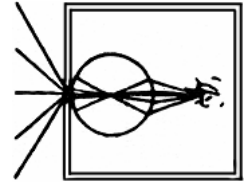


# CHArt

COMPUTERS AND THE HISTORY OF ART



## DIGITAL ARCHIVE FEVER

CHArt twenty-Third Annual Conference

Thursday 8 - Friday 9 November 2007, Birkbeck, University of London

## - ABSTRACTS -

### THURSDAY 8 NOVEMBER

#### **New Media and Web 2.0 Challenges for Cultural Organisations: A New Organisational Model: the 'Cultural Learning Organisation'**

Eva Moraga, *Madrid, Spain.*

The debate surrounding new media, Web 2.0 and cultural organisations usually focuses on four key areas: the collection and conservation of works of art; education and public access; curatorship and exhibition organisation; and legal issues relating to ownership. Surprisingly however, the discussion does not cover the adaptations and innovations that must now be made from organisational and management standpoints, in order to confront not only the challenges posed by new artistic/cultural proposals but also the evolution of society and technological collaborative tools over the next few decades.

In the evolution of the concept of the artistic object over the past century, most museums and other organisations (and the market) have been able to assimilate such objects, barely altering their organisational structures. While the artistic object could be reified, packed and stored, the ways of formulating and carrying out the various traditional functions of cultural organisations hardly varied over the past decades. But now the situation is far more complex. Museums, libraries, archives, theme parks and websites seem to homogenise in the new enhanced technological social sphere.

I would like to introduce a new topic to help cultural organisations respond to the constant transformation entailed by new media and Web 2.0 in the characteristics and functions of works, audiences and other agents intervening in the artistic process. In a polymorphic environment where new media, and artworks in general, are changing so rapidly, organisations need to be flexible and introspective enough to welcome mechanisms of reflection on the evolution of their activities and performance that will allow them to present innovative responses to the continuing transformations of the medium. Such organisations need new models that favour the emergence of a new vision of cultural institutions. New media and Web 2.0 require twenty-first century cultural organisations to become 'cultural learning organisations' that continue their traditional functions alongside new functions, thanks to continuous reflection (internal and external), effective participation at all levels (internal and external), continuous learning and shared distribution of knowledge, all based on the conception of a new kind of cultural organisation leadership.

#### **'Immersion' An Interactive Archive of Sound Art**

J Milo Taylor, *London College of Communication, London, UK.*

Contemporary society offers new opportunities for interaction, involvement and community building. Sound, as a natural phenomenon, and medium of artistic practice, remains immersive, sensual, and elusive to capture by language. Conceptual modalities established by Internet practice and post-structuralist philosophy suggest innovative methods of organising and presenting cultural resources. This paper will present current Ph.D. research being undertaken at the Creative Research into Sound Arts Practice Research Unit (CRiSAP), University of the Arts London.

Discourse surrounding sound art deals with a profoundly divergent set of artists; work ranges from Italian Futurism, to Surrealism, Dada, John Cage and Fluxus to Pierre Schaefer's musique concrète and the electronic innovations of Stockhausen. The subsequent generation of artists developed sound installations, video art and site-specific sound sculptures. Technologies were explored, deconstructed and used in ways unintended by their designers. Later, industrial artists and their contemporaries further developed an art of sound which then

underwent a significant expansion in the digital age with the availability of affordable devices for the recording, organisation and presentation of soundworks.

The focus of the work is the development of an interactive and immersive digital environment. The work is currently investigating the potential of Web 2.0 technologies, specifically XML, Ajax, MySQL and X3D. The application at its core is a dynamic database allowing rich semantic manipulations of digitised cultural objects, a methodology that allows visitors the chance to deconstruct, compare and contrast previously unconnected practice in an enriched multi-sensory, audiovisual environment.

This presentation will introduce some theoretical underpinnings of the work, informed by such people as Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Michel Foucault and Lev Manovich. It will also discuss the working methodology and deliver a demonstration of the work in progress which should be of interest to anyone working with concepts of the digital archive, audience involvement and the potentialities of digital knowledge.

