

ISEA 2008

PANEL: CURATING IN/AS OPEN SYSTEM(S)

29 July, 2-4pm, Singapore Management University, SMU Auditorium

CONTRIBUTORS: Geoff Cox, Beryl Graham, Joasia Krysa (chair), Vicente Matallana, Yukiko Shikata

Panel organised by KURATOR, <http://www.kurator.org>

The panel responds to the wider critical concern and understanding of the dynamics of socio-technological systems and their relevance for curating. The emphasis is on the notion of open systems, in so far as this relates to the openness of technological systems and the practice of curating.

The suggestion is that curating not only increasingly involves open socio-technological systems (such as networks, online platforms and social software tools) but itself can be considered in terms of an open system. This implies a state in which the curatorial system is opened up to the communicative processes of producers/users and to the divergent exchanges that take place that disrupt established social relations of production and distribution. In this scenario the software opens up curating to dynamic possibilities and transformations beyond the usual institutional model (analogous to the model of production associated with the industrial factory) into the context of networks (and what is referred to nowadays as the (social factory)).

This tendency - that emerged from the shared perception of the Web and the Internet as an increasingly independent and open platform for the production and presentation of art - is well instantiated in a number of historical and more current projects such as Eva Grubinger's *C@C - Computer-Aided Curating* (1993-1995), Alexei Shulgin's *Desktop Is* (1997), *Runme* (2003), *Source Code* (Luis Silva, 2005), *TAGallery* (2007), *undeaf* (2007), *Hack-able Curator* (2007), Robert Lisek's *FACE* (2007), Pall Thayer's *CodeChat* (2007) and *kurator* software (2005/2008). The panel reflects upon new curatorial forms and an expanded description of curating enabled by social technologies and an open systems approach.

Notes on panelists

Geoff Cox is Associate Curator of Online Projects at Arnolfini, Bristol (UK) and lecturer/ researcher in Art and Technology at the University of Plymouth (UK). <http://www.anti-thesis.net/>

Beryl Graham is Professor of New Media Art at the School of Art, Design and Media, University of Sunderland (UK) and co-editor of CRUMB, resource for new media art curators. <http://www.crumbweb.org>

Joasia Krysa is a curator, founder of KURATOR, as well as lecturer/researcher at AZTEC (Art Science Technology Consortium) at the University of Plymouth (UK). <http://www.kurator.org/wiki/main/read/About>

Vicente Matallana is a director and founder of LaAgencia, an independent new media art production company created in 1998 in Madrid (ES). <http://laagencia.org/>

Yukiko Shikata is a media art curator & critic based in Tokyo, working as a senior curator of NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC], specially-assigned professor at Tokyo Zokei University, guest professor at Tama Art University.

ABSTRACTS

Yukiko Shikata: Internal observer - Curating in the Age of Digital Networks

Since the beginning of 20C, the art expression has already shifted to 'discovering', 'selecting', 'editing' and 'collage-ing' the enormous existing daily products in creative way. As one of extreme examples could be seen in Kurt Schwitters' *Merzbau* where he extended his body, spirit and memories to the never-ending process, in the form of physical interior and architecture. I would like to interpret this work as new form of curating, developed rather personally, unconsciously.

In the beginning of 21C, digital, telecommunication networks enabled us to make new way of curating in the Internet, or networks assisted by the WWW, online software tools and services. Here you can just type in, choose, recommend, or tag any words and information you like and they would be immediately organized in a certain context or manner, shared by other people, via networks, and the process continues. Additionally it is not only happening in digital networks, but also being extended to the territory of nature both in micro and macro, such as natural environment and genetic engineering. Now we live in the age of: blurring borders between artists and curators, curating as a never-ending process often developed by vast number of people, assisted by computer and networks. We could say that this phenomenon is naturally brought by the current technological development, and it surely has good aspects, because it makes existing hierarchy and centralization -- established in analogue-, reproduction-based modern society -- is getting less. It will bring an open system in curating, but it is of course not the utopia. We face to the opportunity to stop by and reconsider the meaning of artistic expression and curating in the age of digital telecommunication networks, such as how we can articulate artists from curators, how we could articulate the curatorial process... What kind of position, perspective and behaviour curator would have?

