Art Projects on the Web: The ArtChivist site

Karen O'Rourke*

I. "Archiving as art" : the project

A. Objectives

The aim of the experimental project "Archiving as art" (part of the CNRS research program "The Archives of Creation") is to incite artists to reflect on the question of archives and archiving. How do we define what is worth archiving? What is implied in the process of constituting and organizing an archive? How can the material be accessed? How can it be updated? How can fixed and changing elements be articulated ? The participating artists have been invited to create digital artworks which can be presented both on and off-line.

To begin with, the ArtChivist website has functioned as a simple showcase for their proposals. It will evolve with the project. Once the works have been sufficiently developed, we plan to publish them in the form of a CD-Rom (or DVD-Rom). This publication will be completed and updated on the website as it continues to evolve.

The notion of archive plays an important part in the work of many contemporary artists. Some have chosen to intervene in a space or a given field rather than produce objects; they carry out ephemeral actions: "social sculptures", earthworks, network pieces, performances. To report on these activities, to show the public these works which were sometimes carried out without spectators, their authors often choose to present traces of what happened, photographs, videos, drawings which they gather into books or show in galleries or on the Internet. Others, observing the ever-growing circulation of data worldwide, have found that information and communication themselves could be vectors for their artistic practice. For them the process at work in the construction of information is as important as its putative content, and that's where they situate their interventions. Still others, beginning with Buren, have undertaken a critique of the museum system. At the beginning of the seventies, Broodthaers' "Museum of Modern Art, Department of Eagles" attacked traditional systems of classification, such as age, function or geographical location, thereby suggesting that they model our perception of the objects they purport to describe objectively.

The interest of this project for the " Archives of Creation " is above all methodological. For the artists, while inspired by scientific and documentary methods, propose new approaches not only in the treatment of their object but also in its constitution. More than just a tool used to elaborate knowledge, the archive can be envisaged as a significant component of our perceptual world, and indeed of our perception. Just as forgetting is necessary for our memory to function well, so a full wastebasket (" the circular file ") is an essential condition for the constitution of an archive. Since we can never hope to store everything for the delectation of future generations of researchers (unless we are aiming to show the folly of such an accumulation), we must operate choices, fix limits, priorities, motivate our collecting. In the choice which transforms objects into documents, what criteria of pertinence can we imagine? for what use? in what context? The archives constituted or used by the artists could be of different

kinds: from medical photographs found in doctors' files to recordings made by surveillance cameras, from traces of artistic performances to documents left by a brother who died of AIDS. The objective for the participants has been to build from these elements coherent artistic statements.

B. Methods

When the archives have been gathered and classified, the participants need to organize access to the documents using tools provided by the computer. Here they make a hypertextual object, from the audio-visual presentation of the documents to the interface program which allows us to consult them. In the elaboration of their projects, the authors must tackle some of the following problems:

• Specific aspects of photographic and videographic capture, the use of sound, animation and audio-visual editing with a view to creating an interactive program.

• Search for narrative and structural models (new possibilites of navigation, for instance) which take advantage of the proposed modes of interactivity.

• Relations between graphic and software interfacing. Articulation of construction units (screens, sound and image files).

• Creation of new hybrid forms in order to best exploit the media used, such as new kinds of connections between " canned " information (engraved on a mass memory such as a CD-Rom) and " live ", " fluid ", changeable, ever-changing information, which lives on servers and circulates through electronic networks.

• The degree of autonomy accorded to objects administered by a program. Questions posed by the automatisation of responses. The role to be played in archiving by bots and other forms of artificial life.

• The question of interactivity : just what participation is to be asked of the
" spectactor "? There are different modes and levels of interactivity: choices offered in navigation, registration of the actions and reactions of the user, treatment of data introduced by different categories of participants, from casual
" passers-by " to involved artists.

• The competence of the spectator. Integration of multiple levels: not only visual and symbolic (solliciting iconographic or linguistic skills, for example) but also technical (we could propose several levels of difficulty in the use of the tool, from a simple mouse click to indicate one's choice to relatively complex kinds of data manipulation).

