

Transcription of Lecture by David Ross, San Jose State University, March 2, 1999

Introduction: Joel Slayton

Good evening. My name is Joel Slayton. I'm the director of the Cadre Institute, San Jose State's interdisciplinary, academic and research program that's dedicated to information technology and the arts. Cadre is one of the region's oldest and one of the most important centers for digital media arts research and work experimentally by artists. We're very happy to be able to be here tonight to help with this lecture. Cadre is also the publisher of Switch, which is an online theoretical journal that's dedicated to discourse involving technology. If you're interested in either of those two programs, the Institute or Switch, you can locate them on the web, of course, at cadre.sjsu.edu or switch.sjsu.edu.

The Cadre Institute in conjunction with the San Jose State University art gallery and the Natalie Thompson endowment welcome you to this evening's presentation. David Ross was appointed the director of the SFMoMA in 1998. Prior to this he had served as the director of the Whitney Museum of American Art since 1991. Widely known as a strong champion of contemporary art, Mr. Ross has been an art museum professional since 1971 when he was named the first curator of video art at the University Museum in Syracuse, NY. He's organized over 100 exhibitions of 20th century art, is widely published and has lectured at museums and universities around the world. Mr. Ross has been involved in jurying of exhibitions internationally including Documenta, the Venice Biennale, and the Carnegie International. Prior to this and his appointment to the Whitney, Mr. Ross served in a number of key curatorial and administrative positions at several important American museums including Boston's Institute of Contemporary Art, University Art Museum at Berkeley, and the Long Beach Museum of Art.

The title of this evening's discussion is "Art and the Age of the Digital." We anticipate an insightful and fluid discussion regarding the emergence of net.art, the curatorial challenges faced by SFMoMA, and Mr. Ross's perceptions of appropriate theoretical frameworks for net.art's appreciation. I'd to welcome David Ross.

David Ross:

Thank you Joel for inviting me down here to join with you in one of the country's oldest and most important programs looking at and trying to understand art made in this new era. It's an honor to be here and I appreciate the opportunity to discuss some of my ideas but as you know, Joel, and some of you, especially those involved in Cadre, the real lure to come down here is all of you, because I fully expect to learn as much this evening as to give out from what meager I've been able to figure out of this new world that's developing so quickly around us.

I've been looking at this material for several years and just the fact that I've been looking puts me in a position to speak more easily than any of my colleagues, but the reality is that

none of us really know. No curators, no critics really know where it is artists are taking us in this extraordinary moment. I find that quite exhilarating, a little frightening at times, primarily it's energizing. The idea of art that's developing not only in a way that we can't predict, but in this case it's hard to even understand what it looks like, what it's going to do, how it functions on a most basic social level to a complex aesthetic level, we are groping in the dark. I think that process, for strange people like me, is one I delight in.

The way this evening should work is the following. I've written something that I'll read. And then I'll respond to questions and issues from some of the Cadre students who attended a talk I gave in Berkeley several months ago and who, on their own, have been thinking about many of these same issues I have been and who were kind enough to email me some issues they would like me to address and I'll do my best to do that. At that point, I hope this evening's talk will become iterative and really become the kind of community that the web makes possible in its day-to-day operation. This event is being webcast live. So not only are my pearls of wisdom going out into the web and disappearing into that giant sinkhole, but yours as well and our interaction together will, hopefully be like a stone thrown into a pond and the ripples will be more interesting than the stone dropping.

One of the things about the web that I like a lot is how quickly you can change things. All of us have been involved in printing. What a thrill it is to change something and not have to throw away 300 boxes of paper. The whole idea of its permeability, mutability, disposability, I like that. One of the things I disposed of was the title of my talk tonight, well really mutated it. It's now, "Net.art in the age of Digital Reproduction."