In this panel, I would like to raise an importance of new, creative combination between digital and analogue by rediscovering the aspects of 'physicality', 'locality' and 'now, here-ness' in the age of digital networks to open a new way of social communication, collaboration and creation. I also would like to raise the position of curator as 'Internal Observer or agency', that has an initial idea, critical perspective and at the same time, getting into the midst of dynamic phenomenon for the new transformation.

Geoff Cox: antisocial networking

'project.arnolfini' (<http://project.arnolfini.org.uk/>) is an online experimental production and management system that is linked to the physical spaces and the curatorial programme of Arnolfini. It is currently divided into the following main sections: the dump where all digital media is collected but remains unorganised; a number of tools, such as hierarchical blogs and wikis that are available to select and organise materials; an archive that also draws upon the materials in the dump and organises them in a systematic manner; and finally, the curated

collection of online projects. The sections correspond to levels of control and degrees of user feedback using common data.

Consistent with these principles, 'antisocial networking' is a current project: an online repository for the submission of new and existing works that explore the pseudo-agency of online social platforms. It takes a number of recent software projects as its inspiration to reflect upon the fashion for 'participation' with the arts sector and culture in general. The concern is how the Internet is increasingly characterised as a 'platform' (or collective machine) for 'social' uses, but to question what is meant by the term social in such descriptions. Emergent curatorial forms (using social technologies) are undoubtedly dissimilar to the ways in which social relations have been traditionally organised, but in general, appear to reinforce existing power structures. The plurality of nodes in, or apparent openness of, networks does not guarantee a more inherent democratic order, indeed it is arguably serves to obscure totalitarian substructures. This is the trick of social networking, not least, in the way it offers the promise of democracy but through centralised ownership and control where the web platform itself mediates relations - unlike peer to peer file sharing for instance. The presentation argues for an approach that makes both horizontal and vertical lines of organisation apparent – both relatively open and hierarchical models of curating. The 'project.arnolfini' site follows this logic in reflecting the socio-technical architectures of network power in which the curator plays their part.

Vicente Matallana: Information must be free to be effective

When analysing the need for free information, it is usually addressed from an ideological stance rather than the perspective of efficacy. When quoting Stewart Brand's now legendary claim that 'information wants to be free' we often overlook the wider context in which it was originally made: 'On the one hand information wants to be expensive, because it's so valuable. The right information in the right place just changes your life. On the other hand, information wants to be free, because the cost of getting it out is getting lower and lower all the time. So you have these two fighting against each other.' This need to be free does not respond to ideological concerns but to a need to be effective. Shared information in circulation produces a performance or output that is the real value of information. Information that is not in circulation has no value and our duty is to identify the dynamics that best increases the value of information.

The modes and structures of cybernetic thinking are based on the principle that shared knowledge allows us to move forward as thinking societies at an exponent rate. We generate knowledge, but it is in sharing it that we actually produce social capital and wealth. We ought to embark on a more pragmatic and de-ideologised analysis in which the efficiency of strategies prevails over ideological criteria and old structures. In other words, a strategic efficiency predicated on sharing knowledge, with the necessary technical and legal means and structures to enable its realization, in order to generate more knowledge and consequently more capital.

The challenge of 'free information' is to convey to society this idea of efficiency, in opposition to the preservation of the interests and privileges of outmoded oligarchies of capital and knowledge. This is a question of modernity in which citizens, as free human beings and in their own right, pursue and develop structures, both technical and legal, in order to achieve the best social development for the happiness of the individual. Information must be free to be effective, otherwise it has no real worth except for its speculative exchange value; the challenge consists in how to introduce society, and consequently, corporations and institutions, to this new economic approach, simultaneously reconciling the struggle underscored by Stewart Brand.