The constructed archives will then be confronted with critical works. Texts written by theoreticians and artists (about their own and other artists' work) will offer clues, interpretations, readings, subjects for debate... On-line debates and discussions will be organized on the website and the text of these as well as individual papers will be published on the CD-Rom.

II. Archiving: from manipulating information to networking

Instead of beginning with the CD Rom realisation, then evolving toward the Internet, as we had originally planned, we have begun our projects on the Web. The CD-Rom publication will thus be an extension of the Web site, an archive of our archives at one point in their evolution.

A. Manipulating information

Archiving is a continuous process. Far from being exclusively technical or functional matters, each stage in this process of manipulating information — collecting, organizing, updating— engages major artistic decisions.

1. Collecting. Collecting deals mainly with the process of constituting archives. It involves methods of locating (searching for), gathering, solliciting, sorting and cataloguing data. It is at this stage that one begins to classify information, choosing what to look for, what to save and what to discard, what to remember and what to forget.

The objects of these collections range from the "monuments for eternity", statues, portraits and names engraved on headstones at the Montmartre cemetery, photographed by Elvire Bastendorff, to the ephemeral "sous-bocks" in cafés and bars, the painted cardboard coasters placed under beer mugs on which Luc-François Granier doodles, from trivial mass-produced objects (the postcards and discarded photo-machine pictures which serve as raw material for Marie-Hélène Boisdur De Toffol and Gilbertto Prado or the cheap plastic toys which make up "Clara's Archives") to literary memorabilia (manuscripts dating from the 16th century digitized by Edson de Oliveira) and even human beings (Robert Nideffer archives the entire faculty of the University of California, whereas Victoria Vesna gathers "busy people" in San Francisco, Melbourne, Dublin, Los Angeles and Paris).

Christophe Le François, "Entrée libre" (Free Entrance), Eduardo Kac, "Time Capsule", Edson de Oliveira and Artur Matuck, "The 'Reflux' archives", have collected traces of past art shows or events. "Entrée libre" is a virtual exhibition based on a real one, "Petits monochromes délictueux" (Small malicious monochromes), which took place in Rouen in 1994. From there Le François and Yves Cothouit propose a program with navigational possibilities which will allow other artists or curators to digitally archive their own exhibitions for other spectators to visit. In a highly mediatised "action" at the Museum of Modern Art of Rio de Janeiro in November 1997, Eduardo Kac implanted an electronic chip in his own ankle. This event was documented in the written press, filmed, photographed and broadcast on television and over the Web. Kac then gathered these photographs, videos and texts on his website to document this on-going project. In the same way, de Oliveira and Matuck have collected the fax artworks created or received from participants around the world during the "Reflux" event at the São Paulo Biennial in 1991. In some cases however, the projects archived were never realized. It is the archive itself which becomes the show. In her "La Bibliothèque: mode d'emploi" (The Library, an instruction manual), Sophie Coiffier proposes an entire catalog of aborted or unfinished projects.

Several participants have constituted more or less fictitious archives. Xavier Lambert collects documents belonging to people who share his first and last names: some of them are genuine, others falsified or falsely attributed (eg. snapshots of anonymous bathers identified as Xavier Lambert). Lev Manovich proposes photographic and videographic archives attesting to the existence of "a

mythical computer game whose history spans the twentieth century", the "Freud-Lissitzky Navigator"1 . As for "The archives of Judith Saint-Jean", they are a collection of artworks in various media which Anna Guilló claims to have inherited. Her "duty" as Judith's only heir is to take care of this priceless accumulation of paintings, drawings and photographs which all have a common theme: they portray decapitations.