Web.art, net.art...it captured my imagination like nothing since video art on my own personal radar screen some 30 years ago. Oddly the net is attracting the attention of media artists who are both attracted and repelled to this new thing, whatever it is, in a fashion directing reminiscent of the filmmaking community to the portable video technology in the late 60s and early 70s. I remember a public dialogue I had in NY with the great filmmaker/theoretician, Hollis Frampton, in which he berated me for my involvement in video. It was humiliating, but I admired him for his genius and I never imagined we'd be on opposite sides of a great divide. He said to me, "When Richard Nixon was accused of belonging to an anti-Semitic country club, he said, 'I'm merely boring from within.'" Frampton compared me to Nixon, "That's what you're doing, Ross, you're boring from within." I wasn't sure if he was talking on a Buddhist level or as the mole from the right. What he meant was that I'd always been an opponent of video art, and that it was too early to criticize, because in 1975, when this dialogue took place, he reminded me that artists only had access to the tools of production. Tapes and installations were beginning to appear, but artists had no way of using the essential quality of video, which was the ability to create a network outside the art world, to generate a true and valuable, nutritive relationship with an audience. It seemed to me that until artists could do that, it was too early to critique the idea of video art. We could only project the idea of video art and hope that at that point the promise of cable television that would change the world, creating a new structure for artists to gain access to the technology of the broadcast medium that had previously been monopolized by corporate interests. No one thought of the idea of building communities, networks using this technology. There was a little talk of this among small circles at places like "Radical Software" in New York or "Challenge for Change" in Montreal, two magazines that focused on video art.

In general, video art was seen as a medium with radical potential. Filmmakers tended to react in a rather hostile way. They saw it as horribly ugly compared to film with its grainy,

fuzzy images. And for what was this aesthetic given up? The idea of some kind of entry into the world of television on the part of artists? That wasn't a place for artists to be. Frampton was satisfied with making a film and showing it to 25 other artists. That was the only group that ever saw that art and that was fine. My whole idea of a museum television channel was propelled when I left the Everson Museum and gone to Long Beach where I'd been lured to build a new museum . They promised that they would build a cable channel as part of the museum. That was the offense that so earned Frampton's wrath towards me. They discovered widespread corruption in Long Beach and so I never got to do the video channel because the museum never got built.

But the idea that a museum was prepared to extend itself into the community for art to take place was an idea I began to believe in very seriously and wish I could participate in. Needless to say, it's a wish that's never come true. When that project faded, I ran up to Berkeley, then to Boston and to NY. That idea slowly faded as I became a museum curator and then eventually a director. The idea that could ever happen disappeared. I began to focus on what interested me, on the new art forms that have come out of video as an art form, by artists like Gary Hill, Bill Viola, Nam June Paik, and the like. And I put away the idea that art and certain technologies and institutional interventions could actually produce in its fusion something inherently radical, challenging regardless of its content. I thought nothing more of it until 5 years ago when a woman named Stacy Horn in New York started a BBS (Bulletin Board Service) called Echo using the internet to create, what was being done out here with The Well, creating a virtual community based on people using email to write to each other. Five years ago it had a nice ring to it.

For the past several years I've been trying to understand this thing as it develops. From a text-base BBS to the graphical browsers that have developed from Mosaic through Netscape and Internet Explorer. They all have the same idea: to enable people to communicate. The idea of art taking place in this new way is astounding to me. It seems to be re-opening the potential that I thought had disappeared. It's an art form--and I use that term advisably--that's contained within an aesthetic movement that is itself contained within, and simultaneously the harbinger of, a set of radically innovative social structures and practices--all of which are within a set of technologies evolving at an unprecedented and unpredictable pace even in an age defined by its passion for velocity and unpredictability. It is an integral set of production and distribution tools directed by aesthetic propositions, varying from hyper-hermetic, ontological concerns to the overtly political, to the broadly comic and self-referential. An art form evolving within a system that is so fully totalizing and global that it contains within it every other known mass medium on the planet. It is Marshall McLuhan's dream come true or is he spinning in his grave at a rapid pace.

