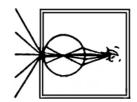# CHArt

COMPUTERS AND THE HISTORY OF ART

CHArt TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL CONFERENCE
Thursday 10 - Friday 11 November 2005

THEORY AND PRACTICE

ABSTRACTS

THURSDAY 10 NOVEMBER, SESSION ONE:

Relocating the Frame: Object-oriented[1] and locative art[2] environments.
Elizabeth Coulter-Smith, *Birmingham Institute of Art and* Design, UK; Graham Coulter-Smith, *Southampton Solent University, UK.*

The locative project is in a condition of emergence, an embryonic state in which everything is still up for grabs, a zone of consistency yet to be formed. As an emergent practice, locative art - like locative media generally - is simultaneously opening up new ways of engaging in the world and mapping its own domain. (Drew Hemment, 2004)

Artists and scientists have always used whatever emerging technologies existed at their particular time in history to push the boundaries of their fields of practice. The use of new technologies or the notion of 'new media' is neither particularly new nor novel. Humans are adaptive, evolving and will continue to invent and explore technological innovation.

This paper addresses the role of adaptive and/or 'intelligent' art in the future of public spaces and how this intervention alters the relationship between theory and practice? Does locative or installation-based art reach more people and does 'intelligent' or 'smart' art have a larger role to play in the beginning of this century?

The speakers will discuss their current collaborative prototype, and within the presentation will demonstrate how software art has the potential to activate public spaces and therefore contribute to a change in spatial or locative awareness. It is therefore argued that the role and perhaps even the representation of the audience/viewer is left altered through this intervention.

1. A form of electronic imagery created by a collection of mathematically-defined lines and/or curves.

2. An experiential form of art which engages the viewer both from within a specific location and in response to their intentional or unintentional input.

Observing 'Systems-Art' from a Systems-Theoretical Perspective.
Francis Halsall, *School of Art and Design, Limerick, Republic of Ireland.*

This paper takes the forthcoming exhibition, *Open Systems: Rethinking Art c.1970*, at Tate Modern as a starting point for a discussion on how to theorise 'systems-art'. Systems-art emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as a new paradigm in artistic practice. Such art is characterised by: artistic responses to new technologies; the use of so-called 'new media' (including computer art); the emergence of digital and network art and an interest in a systems-aesthetic.

I argue that such artistic practice presents particular problems to established art-historical methods. The emergence of these problems is two-fold.

First: The wide variety of systems-art, or that which explores the systems-aesthetic, includes the following characteristics: an interest in the aesthetics of networks; the exploitation of new technology and new media; unstable, or de-materialised physicality; the prioritising of non-visual aspects and an engagement (often politicised) with the institutional systems of support (such as the gallery, discourse, or the market) within which it occurs. These characteristics often manifest themselves in the challenge which such art presents to Modernist paradigms of art-making and identity.

Second: Art history as it is commonly practiced, remains largely structurally unaltered since its Modernist foundations as an autonomous discipline in the nineteenth century. It therefore focuses its attentions primarily upon singular objects, and provides accounts of these objects in predominantly visual terms. It is thus, I argue, insufficient in dealing with the ambiguities and complexities of systems-art.

Having introduced, via specific examples, some key concepts of systems-art I then argue that systems-theory, exemplified by that of German sociologist Niklas Luhmann, provides an effective theoretical model to account for such art. This is because it shifts its attention from singular objects to the systems from which art emerges. These include systems of display, exchange, discursive systems and artworks themselves which display systemic qualities.

In particular I will introduce the systems-theoretical vocabularies of Emergence, Complexity and (systems-contingent) Observation as they are discussed by Luhmann and demonstrate their application to the complexity of systems-art.

THURSDAY 10 NOVEMBER, SESSION TWO:

Problematics of Making Ambiguity Explicit in Virtual Reconstructions: A case study of the Mausoleum of Augustus.
John Pollini and Nicholas Cipolla, *University of Southern California, Los Angeles, California, USA.*

The representation of antiquity using virtual reconstructions creates a highly ambiguous relationship between data, interpretation, and presentation. Virtual 3-D reconstructions have considerable value as visualisation tools, bringing an immediacy of spatial perception and experience to researchers and students alike. Whether in the context of university teaching and research or the setting of web-based sites on the Internet, virtual reconstructions are problematic intellectual productions. They can be seductive if they lack critique and citation.