Still other participants sollicit responses from visitors. Instead of collecting existing things, this is a way of provoking or creating new information. Daphné Le Sergent has invented a playful on-line questionnaire which polls visitors on their sexual tastes in order to propose to each one an appropriate artwork. My own project "Clara's Archives" begins with the inventory of a seven-year-old child's possessions, the contents of Clara's room. These various objects, ranging from dime-store figurines to magic marker drawings, serve as "conversation pieces" for discussion among visitors. On the marketplace they can also be put up for sale or for exchange, thereby eliciting other types of response. Reynald Drouhin's site, "Métaorigines" (Meta-origins), asks viewers to interpret a photograph based on Courbet's painting "the Origin of the World" showing a nude woman lying on her back, exhibiting her sex to the viewer. His is a somewhat larger view than Courbet's: one can see the woman's arms extending out from her body and, in the foreground, the back of a shaven (or bald), presumably male, head. This figure occupies the center of the image, masking the woman's private parts. The viewer must supply his reading of this image or "invent another version... a text, an image, a video or a sound."2 A similar theme, but seen from a completely different angle, characterizes Judy Malloy's archiving project, "Gender Identity in New Media", "— a web-based experimental hybrid of conferencing systems, hypertextual documents, and collaboratively created online narratives — (which) addresses the question: 'What is the role of gender/gender identity in shaping the convergence of art, science and technology?'"3

2. Archiving. The process of archiving focuses on organizing what has been saved, classifying, mapping out, "embodying" information. This entails creating modes of access to archives and links between them.

Marie-Hélène Boisdur De Toffol "Bleu outre-mer: album" ("Ultramarine blue: album") and Gilbertto Prado "Desertejo: gold, plumes et azul" ("Desert: gold, feathers and blue", a trilingual title) have elaborated classification systems in which the color blue plays a leading part. For one, lapis lazuli ("bleu outremer") and white (from the etymology of "album") evoke intercultural cross-breeding ("métissage"). In French "outre-mer" also means "overseas" or "abroad": "blue from overseas". De Toffol juxtaposes postcards, snapshots and documents taken from colonial archives in the French West Indies to create ambiguous "crossbred" images. Prado's blue evokes contemporary cultural history, the "electronic blue" used as a background for special effects in video and, by association, that of the webcam used for transporting images overseas. In a recent installation of his, "9/4 Fragmentos de Azul" ("9/4 Fragments of Blue", 1997), nine computer monitors were placed above participants, who piloted the touch-sensitive screens to create a blue mosaic overhead, an ever-changing sky of juxtaposed fragments. "Desertejo" too collages together heterogeneous elements: found photographs, underexposed, blurred or awkwardly framed snapshots, various pictures and sounds contributed by correspondents in other parts of the world...

The different elements of his title characterize both a series of VRML worlds in which one can navigate and the modes of action participants have in each one. The other two spaces are "gold", which is also the territory of the "cat", the zone in which we navigate, itself composed of nine routes, each one defined by a poem, and "feathers". The feather indicates a zone of silence in which we can move objects or create new ones, which may turn up elsewhere later4 .

Robert Nideffer's "Faculty Subjects" aims to "embody" professional relationships, to give visual form to networks of people as they are defined by the institution in which they work. The faculty members of the nine branches comprising the University of California become "data objects", points on a topology, linked or separated by contextual elements such as department, rank, or discipline. Content-related criteria, including "areas of interest, publication records, citations by peers, teaching materials" are also used to spatialize faculty relations. They thus comprise a kind of "living map" which can be visualized at the viewer's request, either in 2-D or 3-D modes. These operations will be carried out using a Java-based "Mobile Agent Management" system, which Nideffer defines as "a set of tools programmed using Java, designed for the dynamic construction, distribution, querying, and rendering of an 'embodied' collection of information.". This dynamic map of academia evokes not only Pierre Bourdieu's seminal study of the French university system "Homo Academicus", but also Madeleine de Scudéry's more subjective "Carte de Tendre" (map of Tender), which charts the paths a would-be lover might take while trying to reach his goal. For Nideffer's aim is also to foster new (albeit professional) relationships between his "subjects".

In her preliminary text, Anna Guilló retraces the tourmented life of Judith Saint-Jean, a Spanish transvestite born at the beginning of this century who purportedly died in 1972. Judith's very name betrays her origins; she would seem to be a conflation of several biblical protagonists, in particular the legendary "Jewess" ("Yehudîth" in Hebrew) who saved her people by beheading the terrible Holofernes. Her surname brings to mind John the Baptist who also lost his head at the instance of a woman. For Guilló, decollation can be seen as an allegory of painting, and of the art-making process in general.