Working on the net, artists can engage with a set of aesthetic practices (and to use the word, "design," is probably inadvisable here) that seem to be designed to confront, contain and transform the art world's prevailing economies. It's that powerful. It seems that many of the most interesting people, groups, entities working on the net are dedicated to the gentle, and not-so-gentle overthrow of the prevailing order. At one extreme, net.art seems to demand an approach to art-making so fully divorced from traditional art practices/processes, that even contemporaneous critical activity is constructed as part of it or within the work of art absolutely collapsing the notions of reader and writer, between the idea of action and discourse. And much as it is encouraging the collapse of this critical barrier within our art culture, net.art also appears to engage an approach to the idea of making art that avoids many of the traps that tethered the truly radical uses of video to novel, though mainstream, sculptural activity, or variations on standard documentary or narrative cinema practices.

So what is this thing called web or net.art? Can we define it, describe its principal qualities in a way that might provide a broader understanding and its potential. It's difficult to do this. These days it seems everyone is required to quote from Walter Benjamin, whose 1933 essay, "Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," has long served as a starting point with those trying to come to grips with aesthetic change wrought by the relationship of mechanization to modernity. Simply put, Benjamin's theory of an original artwork's aura remains central to our understanding of modern art's essential character. He frames what remains the central question confronting all who attempt to understand the social and aesthetic relationships established by new technological paradigms and how that influences our understanding of art. Benjamin's question was in regards to an understanding of photography and its contested presence in a world of art and ideas in its time. Is photography actually art, might it function as an extension of the work of an artist, might a photograph contain the auratic qualities that Benjamin ascribed as essential qualities of a work of art?

Rather than answer that question directly, he proposed a far more profound question. How had photography's invention changed the central idea of art itself? Or further, how had mechanization in the era of mechanical reproduction out of which flowed the invention of photography changed completely the ground rules of our social lives, the nature of representation, patterns of communication and corresponding aesthetic practices? These questions are never fully answerable, run through 20th century art, from Duchamp and Man Ray, through Hamilton and Warhol, and continue to pose an especially thorny dilemma as we consider our position today in a post-mechanical era, described in the late 1940s by the great mathematician, Norbert Wiener, as cybernetic. Like most questions, it provokes a range of responses, though Benjamin did not have the impact on practice that more contemporary writers have today. But in 1971, during the early years of video art, some thirty years after Benjamin's death, the artist and critic, Douglas Davis, refreshed the art world's collective memory as to the oddly predictive questions posed nearly 40 years earlier by the German Marxist, humanist writer. Davis' critical aim was clear and timely. In light of the contemporary questioning of video art as a legitimate artistic practice, the advocating of Benjamin's notion of auratic seemed the appropriate response.

Now today as we continue the discussion of the nature of net.art and the place of the work of art in the digital era we had best be sure we are asking ourselves appropriately large questions with correspondingly large consequences. So once again, how do we define this net.art? Can we locate this use of digital art within existing structures that today represent the art world or does it call for the construction of a new discursive space? And to paraphrase the poet/critic David Antin's 1974 critical examination of video art, one of the first examinations of that still-new art form, what are its distinct features and qualities? Around the same time that Davis began writing about video in the pages of "Radical Software," a short-lived but influential broad sheet published by video artists and alternative media activists, Ira Schneider and Beryl Korot, no less than the Korean-born video artist, Nam June Paik, directed our attention to another German Marxist. This time it was the playwright, Bertolt Brecht. Brecht had written at a moment roughly contemporaneous with Benjamin, his theory of radio, a text that has increased in relevance almost with each decade of the 20th century. Its thesis remains current because Brecht recognized the implicit fascism of one-way broadcast communications and openly questioned whose interest was served by the development of radio as an essentially passive, unilateral system. As another refugee of a fascist military dictatorship, Nam June Paik was especially concerned with this aspect of media technology and directed his early video artworks towards a critical examination of the potential of what he called, two-way communications. A trenchant concern was that

artists direct themselves to the activation of their audience, and though video offered a limited forum for this kind of truly interactive work at that time, its profound difference from broadcast television, radio, all broadcast media, at least opened up the possibility of two-way, truly iterative communication art. As a note, I would remind you that in a pioneering essay that Paik wrote in 1973 for the Rockefeller Foundation, entitled, "Education in the Paperless Society," Paik first invented the word the "electronic superhighway," predicting the kind of intellectual commerce that global networking would provoke.