BIOGRAPHIES

Geoff Cox is Associate Curator of Online Projects at Arnolfini, Bristol (UK) and lecturer /researcher at AZTEC (Art, Science, Technology) research consortium, University of Plymouth (UK). He is also a member of the research faculty of Transart Institute (Donau University Krems, A/ USA). His research interest concerns software culture and is expressed in various projects such as the co-curated touring exhibition 'Generator' (2002/03), his PhD thesis 'Antithesis: The Dialectics of Software Art' (2006) and the co-curated public art project 'Social Hacking' (2007). He is co-editor of the DATA Browser book series published by Autonomedia (New York), and co-edited 'Economising Culture' (2004) and 'Engineering Culture' (2005). He has published over 40 papers/articles, been invited to give talks internationally such as at University of Paris-Sorbone (2004 & 2007) and Palazzo Arti Napoli (2007), moderated conferences at Tate Modern, London (2005), Transmediale, Berlin (2004 & 2006), WRO Biennale (2007) and 're:place', Berlin (2007), and was jury member of Transmediale Festival, Berlin (2004).

Beryl Graham is Professor of New Media Art at the School of Art, Design and Media, University of Sunderland, and co-editor of CRUMB. She is a writer, curator and educator with many years of professional experience as a media arts organiser, and was head of the photography department at Projects UK, Newcastle, for six years. She curated the international exhibition Serious Games for the Laing and Barbican art galleries, and has also worked with The Exploratorium, San Francisco, and San Francisco Camerawork.

Joasia Krysa is a curator, founder of KURATOR, and lecturer / researcher at Art and Social Technologies research (<http://www.art-social.net>) and AZTEC (Art Science Technology Consortium at the University of Plymouth (UK)). She is co-editor of the DATA browser book series (published by Autonomedia, New York, <http://www.data-browser.net>); a member and advisor for a number of curatorial and management boards including a WRO Media Art Center Foundation council of management (Wroclaw, Poland), and Curatorial Network (with Arts Council England, UK). She regularly serves on international juries including most recently ARCO International Art Fair (Beep New Media Art Awards, 2007 and Vocento Arte 2.0, 2008, Madrid) and Share Award (Share Festival 2007, Torino). Her recent work include an organized conference *Curating, Immateriality, Systems* (Tate Modern, London 2005); an edited book *Curating Immateriality* (Autonomedia,

New York 2006), an online curatorial software project *curator* (2005/2008), and curated exhibition 'After the Net' for *Observatori* 2008 (Valencia, Spain).

Vicente Matallana is director and founder of LaAgencia, an independent new media art production company created in 1998 in Madrid (ES). Its mandate is to respond to the new structural needs required by the incorporation of new technologies in art. LaAgencia is engaged in programmes and projects all over Spain, Europe, USA and Latin America, focused on new media art as an alternative paradigm of research and knowledge. LaAgencia has been collaborating with ARCO since 1999, and is currently in charge of the technical coordination of EXPANDED-BOX (the new media art section at ARCO). LaAgencia is also responsible for developing and managing the programmes organised by ARCO related to new media art, such as the ARCO-BEEP Electronic Art Prize and the Arte 2.0 Competition of Ideas organised by Vocento, as well as sponsorship and technological alliances. As a production company, LaAgencia is a forerunner in the field of new media art collaborating with major organisations and artists. It is presently engaged in the production of the exhibition "Máquinas y Almas" for Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofía, Madrid, Spain. Vicente Matallana is also a teacher and lecturer and regularly publishes articles. He has been a member of the editorial board of the *ARCO-News* magazine. He also regularly sits on international juries, seminars and committees for new media art. <http://laagencia.org/>

Yukiko Shikata is a media art curator & critic based in Tokyo, working as a senior curator of NTT InterCommunication Center [ICC], specially-assigned professor at Tokyo Zokei University, guest professor at Tama Art University. Since early 90s she has been curating many challenging exhibitions at Canon ARTLAB (1990-2001), Mori Art Museum (2002-04), and as an independent curator, many projects including 'Power of Codes' by Mischa Kuball (Tokyo National Museum, 1999), 'Amodal Suspension' by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (YCAM, 2003), 'MobLab' (Germany in Japan 2005/2006, 2005). Selected exhibitions by her at ICC are 'open nature' (2005), 'Connecting Worlds' (2006), 'LIFE- fluid, invisible, inaudible...'. She is the International Advisory Board member of transmediale (Berlin), Nam June Paik Award, and has worked as jury in many competitions including Prix Ars Electronica, UNESCO Digi-Art Prize.