### **Virtually the 'Real Thing'? Changing Definitions of Authenticity in the Display and Interpretation of a Virtual Artefact**

Tara Chittenden, *the Law Society, London, UK.*

The twenty-first century trend toward virtual interaction, virtual worlds and web tools that enable people to create and share their own information at an individual level is causing institutions such as museums to reconsider their position as providers of knowledge. The increase of 'new attentional cultures' (Lemke 2004), and a cultural revolution which challenges 'top-down' information provision, is leading museums to experiment with new modes of technological and virtual display. As museums are increasingly attracted by virtual reality, as a new mode of display and a novel way to draw visitors, I propose a need to examine the role of the virtual object in the museum.

In this paper I will explore the place of virtual reality in museums in relation to new web-based approaches to sharing and interacting with virtual information spaces. In so doing I call for a re-examination of the status of the 'original' in terms of the material artefact housed in museums. If historical objects are sanctioned and prized for their material authenticity, then what role does the virtual artefact play? This paper addresses definitions of authenticity in the museum, questioning what educational potential may emerge at the intersection of tangible and virtual forms. The technological migration from material to virtual artefact is at present gradual, with museums favouring virtual reality to create immersive environments or to augment the museum experience through a surrogate that can withstand manipulation. The potential disappearance of the material artefact from the arena of public display suggests that museums need to engage with the underlying interpretative strategies that new generations deploy in response to virtual artefacts.

### **A Visual Arts Perspective on Open Access Institutional Repositories**

Jacqueline Cooke and Dafna Ganani-Tomares, *Goldsmiths College, University of London, UK.*

Open access digital repositories now enable researchers to communicate their research output by means of the WWW, contributing to the 'culture of abundance'. However, repository development in the visual arts remains undeveloped. In this paper, based on my work on Goldsmiths Research Online in the SHERPA-LEAP project and as a subject librarian for visual cultures, I explore the qualities of research in the visual arts, which affect how we represent it in repositories.

What is a visual arts perspective? - Research may be practice-based, documentation may be created specifically for the archive. The research environment extends beyond the university into the art world, the web and media. Visual artists are concerned with representation; context matters. How does the repository act in comparison to other contexts?

How do the criteria of the academic research environment i.e. publication, validation, citation, peer review translate into the visual art sector? What constitutes an adequate representation of research? I will show examples of an exhibition, event/performance, lecture, video, installation, database, software and visual work and consider activities such as citation in literature, mimicry and mockery as citation, ephemerality, the online CV, gallery talks, teaching and blogs, with reference specifically to the research of Prof. Janis Jefferies and Dr. Dafna Ganani-Tomares.

Visual arts research produces diverse digital objects, which are often in complex, multimedia formats. What are the technical issues we need to address to enable us to present and preserve these materials? How do the conventions of the repository environment map onto this subject area? How do metadata standards developed in museums and galleries reflect concerns of these different domains? I give examples of the use of generic standards to help with decisions.

My conclusion is that work in this area is at an early stage. I advocate a pragmatic approach, backed up with further reflexive research.

### **ArtPad: A Collection. A Connection**

Melanie Kjorlien and Quyen Hoang, *Glenbow Museum, Calgary, Alberta, Canada.*

The website *ArtPad: A Collection. A Connection* ([www.glenbow.org/artpad](http://www.glenbow.org/artpad)) has ambitious goals. At its core is the online presentation of works from the Glenbow Museum's contemporary art collection, an exceptional collection that is not often presented to the public. Simple enough, but we also wanted to present the collection to an untapped audience for the museum: teenagers. Further, we strove to present the content in an educational context, yet in a way that high school art students would want to receive and interact with the artwork, with each other, and with the museum. Ideally, this balance of (presented) museum content and Web 2.0 functionality will create user dialogues about the artwork featured and contemporary art in general, and user reactions to the art they can create and post on *ArtPad*.

The needs and preferences of the intended user were at the fore during development of *ArtPad*. Sample audience groups were consulted throughout the development process. Will this evaluation pay-off? Will young art aficionados be engaged enough by the artwork and the content presented to begin interacting with it, expressing their own views and questions about contemporary art and creating their own artwork?

*ArtPad* goes live in August 2007; this paper will focus on the user evaluation process employed to develop the site, the features and components developed specifically for the target audience, and the Web 2.0 components used to create and build discussion around contemporary art practice. *ArtPad* dispenses with the traditional curatorial stance – that of one authoritative voice – and instead opens the discourse to users. This curatorial view and results and reactions to the site (from its first three months) will also be addressed in the paper.