Video art opened the door to a re-examination to these two linked issues. In earlier works, like Davis' "Talk Out" in 1973--a live, phone-in, broadcast television performance work--in which viewers participated in the creation of a collaborative text by phoning into the artist who, live, and on camera, literally typed their responses to his text onto the screen in a continuous, superimposed text roll. Or consider Paik's seminal 1974 video tape, "Global Groove," which spoke directly to the need for a kind of virtual community, combining artists as diverse as Allen Ginsberg, with a Korean drum dancer, a Broadway drum dancer, John Cage, a Navajo singer and others. Perhaps more important, several years later, Paik initiated a series of live, global broadcast satellite collaborations with Joseph Beuys, Laurie Anderson, David Bowie, Douglas Davis and others, in which these very short-term virtual communities were linked together in art world entertainment spectacles, connected by the shared space of extremely expensive broadcast satellite time. The implications of the theoretical questions of these works show through quite clearly. If video art was to be meaningful as a new way of framing larger questions pertaining to the paradigmatic shift in the structure of normative as well as aestheticized communications, critical attention would have to be focused, at least in part, on the potential for an expanded discourse as well as an expanded cinema. And though early video work, in both its documentary form as well as in its more overtly aesthetic use, may have been based on utopic assumptions, especially those associated with the development of cable, a wide range of artists found the early years of video experimentation filled with radical promise.

In 1974, in "Collage" (dedicated to the late Ray Johnson, the father of correspondence art, an art movement we should all be looking at when thinking about the web and net.art) Paik added a clever text to a reproduction of a 1944 Life Magazine advertisement promoting television as the symbol of the soon-to-be, post-war good times. Below the text asking the provocative question, "How long will it be before all American homes have a television sets?" Nam June Paik attached the text asking, "How long will it be before all American artists have their own television channels?"

But cable television, which initially promised this economy of abundance, did not deliver. At least in its first mature phase and as an industry, it had no room for art or poetry. And satellite access such as that which supported the live, global performances that I mentioned before, were mere demonstrations of what could be possible. But the fact was that these were fully out of the reach of regular artists who didn't have access to money like Paik and Beuys and absolutely out of the realm of possibility for individual artists who had their own personal reasons for communicating. In the late 70s, radical development known as slow scan came about in which artists used telephone lines to link together slow scan video activities and created interactive guerrilla theater pieces with activated audiences communicating over this very clumsy, but very thrilling, system. It had a great deal of symbolic resonance, but it was hard to actually create real work within this framework.

We were, to quote the title of a book by video artist, Frank Gillette, "Between Paradigms." But more to the point we recognized that whatever it was that had changed, it radiated

from radical transformation within the world of control and communication devices--that world known as cybernetics--they were heady and confusing times. The knowledge that these changes were close at hand but were still outside of our grasp, that artists had the possibility of shaping that change and exploring its distinct capacities, did little to relieve the fact that most were looking something they had never seen and wouldn't recognize if they did. All the more confusing, as Allen Kaprow has termed it, artists were producing old wine in new bottles. This appeared within the art world providing a delightful distraction while often providing critical and theoretical deadends. Even more confusing because there was little, if any, critical writing to frame any of these issues in a broad context and little institutional support to spur public debate. Not surprisingly, most art museums and commercial galleries viewed these goings on with bemusement. Some responded with outright hostility which was better than bemusement. Even though this artistic activity took place within the context of conceptualism and its heyday, the kinds of ontological concerns raised by video conceptualists were relegated to an instantly marginalized status compared to the more purely language-based, narrative conceptual artists. So even that seemed a deadend. When it was welcomed at all into the mainstream art institutions, video was primarily the responsibility of education departments who were able to bring video documentaries about art into orientation theaters or other educational ghettos within the art museum. Video made noise, and noise generally was seen as bothersome in galleries seen as sanctuaries away from the increasingly noisy world. From time to time, a novel video exhibition may have been allowed in some corner of the gallery or art museum. I was kept gainfully employed staging many of these, so I'm not complaining, it was a living. But rarely did the ideas I mentioned earlier find their way into a broader institutional dialogue. The era of institutional self-criticism had yet to dawn and many of the issues that have since transformed art museum practices had yet to surface. The art museum was, by and large, still a privileged domain run by white men in the interest of a set of increasingly irrelevant, antique sensibilities. And of course, let's not forget that most video art was incredibly boring, dreadfully under produced, if intentionally or not, as if in a way to re-frame Andy Warhol's empire as an action drama, which in a way it was. And though a few video/audio performance artists had the opportunity to produce on a higher level, there were many who wouldn't be caught dead at that level even if they could. The badge of independence was to produce on a low-tech level and to show your distance from what Antin called, video's frightful parent.