There are 34 Xavier Lamberts in the French telephone directory so there are 34 identical entries on Xavier Lambert's first page: "The Xavier Lambert as a fictional object of study". When we follow one of these links we come to a different address and phone number (both of them genuine). Mixing autobiographical or biographical details with found or manipulated material (identification papers, drivers' licences, family snapshots etc.), he has given each of these Xavier Lambert "a new existence, real or fictitious". Navigating through these different lives, we will come to junctions marking major events in a human existence: birth, marriage, fatherhood, etc. where we can leave one Xavier Lambert and rejoin another....

Lev Manovich and Norman Klein, in "the Freud-Lissitzky Navigator" mix real and simulated archives. Manovich has described this project as "a virtual exhibition / imaginary software.We narrate the design of a software package called "Freud-Lissitzky Navigator." Its story takes us through the whole of the twentieth century, from Freud's 1907 visit to the park at Coney Island called "Dreamland" to the 1997 release of 'Quake 2" by id software. Thus what what we actually "navigate" through is an archive of the cultural history of this remarkable century, soon to end."

On the Internet today it is often hard to distinguish between actual events and rumors: proven facts and opinions sit side by side in databases or on personal home pages. Did Freud ever visit the New World? He spent most of his life in Vienna, fleeing Nazi rule only in 1938, stopping briefly in Paris before going on to London where he died in 1939. 1907 was the year he published "Delirium and Dreams in Jensen's Gradiva" and "The Future of an Illusion"... Sometimes the information seems plausible. Couldn't he have met constructivist artist El Lissitzky or avant-garde filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein in Vienna? Eisenstein acknowledged Freud to be an important influence on his work: "Without Leonardo, Marx, Lenin, Freud and the cinema, I probably would have been another Oscar Wilde". Freud visiting a park called "Dreamland" seven years after the publication of his " Die Traumdeutung" sounds a little more dubious, like a slightly anachronistic joke. And what about he and Lissitzky imagining a mass housing project based on the structure of the unconscious mind? Even if the mobile walls designed "to implement the concepts of condensation and displacement" are an extension of Lissitzky's 1926 Dresden pavillion. Manovich also provides genuine archival images —photographs, drawings, blueprints— to illustrate ("prove"?) his account. In much the same way, Dominique Noguez's facetious "essai", *Lénine Dada* (1989), begins with an attested historical fact: Lenin was living in Zurich in 1916 at the same time as Tristan Tzara, Richard Huelsenbeck, Hans Richter and Hugo Ball. From there the author goes on to accumulate (often quite plausible) "evidence" of the future Soviet leader's having participated in the Dada group's activities at the "Cabaret Voltaire". We no longer know where reality ends and fiction begins. As Noguez puts it, his is a fiction "where everything is true"... But when, in Manovich's and Klein's deadpan history, Eisenstein meets Disney and decides to incorporate Mickey Mouse into his film version of the architectural project which would "displace" Marx's "Kapital" into the "Interpretation of Dreams" and at the same time reconcile his method of editing "with an essentially continuous experience of navigating through a space" we are sent reeling into sheer absurdity! In the process we find ourselves confronted with esthetic problems such as that of narrative structure in hypermedia fiction which Manovich has treated in more theoretical works5 . Not the least interest of this project is the combination of story-telling and game construction. In order to demonstrate their hypothesis, the authors are "reconstructing" the navigator attributed to Freud and Lissitzky. It would appear, however, more useful for navigating through the story of its invention, and at the same time through related events in twentieth century history, than for exploring Freud's model of the mind.

3. Updating. The next step in the process is manipulating archives: they are continually being modified, added to, rearranged, rewritten, renewed, updated. At some point even it is possible that a new archive comes into existence. Several projects involve transforming, parasiting or otherwise manipulating existing archives.

In Edson de Oliveira's project "Brazil 500 Files", 500 Brazilian archival files are "rewritten" in the form of a multimedia hypertext. De Oliveira classifies these historical documents according to what he describes as their esthetic value and, eschewing traditional methods of organisation such as hierarchic or chronological order, proposes alternative means of consultation. Thus in a sort of historical reconstitution, the letter written 500 years ago by Pero Vaz de Caminha to the

king of Portugal, Don Manuel, in which he described the newly discovered Brazil and its savage inhabitants, becomes the entry point for a multimedia, multi-directional travelog featuring images, incidental sounds and texts spoken by "natives".