### **Your Paintings: Institutions, Identities and Interactions**

Bridget McKenzie, *Flow Associates, London, UK*; Jon Pratty, *24 Hour Museum, Brighton, UK.*

The presenters will explore the challenges and possibilities of interpreting digitised visual art collections in ways that respond to opportunities offered by the new wave of the web. They will explore how new approaches to the web can radically alter and enhance the nature of institutions' relationships with their audiences.

Alternative taxonomies and new tagging technology could generate richer 'neural networks' of meaning between paintings, their makers, their histories, their various locations and the full range of possible interpreters. This could bring new responsibilities for curators in the making of meaning.

All these possibilities are enshrined in an emerging national cataloguing project promoted by the Public Catalogue Foundation. It aims to use the latest online technologies to democratise access to the nation's paintings, 80% of which are not visible to the public. This national project is not tied to the existing political structures of cultural institutions, so it offers an exciting opportunity to build networks of similarity and serendipity in a sustainable way.

The distribution of publicly-owned paintings, many of which are in non-cultural venues such as police stations or hospitals, is the biggest opportunity for this project but also its biggest challenge. This paper will draw out the nature of these challenges, looking at new ways to make connections.

### **Transforming the Methods Network: Where's My Community Dude?**

Neil Grindley, *JISC, London, UK*; Torsten Reimer, *AHRC ICT Methods Network, London, UK.*

For almost three years, the AHRC ICT Methods Network has engaged with research communities in UK Higher Education and supported the use of advanced ICT methods through a programme of funded events such as workshops, seminars and conferences. In the last year of our programme we have changed the focus to some extent and are now working on ways of exploiting the knowledge that has been generated and the connections that have been made between individuals and groups who have participated in these events.

The Digital Arts & Humanities community website ([www.arts-humanities.net](http://www.arts-humanities.net)) has been developed to provide a virtual space for any groups or individuals who are interested in using ICT techniques for arts and humanities scholarship. The platform includes tools for interaction such as blogs and fora, and also allows users to disseminate their activities more widely, not only to colleagues in similar fields but also, potentially, to

practitioners working in other disciplines. In this paper, we propose to explain the rationale behind this idea, the means used to set it in motion, and to draw conclusions about how to transform the legacy of the Methods Network into a resource that can be used by a broad range of virtual communities. This will be done with a particular focus on the arts community, which the Methods Network has supported from its inception.

Projects and programmes - no matter how substantial the initial funding - have finite terms of existence and are therefore, by definition, not as sustainable as initiatives that provide resources and functionality that communities themselves define as important, useful and worth preserving. The relationship between Digital Arts & Humanities and the 'official' Methods Network website will be reflected upon and conclusions will be drawn in relation to the institutional and community paradigms implicit in the conference theme.

## **FRIDAY 9 NOVEMBER**

### **Collection online: the British Museum Collection Database goes public**

Tanya Szrajber, *Head of Documentation, The British Museum, UK.*

Over the next three years, the British Museum is making its collections database publicly available on the web. The release of the records will be phased, beginning with those for 2D art works (July 2007) and gradually adding material in a staged process. Conservation and science records will also be included, as well as those for the photographic collections, previously regarded as archival or ancillary material. The records include images as well as text, although not every record will have an image, which is understandable considering the size of the database, which consists of nearly 1,700 000 records.

The database will be shown as it stands, as a work in progress, and will include terminology files as well as catalogue (object records). All fields will be available, apart from price paid, personal address and NGR (National Grid Reference). The public is invited to add comment to the records, and this process will assist the Museum.

It is assumed that users will vary from researchers to interested non-specialist members of the public. No attempt has been made to re-write the records to suit an 'average' public user, should such a person exist. This is partly due to the size of the database but also because the priority is to update the records with accurate and up-to-date specialist information, in order to assist curators and researchers with their work. As a result, the records vary in content. A high percentage of records were created by documentation staff for over twenty years, working from Registers (bound ledgers) and record cards on Merlin's predecessors, and may contain very basic, or even outdated, information. At the other extreme, records edited or created by curators may contain very specialist descriptions and terminology. Although this is not the first time that the BM collections have been directly accessible on the Web, previous ventures (e.g. COMPASS) covered a small percentage of the collection, and special records were created for public access. The sheer size and complexity of the collection database, and the presentation of 'raw data' makes this project a very different venture, and challenging in a number of ways, which will be explored in this paper.