The relationship between data and reconstruction should be open to interrogation and clarification on demand, thus allowing consumers of research products (as is already the case with books or site reports) to see the link between evidence and interpretation. When authorship or the evidentiary basis is not transparent, the virtual reconstruction plays a dubious role in education. In other words, while maintaining the immediacy and interactivity of the virtual experience, the equivalent of footnotes should be accessible within the virtual world. This paper presents as a case study a virtual 3-D Mausoleum of Augustus, in which the relationship between the written and archaeological evidence, on the one hand, and a restored virtual world, on the other, is made transparent using interactive, intuitive, and visual tools. Presented here is an explanation of theoretical and pedagogical concerns and a demonstration of solutions developed during three years of experimentation with archaeological reconstructions created by students in university courses.

Intermediality, Interdisciplinarity, Reliability: Reflections on a visualisation-based study of Pompeian frescos.
Hugh Denard, *Centre for Computing in the Humanities, Kings College, London, UK.*

No abstract.

THURSDAY 10 NOVEMBER, SESSION THREE:

Les Cyclistes.
David Furnham, *Middlesex University, UK.*

A creative and intellectual investigation of the film medium starting from the history and practice of the documentary genre but now defined as a site specific-event allows a complex flow of new ideas to interact with the concrete processes of realisation.

In my film world, theory and practice are bound by a developing understanding of the absurd and the hyperreal. Theoretical ideas are informed by creative performance and presentational decisions taken in the making process, and visa versa, leading to the emergence of novel creative outcomes and a theoretical model.

Les Cyclistes - as a touring event - creates a virtual world, which is entertaining, knowledgeable and fun – a popular experience for all. The mixed media installation is a hyperreal cycling enthusiasts' world set in a marquee. An absurd world where archive and contemporary footage, memories and live performance mix and collide, around which visitors may navigate their own route. Alongside this installation is a silent film with piano accompaniment and live 'bonimenteur'/sound effects set around an historic Citroen van. *Les Cyclistes* is an entertaining and humorous portrayal of the passions of cycling in France and the UK. In addition, the event records cyclists' stories on video as its own archive.

Practice and theoretical considerations become an integral part of the research process and the presentation process.

Evaluation becomes an evaluation of the subject, the theme, the process and reception. Illuminative methodology using observation and interviewing techniques and analysis of written materials is used to seek out both congruities and incongruities of what has been assumed and can reveal new insights essential to the theoretical articulation.

This culturally comparative project reveals institutional strengths and weaknesses. The project will hopefully 'delight, fascinate, question' and give pleasure and engagement. It stimulates support for local government policies for healthy activity and cultural harmony and exchange. Within the academy, it offers collaborations and it can act as case study offering new insights into the film medium across many disciplines, disseminated through the written article and conference presentation. But it also raises questions about the standing of research by practice projects to the academic institution. There is ambivalence to the project as regards its collaborative definition and in acknowledging the amount of work involved. My previous projects led to the development of a new undergraduate programme – a major commitment on the part of the University. Yet there is no public mechanism which accounts for the fact that the new curricula developed out of the research by practice arena.

The Tour for *Les Cyclistes* is currently being devised. It will launch in Brighton and at the York Cycle Rally in June 2006 – then the open road awaits!

Digital Archiving as an Art Practice.
Dew Harrison, *Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, Scotland*.

Archiving is a cultural activity involving the creation of vast electronic databases, which document and preserve art past and present for our education and heritage. However, this activity does not belong solely in the domain of information specialists, museum curators and librarians. Archiving can also be accepted as a form of art practice, and the 'digital' archive - as a curatorial project, an art-based collaboration, or a piece of conceptual art. These new media art databases are being approached from a different direction and with a different intent than those of the major art galleries and national institutions. They are not constructed by trained archivists, but constitute 'archive' none-the-less.

Within my own practice I have directed web collaborations into one artwork, which is a form of curation but remains as practice. I have curated large online exhibitions, which live on dedicated servers and constitute a database, an archive of online work produced at that time under an overarching theme. I am in the process of archiving the work of 400 or so artists produced in the same weeklong media lab conditions over a period of eight years into an electronic database. This could be understood as a curatorial project. I have created an artwork which could be seen as an archive of Duchamp's work, but isn't. It could be said that an artist's website is an archive of their work, but not their practice, not a piece in its own right. When does the database archive exist as an artwork in itself then?