Fabrice Oehl takes advantage of the permeability of on-line archives to infuse fiction into art history. Using the methods of contemporary hackers to introduce information into existing databases, he has invented an "alter-ego" who participated in many important artistic ventures of the last half-century. It was he who helped Robert Smithson bury his "Partially Buried Woodshed" at Kent State University in 1970: a snapshot shows him on site with a shovel. And there he is in another photograph, looking on with pride as the young Louise Bourgeois cradles in her arms a sculpted phallus the size of a baby. He has been everywhere from Tokyo, where in the mid-fifties he took part in the Gutai group's actions, to New York, backstage at the Judson Church theater where he can be seen with Robert Morris and Simone Forti after one of Morris's early performance pieces, to the Düsseldorf Kunsthalle where he was photographed drinking champagne at the opening of Eva Hesse's first show of relief sculptures in 1965.

Thus new information is surreptitiously introduced into official circuits. Deadline-conscious critics, anxious students cramming for exams who hastily question one of the major search engines on the Web may discover this heretofore unknown actor. Little by little he just may show up in term papers, magazine articles or even art-historical surveys... However if their authors take a closer look, they might be puzzled by the fact that this unpretentious figure, present in many major adventures of contemporary art without attracting notice, never seems to age. The same young man sporting a neat ponytail seen standing at the foot of Charles Olson's ladder during John Cage's first happening at the Black Mountain School in 1952, sits between Smithson and Nancy Holt in a photograph from 1968 showing a group of artists soon to become famous for their "earthworks". And it is that very same young man who looks on imperturbably in late 1999 as Sophie Coiffier demonstrates the inaccessibility of her library shelves.

Eduardo Kac "parasites" another kind of on-line archives. His "Time Capsule" is a microchip incorporated into his own ankle. Kac has described this project as "a site-specific work in which the site itself is both my body and a remote database, and a simulcast on TV and the Web". In an event staged at the Casa das Rosas in São Paulo, Kac used a special needle to insert the passive microchip under his skin, which was then scanned. A low energy radio signal allowed the microchip to transmit its unique and unalterable numerical code to the scanner's LCD screen. The identification number of this chip was then registered with a database in the United States used for tracking lost animals. Kac listed himself as both owner and animal.

Today his implant can be scanned remotely from anywhere in the world. We can see here very literally how the connective tissue of the global digital network has extended the body's limits. One is no longer confined in one's skin, nor is it only at a keyboard in front of a computer screen that one uses electronic technologies. If Kac's project makes us shudder at the prospect of a corporate Big Brother whose agents will be found even within us, where "I've got you under my skin" will no longer be just a metaphor and employees will be as closely supervised as household pets, it also evokes more positive developments in recent medical research. Microchips may soon allow us to stimulate and control bodily functions from a distance, thereby enabling, for instance, a blind person to

see with an artificial retina.

B. The Art of Access

Archiving usually entails accessing information and making it accessible. This can mean rendering it in visual form. Archives are generally made to be used. Once they have been constructed, they can be accessed, copied, printed out, annotated, forwarded, bookmarked...

Sophie Coiffier questions this common assumption. Her "The Library: an instruction manual"(a title which evokes both George Perec's "Life, an instruction manual" and Borges' "Library of Babel") focuses on the image we carry of archives, an inescapable component of our perceptual world. "The Library", however, is an inner image which emerges from reading and consequently "must never appear". Her archives, consisting of catalogs and card-files, are deliberately unavailable, impossible to consult. Even if we knew what we were looking for, we would never be able to find it. The library is also said to contain a small and a big history of the book. At this reading it boasts four actual books with marvelously sybilline titles: "A mots couverts" (literally, in covert words, to hint at something), "La bibliothèque des manuscrits" (the manuscript shelf), "Le temps (la lecture)" (Time (reading)), "Le magazine" (the Magazine).