### **Designing the Electronic Archive: Archive Fever and the Archival Economy of 'Getty Images Online' Operations**

Doireann Wallace, *Dublin Institute of Technology, Eire.*

The emergence and consolidation in the past decade or so of giant electronic stock image banks such as Getty Images and Corbis, trading in the reproduction rights of 'visual content' of all kinds, has radically affected the global circulation of images, yet there has been practically no exploration to date of the enormous changes and the diversification of image banks' field of practice due to electronic and network circulation via the Internet.

This paper provides a theoretical perspective on the impact of digital technologies on the practices of stock image banks. Archive fever is a desire for context and law engendered by the archive's inherent reproducibility. This is greatly exacerbated by digital circulation—deterritorialisations at the level of technology and interpretation that have increased the desire for immediacy, familiarity and context. On a practical level, archival economy, or the institution of laws and limits, seeks to both capitalise on and compensate for these deterritorialisations, in other words, to reterritorialise for profit. Stock image agencies have built or expanded their current enterprises on the basis of deterritorialisations at the level of archival substrate. At the most basic level, electronic storage and circulation have sped up and automated transactions, allowing consumers to conduct their own image searches and to download images instantly. Image banks also take advantage of the reproducibility of the digital image file, which need not be degraded through multiple use, and of new possibilities in the design of image search engines. Through their websites, which interface between agencies and users, they negotiate the 'territory' of the Internet: treading a path between the Utopian appeal of its potential for open access and democratisation, the communicative and marketing opportunities engendered by a fluid multi- or meta-media substrate, the desire for context and familiarity that the proliferation of technology engenders, and the need to provide simple, user-

friendly search engines and information and limit appropriation and abuse of their economic resources. All of this amounts to the capitalisation of the possibilities of electronic circulation and distribution, to reterritorialisations both at the level of law and of user interface. This paper examines these issues with reference to the archival and design practices of Getty Images' web interface.

### **Re:Inventing the Art Historical Archive. Towards a Rhizomatic and Funeous Social Memory**

James MacDevitt, *Cerritos College, USA.*

In *Le Musée imaginaire*, André Malraux posited a revolutionary merging of traditional art historical discourse with a modern photographic means of dissemination. In fact, art history and the institutions that have 'disciplined' that discipline (such as university survey courses and museum archives) have always been intimately interwoven with technology (from the magic lantern to digital archives).

This paper will examine how a serious restructuring of the art historical canon is now under way with a conceptual restructuring and expansion of the art historical archive made possible by Web 2.0 technologies. As countless semioticians have demonstrated, categorisation fundamentally gains significance from the 'order of things'; each object's 'meaning' is directly tied to its position amongst other objects. Within this context, power over the construction of the art historical canon is structurally linked to those individuals and institutions responsible for the selection, organisation, and maintenance of art history's archived specimens. This has meant, in the not-so-distant past, that the supposedly objective and academic archive and its associated institutions have served to further the political intensions and voyeuristic desires of those groups and individuals of the dominant class, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc. responsible for creating and maintaining the collective histories of society.

The anamorphic nature of the art historical archive arises simultaneously with a privileging of certain objects over others (e.g. a painting over a 'snapshot'), with a causally connected structuring of certain objects in relation to other objects (e.g. a 'preliminary' sketch leading to a 'finished' painting). It is this hierarchical and causal relationship, which is structurally built into the archive, that allows museums, art historians, and art critics to create grand narratives of authorship, nationhood, and epochal chronology.

The new anti-canonical archive strives to be inclusive, rather than exclusive. By doing so, any perspectival position, any anamorphic narrative, is countered by other, equally valid, specimens from the archive. In effect, the Enlightenment project of categorisation and organisation has imploded upon itself by its own structural logic. Sensory overload makes any interpretation true, but not exclusively so. In this dialogic, Malraux's proverbial 'museum without walls' has reinvented itself as the archive without hierarchy, the canon without limits.