In this paper I intend to trace the idea of the archive as a form of art practice, from Duchamp to Art & Language, in that it situates investments in text and wordplay, indexing and database, archiving and curation as both content and medium for a conceptual practice.

THURSDAY 10 NOVEMBER, SESSION FOUR:

ROUND-TABLE DISCUSSION (ICA)

Democratising the Image: Creating a global learning community.
Led by David Ehrenpreis, *James Madison University, Virginia, USA.*

The ICA, the Mall, London, SW1Y 5AH (www.ica.org.uk) is located behind the British Academy. (www.britac.ac.uk)

FRIDAY 11 NOVEMBER, SESSION ONE:

The Representation of Artistic Practice in Digital Visual Culture.
Ann-Sophie Lehmann, *Utrecht University, Netherlands.*

Traditionally, artists have always reflected on their practice, technical achievements and representational skills. The genres of the self-portrait in front of the easel and the atelier-scene served this self-reflective element of artistic practice. New media art seems not to have generated a genre reflecting on its practical and technical procedures and skills yet.

Although process and technology are prominent features in many art works, the initial procedures of construction seem to be too 'technical' to be generating interesting visual material. Although many artists use their own image as working material, and viewers might become active practitioners in interactive artworks, the 'artist at work' is seldom represented as a 'work of art'. As the creative space of the media artist is currently more often described as laboratory than atelier, even practice tends to disappear inside a black box. Traditionally the laboratory evokes experiment and invention kept from the public view.

While new media art seems to exclude the representation of practice, other more applied domains of digital practice, like web-design and computer animation, have created self-reflective genres in which practice is represented. Making-of's and (to a lesser extent) tutorials feature the maker at work. Like their traditional precursors - the self-portrait and the atelier-scene - they serve to represent, celebrate and mystify professional skills of creation.

Based on an analysis of the making-of and recent theoretical studies on digital practice, I want to investigate the representational status of artistic practice in new media art. Using examples from different genres of new media art the following questions will be discussed: When does practice become representational? How do artists conceive and describe their creative spaces? Have digital production modes rendered creation invisible by transferring practice to the virtual realm?

ARTstor: A digital library for the history of art and the humanities.
Max Marmor, *ARTstor, USA.*

ARTstor (www.artstor.org) is a non-profit initiative, founded by The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation in 2001, with a mission to use digital technology to enhance scholarship, teaching and learning in the history of art and associated fields. The roots of ARTstor, as well as its name, can be traced to the Foundation's earlier creation of JSTOR (www.jstor.org). JSTOR's goal is to serve libraries and the scholarly community by building, making available, and preserving a reliable and comprehensive archive of important scholarly journal literature. The JSTOR archive now includes many key journals in the history of art and architecture, such as the *Art Bulletin*, *Burlington Magazine* and the *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*.

In March 1999, the Foundation began to explore ways in which it might help address community-wide needs for accessing and using images for non-commercial, educational and scholarly purposes. What digital resources do curators, educators, scholars, students, and others need to do their work more effectively and in new ways? How can the adoption of evolving standards and best practices in this domain be fostered? Where do the interests of various parts of the arts community overlap and how can different interests be addressed regarding the development and use of digital collections? Above all, how can work in this arena be developed, sustained and funded?

ARTstor's primary goals as an organisation are: 1) to assemble image collections from across many time periods and cultures that will, in the aggregate, have sufficient depth, breadth, and coherence to support a wide range of educational and scholarly activities; and 2) to create an organized, central, and reliable digital resource that supports the non-commercial use of images for research, teaching and learning.

As an expanding digital library offering (even at this early date) hundreds of thousands of digital images and related data, ARTstor seeks to provide scholars, teachers, and students with the kinds of image collections and software tools they need to make the pivotal transition from slides to digital images.

As an online resource available only to non-profit institutions, ARTstor seeks to create a secure, trustworthy space on the Internet for the educational, non-commercial use of digital images. This space is defined by a licensing framework that embraces - and seeks to accommodate the concerns and interests of - content owners, participating institutions, and end users.