Fabrice Oehl's project gives us access to information, but it is deliberately falsified. The fact that digital information can be easily transferred from one place to another has a correlate: it can also be easily corrupted. One only has to change a few pixels and "the facts" are completely different. He also makes the point that contemporary art history is made more in books and magazines (and today on the Internet) than even in internationally celebrated art exhibitions. For every gallery-goer who actually sets foot in the Venice Biennial, many thousands more read about it in the international press, and still more catch a glimpse of the artists or the artworks on television. One no longer has to go to Kassel to see Dokumenta, one simply needs to read an art magazine or flip through a catalog (which often gives us more of a clue as to an artist's intentions than seeing the enigmatic object itself). Christophe Le François's "Entrée libre" proposes a model for interactive exhibition catalogs. Even contemporary art shows can be explored from an armchair. However, by deliberately leaving blanks in the reconstruction of his show, just as restorers leave white patches on antique vases to show what is missing, and by deliberately not documenting everything in the show (we can occasionally make out a work in the background to which we can't get any closer). Le François reveals the speciousness of our impression. We can never "do" the Louvre by clicking our way through a CD-Rom. Our vision will always be partial, oriented by what the CD Rom's author deems to be important, spectacular or saleable.

In Robert Nideffer's and Victoria Vesna's projects, access to information means access to people, or to their information gathering strategies. "Through the assemblage of data that defines (a person's) being both on and off line", Vesna proposes, in "Y2K", "data mining portraits" of people which she plans to assemble into a gigantic network. Each of these "busy bodies" will create his/her own online agent or "information persona "The result will be a visualisation of the people who are gathered through the project and their data, information and knowledge exchange".

C. Networking and interactivity

Archiving on-line also offers the possibility of a direct, immediate contact between producer and audience. Now that information is so plentifully available that we must protect ourselves from an overdose, creating and maintaining a relationship with the spectator often becomes one of the artist's goals. Instead of looking out toward the archives, we begin to turn our gaze back toward those who consult them.

Prado's project involves participants elsewhere who contribute images and manipulate objects in the virtual spaces he defines; here the webcam is one of the main interfaces. Malloy's on-line conference uses points of view expressed by several prominent artists and critics to spark off debates among the fifty online participants.

As Le Sergent puts it, her work deals with "desiring machines". Not without irony, she claims to set up an amorous relationship with the spectator. Unlike Pattie Maes' "Firefly" software agent which gathers statistics on the music people like to propose to the visitor other examples of music he is likely to appreciate, Le Sergent's poll is blatantly subjective. The questions deal with our preferences in love-making. Is it in intimate matters that our taste in art is forged? Whereas Komar and Melamid, in a sort of pseudo-socialist "people's art", actually paint pictures fulfilling the wishes expressed by people polled as to their "most wanted paintings" (ie. a "realistic" landscape in which blue is the predominant color), Le Sergent merely points viewers to works of art which, according to her, correspond to the qualities evidenced in each combination of answers to her questions. This is almost "computer art" without the computer. One is reminded of Raymond Queneau's malicious "Un conte à votre façon" (a tale the way you like it, itself a parody of popular novels "in which you are the hero") where, at each possible turning point in the story, the reader must choose one out of several actions proposed. The dice are stacked against us. If Le Sergent's multiple-choice questionnaire evokes those regularly published on glossy paper in women's magazines, the insight they give us into our own preferences is as ambiguous as horoscope predictions.

In "Clara's room", people are asked to discuss everyday objects and events not usually considered worthy of their attention. Who cares about children's toys, except their owners (or an occasional harrassed mother trying to put things away before her dinner guests come)? How many of our most intimate sentiments were not once tied up in these mass-produced objects? It is the staging of the news which counts, not its content, which could just as well be Emilie's loose tooth or the "gn" sound learned at school today as grizzly details on the latest serial killer in Kansas or the wails of uncomprehending mothers whose husbands were slaughtered by terrorists in Algeria, whose children were gunned down by a sniper in the Balkans. On television, information which doesn't fit into the preconceived screenplay is dismissed as trivial. Specialists are called in to confirm opinions already held rather than to propose new points of view. Here however contradiction is possible. Not only the "experts" have something to say, but other children, parents, teachers, older siblings, even casual onlookers... There are more than two sides to every story.