Yet video has held on and survived. It has transformed sculptural practice as we know it, from Nauman to Viola, but the socially transformative ideas embedded in its early moment have faded if not disappeared. Ironically, or perhaps predictably, as video grew to present less of a threat and carried fewer of the challenges to established institutional order, galleries and museums began to exhibit and collect artists' tapes and installations. But during this time, several other things were brewing. Not to be ignored or forgotten, the artist-run space re-established the role that individual artists could have in constructing and managing a site in which their own aesthetic concerns formed the core and informed the structure of an art institution.

That is a very important basis for what we see now with net.art. But from the least likely direction something emerged that would re-frame the notion of art, including video, in a truly novel and potentially revolutionary context, and that of course is the internet. What is it about the internet that provides such extraordinary potential and has already created such unparalleled acceptance of a very complex and incredibly new technological system into our schools, offices and even into the bosom of our homes? For one thing, the internet provides an essential use for the personal computer that everyone has and no one knows what to do

with--a use that moves beyond that of the typewriter or lined yellow note-pad. And it has dramatically accelerated the penetration of these devices on a global basis. But more importantly the internet functions as a system that links together computers in a standard broadcast, point-to-space fashion as well as allowing for addressability or to define the audience for any specific communication. In its role as the spine for an essentially free, global, interpersonal communications system, the internet created a new context for art that requires, or at least makes use of, a set of distinctive qualities that define this new space and the activities that take place within it. Now chief among these qualities is the interchangeable identity of readers and writers. The ability to shift, hide and conceal or invent identity and the ability to explore, within an increasingly controlled order, notions of non-order, creative anomie, provisional disorder as well as anarchy itself. Though often linked to socially unacceptable manifestations such as email harassment or cyber crime, the fact of the matter remains that the power unleashed by the internet has quickly become an essential component of what artists can do within the social space constructed by the internet.

Entities such as Artmark and the Bureau of Inverse Technology seem to have emerged from conceptual art that questioned and challenged the hegemony of the art world's institutional order. In this respect it may be related to 70s agitprop artist's initiatives like those by the guerrilla Art Action Group. Or it may be seen as heirs of work by artists as diverse as Daniel Spoerri, Christo, Chris Burden, or even more recently, the Survival Research Laboratories. But as Douglas Davis' fairly simple, ultimately not very interesting to read piece, titled, "The World's Longest Sentence" (a 1997 network in which the artist initiated a sentence and then turned over the life of the artwork to the audience)--the role of the audience in the new work of art has changed critically. Yet whether a network involves the construction or blurring or hiding of identities between readers and writers, it seems clear that the nature of net space calls upon the complexities of identity. It seems that, finally, we need to begin to define these distinct qualities of net.art. I've beaten around the bush long enough. I've told my sad story of video art too many times. How many times do we want to hear this? I insist on framing this discussion within the framework of the failure of video and its success, because I think it's critical to understand the potential that's in place for this new art form, this new way of working, for this new aesthetic/social space. In response to my own initial questioning of defining the distinctive qualities of this art form, I thought we could start by going through my 21 distinctive qualities. I bet you by the end of the evening, it will go to 30, because every time I have this discussion, especially with artists who are developing this art, in real time, I walk away saying, "Oh, of course, I should have thought of that." The reality is art curators, museum directors, follow the route paved by artists. I may be here lecturing to you, but in reality, I'm only feeding back what I've taken from looking at the web and reading some of your own writings and works.

