presentation. We are working too on a new version of the project on internet, for this we'll ask you at time to take part in with new specific internet-based and streaming sound works. This project will appear here: <http://jukebox.thing.net/>
We are working now on a proposition of GPL (General Public License) for the whole project as a collaborative and cooperative free system (dispositive).

[005]

please feel free to join the jukebox 3.0!

DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS: 25 october 2000

Send your works to:
Jerome Joy, BP 74, 06372 MOUANS SARTOUX Cedex, FRANCE.
email: joy@thing.net

[006]

Past events:

- 1996 "Collage Musiques d'Appartement", non-stop hi-fi dispositive into a public apartment.
- 1996 "Collage Musiques de Plein Air", non-stop sound-system dispositive in a public place.
- 1997 "Collage TV", 38 TV-programs of 15 minutes each, white screen + sounds.
- 1997 "Collage Audiotheque", La Station, consultation place with audio-cassettes.
- 1998 "Collage JukeBox 1.0", jukebox. (version 1.0, Bregenz Austria)
<http://thing.at/orfkunstradio/BREGENZ/KIDS/collage.html>
http://thing.at/orfkunstradio/BREGENZ/IS/RADIO/RA/is-21_7a.ram
<http://thing.at/orfkunstradio/BREGENZ/RA/jukebox.ram>
- 1999 "Collage JukeBox 2.0", jukebox. (version 2.0, Lyon France)
- 2000 "Collage JukeBox 2.1", jukebox. (version 2.1, Tourcoing France)

[007]

<http://homestudio.thing.net/>

Collective JukeBox

International co-operative project moderated by Jerome Joy.

The digital revolution " changes the world ", it " changes even the logic of the representation " and creates new community spaces. The JukeBox project, under the upset hegemony of musical industry, opened a shared and temporary space, supported by the only participation of the artists and actively developed with the Internet networks.

All the observers are speaking today about true changes and transfers of the artistic practices and emergences of new investigations, as much in the fields of the visual arts that in the actual musics. In these two often differentiated fields, new sound practices develop themselves around the techniques of the recorded sound, digitalization, the networks and experiments and multiple diffusions and broadcastings which allow these technologies. The diversity and the implication of these transfers and changes clear today grounds of experiments which call in question or stake the methods of representation commonly accepted such as the concert and the exhibition.

It's difficult to remain indifferent in this context under full development, with the transformation of the practices of art and the actual music, in their own spaces of production, transmission and monstration, which today are most of the time unified in real time. The studio, with the image of the homestudio, becomes more and more delocalized, even dematerialized. These practices break with the autonomy of work and are immersed in peripheral fields (data processing, the communication, the social, etc.) who modify their identification deeply.

It is not a question of a rupture but well of a continuity, which is, during this technological, accelerated and renewed time. If they are claimed activities more and more , they are not always also explicit and remain sometimes even dissimulated ones in the state of slight effraction in the referent territory where they are immersed. Their object and their objective appear far away from the indexed categories of art and of the music and yet their processual methods are undoubtedly resulting from these fields. All these activities recognize the telematic revolution.

The JukeBox Project since 1996 had develop an autonomous and evolutionary dispositive by opening an experimental co-operative space around these new sound and musical investigations. This contributive dispositive is not a documentary project or a "discographic" catalogue, but proposes well a generating and collective space submitted to any selection and invested by many artists. The free mode of consultation and sine qua non activation by the listeners allow the installation of a user-friendly space suggested to the public. The project opens not only one "forum" and a space of "scan", but also a permanent laboratory.

description:

Jukebox containing between 500 and 1000 sound and musical parts produced by international artists and composers , 80 X 64 X 64 cm, 300W - 220V CA, 160 kg

coproductions: Nice Fine Arts, the Station Nice, Kunstverein Bregenz

Austria, the Museum of Contemporary Art of Lyon, Gallery ERSEP Tourcoing, and Frac Paca for the development of the project, the Sound Studio AudioLab Villa Arson Nice and Association ICI for the technical realization, the server The Thing NYC for the Internet.

jerome joy
::: <http://homestudio.thing.net/>

jerome joy
BP 74
F- 06372 Mouans Sartoux Cedex
FRANCE
===== end of example 1 =====

===== beginning of example 2 =====
Date: 10.3.00
From: tsnuKitnA (tsnukitna@acidlife.com)
Subject: deface!

<http://www.acidlife.com/deface>

DEFACE!

Dedicated to Piero Cannata.

Deface! is disfigurement in its non-negative meaning, act of real union between who originally made the work and its viewer. In the time of digital reproducibility, deface! destroys artist's sacred role giving the spectator the possibility to actively operate on the work making it definitely of his own.

But Deface! is something more. Deface! makes the dead and static work of art something constantly mutable, finally alive. Something that is not there just to be admired and venerated but is indefinable, receding, ready to be something else after every new intervention on it by someone. And exactly with the destruction of the aura of holiness surrounding the work and the artist and the impossibility to consider a work concluded, finished (the work is concluded just with its destruction), Deface! makes itself unfit for the market traffics and for the gowned critics' soilings. The art of Deface! is a living, open, collective art. It's the collective destruction of art. Deface it!

HOW TO USE IT.

1. Download from our archive the image of the work you want to deface.
2. Operate on the work in the way you prefer.

3. Send the altered image to deface@acidlife.com

We will put the new work in place of the old one.

They take part to deface!:- Jean Arp, Francis Bacon, Giacomo Balla, Jean-Michel Basquiat, William Blake, Hieronymous Bosch, Fernando Botero, Canaletto, Caravaggio, Marc Chagall, Jean Dubuffet, Marcel Duchamp, Max Ernst, Paul Gauguin, Giorgione, Vincent Van Gogh, Paul Klee, Gustav Klimt, Rene Magritte, Edouard Manet, Man Ray, Edvard Munch, Parmigianino, Pablo Picasso, Jackson Pollock, Mike Rothko, Peter Paul Rubens, Tintoretto, Henri De Toulouse-Lautrec, William Turner, Diego Velazquez, Ian Vermeer.

<http://www.acidlife.com/deface>

===== end of example 2 =====