### **From Information to Knowledge: An Unfinished Canadian Case Study**

Sarah Parsons, *York University, Toronto, Canada.*

For the last ten years, the online Canadian Centre for Contemporary Art ([www.ccca.ca](http://www.ccca.ca)) has assembled a growing collection of previously inaccessible or hard-to-find quality information on Canadian art and on a broad range of artists working in Canada. Placing the resource on the Internet has made it available to a diverse group of users in Canada, serving the art community as a whole by drawing together and meeting the needs of both content drivers/providers (artists) and users (teachers, students, researchers, curators, writers, collectors and the general public). In that sense, the CCCA has become a technological interface for the Canadian art community. Although the project has received significant government grant support through digital initiatives and arts councils, it was a community, not a government initiative.

This paper will explore the CCCA as a new kind of cultural resource, one that seeks a community managed balance between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' access to cultural resources. The Canadian art community has not traditionally been understood as a cohesive entity. Fractured by cultural and linguistic differences, geography, profession, and by market niches, its shared needs and goals have never been well understood or served. However, art teachers, curators, artists, collectors, writers, and researchers all have a vested interest in a centre for the documentation of and research on Canadian visual culture. They require access to images, biographical information, interviews, archival finding aids and critical writings. The core information they need does not differ dramatically but how they turn that information into knowledge does. This paper will probe that process and suggest possible future directions for foregrounding and enhancing the move from information to knowledge through the CCCA, such as user portals. I will also consider the broader international implications of this effort to reify and serve an art community through a new model of cultural access.

## **Computer Art Then and Now: Evaluating the V&A's Collections in the Digital Age**

Douglas Dodds, *Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK.*

Until recently, the Victoria and Albert Museum held relatively few works that illustrated the early years of computer-generated art and design. However, with the recent acquisition of the Patric Prince Collection and the archives of the Computer Arts Society, the V&A now holds an internationally significant collection of computer art. Pioneers represented in the Museum's holdings include Harold Cohen, Charles Csuri, Jean-Pierre Hébert, Ken Knowlton, Manfred Mohr, Vera Molnar, Frieder Nake, George Nees, Lillian Schwartz, Roman Verostko and Mark Wilson, among many others. We also intend to acquire additional contemporary works that complement the earlier material in the collection.

The paper will describe the V&A's collecting policy in this area, and highlight issues involved in acquiring, preserving and displaying early works, many of which only survive on paper. The bulk of the artworks consist of line plotter drawings, screen prints, inkjet prints, posters and photographs, but there are also examples in other media, including 3D images and computer files. The Patric Prince Collection in particular also contains a huge quantity of books, archival material and ephemera. We will need to find ways of making all of this accessible to the widest possible audience. The paper will outline plans to digitise key works from the collections and to make the information available online, building on earlier work undertaken by the CACHe project at Birkbeck. We also expect to include key works in future V&A exhibitions, displays and publications. One of the challenges will be to ensure that the collections can be framed in an academic context and presented to a technologically and aesthetically advanced audience that now takes computer-generated images for granted.

## **Curation in the Digital Age - How are Digital Media Changing the Way we Preserve and Curate Work, and What are the Implications for Audience Experience and Audience Development?**

Janis Jefferies, *Goldsmiths Digital Studios, Goldsmiths, University of London, London, UK.*

Works of digital and Internet art, performance, installation, conceptual, and other variable media art represent some of the most compelling and significant artistic creations of our time. These works constitute a history of alternative artistic practice, but because of their ephemeral, technical, or otherwise variable natures, they also present significant obstacles to accurate documentation, access, and preservation.

Without strategies for preservation many of these vital works - and possibly whole new genres such as early Internet art - will be lost to future generations. Long term strategies must closely examine the nature of ephemeral art and identify core aspects of these works to preserve. Will the future experience these works as physical traces and documentation? Emulated media artifacts? Dynamic cultural events re-performed? All of these?

On the other hand, with digital content there is almost no cost to keeping absolutely everything for ever and ever. Aside from artist-generated media art works, people downloading images or music have a problem of searching and finding what may be of value and significance within all the stuff that can now be stored.

The web makes us rethink what we mean by 'preserve' and 'archive'. In the digital world information is preserved only through interaction. For instance, the Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science and Technology in Montreal has established projects which aim to preserve new media artworks through documentation, metadata and contextualisation to guarantee long-term access to research.

This paper will examine the kinds of tools needed to help us decide what to save and how new approaches such as social networked curation might help. We will examine three collaborative case studies of computer-based art projects selected from the range of active projects by those now involved with the Arts and Business project, including Tate and also the Victoria and Albert Museum, which now holds some of the early British Computer Arts Society projects in its Prints and Drawings department.