Ross's 21 Distinctive Qualities of Net.Art

1. The ability to move and assemble audiences. Artists working in theater or cinema are used to constructing a work that assembles an audience. Poets have been doing that since time immemorial. But the net allows us to take that audience and move them into another work, to transform them, or to transform the space in which they are into a space no longer controllable. You may be responsible for their initial gathering, that then the authoritarian relationship breaks down. The way that audience reconstructs itself and how it moves, is for the first time, an element on the palette, something to consider.

This leads me to my second distinctive quality or potential for net.art. And it regards authority, particularly in my always conflicted role of museum director, curator, teacher. I never liked going to school, never believed in the authority of teachers. I never liked being lectured to.

2. Authority shifts between reader and writer. I am interested in what happens when authority shifts. I'm interested in when and how an artist can generate a work where not only the nature of where an audience disperses and reassembles, but also how that critical line of being a writer and being a reader is blurred, eliminated. I'm interested in where one can cross over that border and where the idea of authority is no longer inherently a function of who owns the camera, the broadcast transmission tower, who stands at the microphone, but purely a function of who has the best idea or whose turn it is in an iterative dialogue or whose role it is within a complex, new social dynamic which evolves in a space where even fast-talking New Yorkers like me can necessarily hold forth. It's very interesting how the dynamic of social intercourse has changed in relation to BBS dialogues. People are taking a different kind of time to react, to engage in the dialogue. That's why those kinds of conversations were so special. A discourse evolved from a new form of community interaction. One might say that in an ideal, polite seminar this could happen, but the reality is it doesn't. But it was possible immediately in the BBS environment, when I got involved with Echo and later with The Well and similar online communities and I think we've all seen how that aspect has transmuted as artists have made use of the internet, especially as the speeds have increased, and the ability to transmit not just text, but sound, still and moving images in a different kind of iterative dialogue.

3. Net.art is based on an economy of abundance. The net, even though it's not really free and we know that the idea that we've walked into a completely democratic world where all the social and economic barriers have been erased, we all know that's bullshit. However, it's such a large step in a direction of abundance that we actually can begin to talk about that. Broadcast and cable television, those controlled forms of communication in which control is a function of commercial enterprise in an era of late capitalism as well as political control in an era where governments have long known the power of controlling communications, has been changed. We've seen how the internet's relative freedom and low cost once you have access to the tools of production and distribution, which are the same tools. That changes the idea of what can take place within that new space, in fact changes the nature of this space instead of using the analog of museum space where it seems like you'll never run out of space, but of course you will.

The economy of scarcity was the economy of thirteen channels of broadcast. The economy that we thought cable was going to usher in was enormous, we thought seventy channels would provide space for everyone, every artist could do whatever they want. Of course, they ran out of space three minutes after they opened the goldrush, because it was structured to be another, but larger and more profitable, economy of scarcity. The economy of abundance is a new economic model which will produce enormous profits for many. It already has. Look at every internet stock IPO. That's based on a broad assumption by investors worldwide that this is where the money is--the new goldrush. I'm not negative about this. I pray for the success of my wealthy patrons. I want them to succeed so well that when it comes to supporting the arts and artists and a culture in which they're comfortable and not threatened, they will allow for a world to exist because it's in their interest to encourage a kind of freedom and diversity and openness.

4. The net allows for the production of epic work. Brecht talked about epic theater which

was a challenge to conventional notions theater, to the notion of theater as a commodified spectacle. Theater that actually related to the direct lives of people, with all the attendant boredom, the interstitial space between things happening in life. Art has always been about compression, always within a confined space of materiality, despite the large-scale possibilities. The real scale is day-to-day life. It's artists who began to blur that line, artists beginning with Duchamp and on to Fluxus and others. Those artists finally found a medium where they could work unfiltered. That can take place within an economy of abundance, can make epic work possible. Someone could come to me with a proposal for SFMoMA's website that would take the next twenty years. This is feasible. That abundance allows for amazing things. We've seen this with webcam activity. I find it fascinating. Andy Warhol must be jealous that he didn't live to experience webcams. He would have had a webcam on every corner of the factory just looking at the water cooler. I haven't really seen anyone online take on that kind of epic aesthetic activity. Epic time is variably defined.