As a non-profit organisation with roots in both higher education and the museum community, ARTstor strives to bring the international community of archives, libraries, and museums together around a set of shared values and common goals focused on teaching and learning. Essential to this effort is a commitment to identifying, understanding, and balancing the concerns and interests of content and rights owners with those of end users and those who represent them in a variety of institutional settings.

ARTstor became an independent non-profit organization in January 2004, and began offering a service in July of that year. In its first year of serving the educational and cultural communities nearly 400 colleges, universities, art schools, and museums in the U.S. have chosen to participate. In April 2005, ARTstor announced its availability in Canada, the beginning of an international outreach program.

This presentation will offer an overview of ARTstor's mission and genesis to date, a demonstration of ARTstor's collections, software and services, and a look ahead at the future, including prospects for availability in the UK.

FRIDAY 11 NOVEMBER, SESSION TWO:

MDID: Sharing digital content in a global, open-source community.
David Ehrenpreis, *James Madison University, Virginia, USA.*

In 1997, James Madison University (JMU) began development of the Madison Digital Image Database (MDID), a system for teaching with digital images online and in the classroom. Initially released as free, closed-source software, it was rewritten and published under an open-source licence in 2004. Today, dozens of colleges and universities are using MDID. Several other commercial and free digital content delivery systems are also available.

Since 1997, JMU librarians and art history curators have been creating and acquiring digital images for inclusion in MDID from many sources: slides and print media are scanned; instructors take photographs with digital cameras; images are purchased and image collections are licenced through third-party content providers.

MDID is a content delivery system: It is not preloaded with digital images. This paper will examine JMU's efforts to ignite a global network of shared institutional collections within the community of instructors and curators who use digital images in teaching and research and to establish a global repository through which instructors and scholars may share independently-acquired, curator-vetted digital images.

JMU promotes an atmosphere of sharing by freely distributing a quality content delivery system and recent enhancements to the MDID software now enable institutions to share collections. Sharing software has already led naturally to sharing content: JMU is sharing digital image collections with Grinnell College in Iowa and with Otis College of Art + Design in Los Angeles. Since many institutions harbour small, specialised collections of images to which they hold the copyright, MDID will also function as clearing house under open licensing schemes like 'public domain', 'open content', and 'Creative Commons'.

Adding shared and freely-accessible digital content to an open-source content delivery system like MDID will allow institutions to implement quickly and inexpensively a service for teaching and learning with digital images.

Video: Incorporeal, incorporated.
Stephen Partridge, *University of Dundee, Scotland.*

Continual, and changing, convergence places us (artists and audience) in a post-film and video era, where digital forms (mostly) replace, substitute, or simulate the previous media. This process of substitution and simulation explains the current lack of (perceived) distinctions between forms or media. For instance, it is common for us to say that we are going to watch a film on video or a DVD when what we actually mean is that we intend to watch a recording of a film or movie (without recourse to celluloid). It is possible that this lack of distinction is likely to erode even further with the advent of high definition television (HDTV) for broadcast and DVD with the improvement in picture quality and adoption of movie theatre aspect ratios. It may be worth asking whether this matters and why in the process of convergence, video has been substituted, while film has been simulated by digital technologies. To answer this question, there is a need to re-examine the development of video as a medium and its incorporation into digital form, while making some comparisons with film, and in turn, its simulation within the digital domain.

The convergence or incorporation of video with digital forms could be considered as almost complete. In any case, video as a term has had many definitions and uses, both culturally and technologically, and has become a generic word for a number of different things. As a specific term it refers originally to an electrical analogue waveform produced by scanning the light (the latent image) focused onto a photosensitive plate in the video camera. This is then re-created into the pattern (or raster) of horizontal scanning lines made by an electron beam onto the photosensitive surface of a cathode-ray-tube that in turn creates the image that appears on a television. This waveform in the digital domain is now essentially bit-mapped or sampled to appear on a contemporary television, computer screen or flat display panel. This converged analogue/digital use of the word can be referred to as the video-plane and as such was and remains incorporeal like its cousin, the audio waveform or sound sample, with which it is usually incorporated. This distinguishes it from the photographic and material-based medium of film - even though both film and video strive to produce one similar effect - a moving image as perceived by the human brain.