Nideffer not only de-constructs faculty relations, in the manner of Bourdieu, he also aims to re-construct them, by creating awareness of common objectives and provoking contacts between professors working on similar projects in different

departments, on different campuses. His "subjects" remain subjects even as they are objectified. This is one way of building an on-line community, which may be easier to set up between people in different places than between members of the same department, where feuds are everyday fare and one's "best enemy" is the colleague with whom one has the most in common. In this project, the viewer too becomes a data object whose actions are ruthlessly tracked and recorded by the program. Successive viewers/voyeurs may then be able to look over each other's shoulders to see what information was consulted and by whom.

III. The ArtChivist: node and network

The casual websurfer will probably be put off by the ArtChivist's rather austere, enigmatic interface6 . What we see to begin with is a black and white still photograph, full-screen, showing a dark hallway with rays of light shining out from behind partially closed doors. It is up to the viewer to look for areas which light up briefly to indicate possible destinations. By clicking, one can find out more about the ArtChivist, its partners or visit the project room. The walls of this room are covered with old and musty books; archives are piled up on shelves, rolled-up manuscripts have even fallen onto the floor. Several volumes have been left on a footstool in the foreground. One must feel one's way around, touching the shelves with the mouse to find archives here and there which light up while the title and author appear below. At the bottom of the screen a short one-line description appears in English (or in French, if we happen to be using a French-language version of the browser). If we click on the light, it will lead us to the reading room: another musty corner with a cramped desk lit by a dim reading lamp. The selected project description appears in white print superimposed on the dark background. One must drag it down the screen to continue reading. The text contains a link to visit the project itself; we can also print out a hard copy or write a note to the author.

It is possible that art projects on the Web have more impact when they are grouped than when they are happened on to individually. It's hard to compete with the flashy porn sites and compelling advertisements we inevitably find: even the most innocent queries on the major search engines yield a harvest of these sites. Strategically they are designed to infest the Web; it makes good commercial sense to bring in unsuspecting customers from anywhere they can be found. To experience art in this context one almost has to recreate a sacred, museum-like atmosphere, or at the very least, more favorable, more serene viewing conditions. Artworks are not usually very well-served by the frenetic pace of the Web. For despite their sometimes superficial resemblance to other types of websites, they are there to make us think. Because of this, it is hard to get anything out of them if one is running 100 MPH, clicking madly at everything that moves.

As the project continues we aim to develop the relations between projects, between their authors and their publics, to reinforce the connective tissue which has just begun to appear. This goal is already manifest in projects like Victoria Vesna's "Y2K" which acts as an interface between the "Online Public Spaces" she is developing with Robert Nideffer and others, and the "ArtChivist". By playfully "parasiting" other participant's projects (he is even planning fictitious exhibits for people), Fabrice Oehl not only incorporates them into the revised art history he is writing online but also promotes horizontal consultation, border-crossing. It is

probable that other types of linking strategies will be developed as the ArtChivist gains in maturity. Art too can "infest" the Web in other ways, if we know how to use it.

Notes

*Artist and Maître de conférences at the Université de Paris I (Panthéon/Sorbonne)

1. Lev Manovich, <jupiter.ucsd.edu/~manovich/FLN>

2. Reynald Drouhin, <www.incident.net/metaorigine>

3. From Judy Malloy's project description. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations are from the participating artist's own project description, which can be found on the ArtChivist website at <www.univ-paris1.fr/CERAPLA/ArtC/index.html>.

4. Gold and feathers also evoke the uneasy relations between Indians and gold miners in the north of Brazil.

5. See his essay " Database as a Symbolic Form" to appear in *Artificial Intellignece and Society* (special issue on "Database Aesthetics" edited by Victoria Vesna).

6. designed and programmed in Javascript by Fabrice Oehl.

http://66.249.93.104/search?q=cache:LVqInO_cDVUJ:wawrwt.iar.unicamp.br/anpap/anais99/palestra3.htm+anais99+palestra3&hl=fr&lr=&strip=1