FRIDAY 11 NOVEMBER, SESSION THREE:

CHArt Annual General Meeting

Paper-Like Displays and Paper-Like Books.
Simon Downs, *Loughborough University School of Art & Design, UK.*

Historically there exists a sharp boundary, in both technological and design terms, between visual communications design for screen and for print. These distinctions stem from the nature of the broadcast environment and the subsidiary effects that these means of transmission impose on us, the users. Within these distinct areas of design, there are well-established visual metaphors for organising and presenting information in the form of books; there is also a degree of established good practice in screen design (web and multimedia). Each has its benefits: portability and extreme durability for books (running into thousands of years); interlinking and expandability for electronic design. Additionally, each has drawbacks, generally arising from technical issues inherent in the fabric of the media, such as binding technologies that constrain the form of the book and screen resolution that defines the presentation of the web page.

What if we could merge the best of these two worlds into one elegant whole? What form would the user interface take? This paper examines these questions and reaches some surprising conclusions. For instance, we could have a book with all that this entails - portability, durability, good quality typography and low cost - but with web-like features, such as search functions, networking and the ability to access other media. The technology is extant, but is it everything that the developers claim, and what should the designer's response be to such a medium? New creative insights are needed before the design response is as mature as the medium. In this proposed paper, these questions are examined, and some surprising conclusions are drawn.

FRIDAY 11 NOVEMBER, SESSION FOUR:

The Digital Image and the Pleasure Principle: The consumption of realism in the age of simulation.
Hamid van Koten, *University of Dundee, Scotland.*

Digital technology has rapidly become the dominant provider of mass entertainment. Digital Animation, CGI feature film, digital gaming.... the photorealistic, all immersive environment lies just ahead of us.

With reference to - and critique of - Marshall McLuhan's notions of 'hot and cold' media, and drawing upon Baudrillard, Lacan and Gerbner, this paper will seek to examine the social and philosophical implications of the digital environment.

Rather than adopting an 'effects theory' this paper will bring together these highly diverse approaches to understanding the digital environment, and will seek to explore the complex interrelationship between the producers, distributors and the consumers of the digital media product.

What are the forces at work in the production and consumption of these digital environments? What makes these products so popular? What are the narratives and representational issues involved and what do these tell us about our culture?

Specifically the paper will seek to uncover two themes: pre-modern narrative and realism as the dominant form of digital representations in terms of production; and the Lacanian notion of the Imaginary as the dominant drive towards the consumption of these representations.

From UNCAGED to Cyber-Spatialism.
Ralf Nuhn, *London, UK.*

The starting point for this paper is my recent project UNCAGED, which is a series of six 'telesymbiotic' installations, exploring interrelationships and transitions between screen-based digital environments and their physical surroundings. The presentation will include a commentated video documentation featuring the first exhibition of UNCAGED at the Victoria and Albert Museum (National Museum of Childhood) during May and June 2004.

I will introduce the initial motivation behind the project, which is based on the idea of 'uncaging' computer-based realities from the confines of their digital existence and bringing the remote computer world closer to our human experience. Furthermore, I will explore how my critical engagement with the work has nourished the impression that despite the perceptual fusion between the digital and the physical world, UNCAGED actually seems to highlight the distance between the two domains. In my view, all six exhibits bear an underlying absurdity, which arises from the very fusion between their physical and digital components. For me, this absurdity ultimately hints at the fallacy of the initial motivation behind UNCAGED and, in a wider context, questions the attempt to seek a place for meaningful human exchange and experiences in a virtual world.

In the second part of this presentation, I will discuss how these new insights have informed my new artistic approach, which is essentially concerned with exploring further the socio-philosophical issues implied in UNCAGED. In particular, I will refer to my project Cyber-Spatialism, which is a series of canvasses in which common computer connectors are inserted. The project obviously references Luigi Fontana's slashed canvasses and his concept of Spatialism, which is usually regarded as an attempt to overcome the illusionistic representation of space in painting by introducing real (physical) space. By substituting Fontana's slashes with computer connectors, Cyber-Spatialism implies an extension of the canvas into cyberspace, and thus attempts to address the notion, that in today's (globalized) culture real space is increasingly being replaced by virtual space.

For further information about UNCAGED, including photos and videos, please visit the project website at: http://www.telesymbiosis.com.