5. Net.art is purely ephemeral. The opposite of the epic quality of net.art is its pure ephemerality. There's no trace. It can have poetic brevity, that brief a life in the collective consciousness.

6. Net.art is produced within a medium in which extraordinary digital tools are available. Artists are able to make images of a quality which is unprecedented. They're able to create and reproduce sound which is unprecedented. The actual texture is novel. It doesn't look like video or film. It looks like what it is. Artists are just now discovering the unique qualities of the net, the ways in which text and layering can take place, the ways in which color plays. There's enormous potential for exploration on a purely formal level, disregarding all the other social and aesthetic concerns.

7. Digital technology affords the possibilities of simulation and construction of truly credible images. We must be alert to it. But it allows for enormous aesthetic opportunity and playfulness. Digital manipulation is clearly an important quality that has to be confronted and dealt with.

a. Shifting of identities. The 80s and 90s was a time to look at identity. But what's taking place in the use of identity within the web, which is so easily falsified, manipulated or acknowledged, and the constructions that develop within this anonymity and presentness, is truly amazing. I don't understand it. I'm fascinated by it. The most overt examples are Artmark, the collaborative Bay Area group, doing the Barbie Liberation Front--they constitute themselves as an anonymous investment banking firm to generate support for socially interesting projects both in the web and in real space. Their insistence on being anonymous is important, shifting of identities, hiding their aesthetic practice as Duchamp did for thirty years of his life, declaring what they're doing as not art. That kind of active non-art art-making is clearly going on within this frame of identity shifting.

b. The relationship or equity between individuals and larger corporate entities. By corporate entities, I mean many things. For example, Switch is a corporate entity, SFMoMA is another, or the kind of websites generated by individuals who may claim to be corporate entities or may claim to be individuals, but their power and their presence, their ability to manipulate all of the aspects of the audience, of the tools themselves, are equitable. That's a radical shift in power relationships and that is a distinct quality of this new medium.

8. The intimacy of this medium. It's directly in your face. There's rarely someone else with you. It's odd to be on stage with a web image or a computer screen and it always seems

completely out of space. The idea of being on the web is like reading a book, it's that kind of space. It's not theater space. Yet it has aspects of theater space, that kind of tension. But the real space is intimate and that intimacy lends itself to a variety of aesthetic manipulation. I think back about Vito Acconci, with pieces like "Command Performance" or "Theme Song" in which his ability to command the audience to use that relationship to the video monitor to assume a kind of intimacy with the viewer opened up the idea of the monitor. In this case, the computer monitor as that kind of surrogate window as a kind of connector, surrogate sexual link in the ultimate safe sex.

9. Iterative nature. There is a back-and-forth continuum quality of the net.

10. The discursive quality can be embedded into the actual work. Never before has the ability of the work's critical apparatus been included in the actual work itself, so that the work and its critical reception and its transformation in relation to its reception, in fact, is all the same thing. There's an absolute collapse of space that we all thought was as distinct and unchallengable as the space between readers and writers.

11. The collapse of the distinction between critical dialogue and generative dialogue.

12. Small-scale surfaces. The kinds of images, texts, and graphical design that tends to be contextualized within it, that makes use of the fact that we have frames within frames. Often these frames are no larger than eight or nine inches. That we're working along the same scale that is paper size and that scale calls upon certain kinds of approaches to the graphical organization of space.

13. The ability to chose not only the transformation of the audience, but the exact size of the audience. We can create work that is generated to the entire internet space, point-to-space kind of broadcast, or we can identify groups or individuals that we wish to communicate with or create a work of art within. That control over the size and nature of our audience is a distinctive and unprecedented quality of this medium. You could create a work that is broadcast to infinite numbers of people, or just to a select few, via a password, like the "Hell" project of last weekend. It's not really "space" but more a set of connections.

14. It's transactional. There's selling that can take place, various kinds of buying in, of voting, of reacting distinctly to an offer, sometimes a barter. Money can actually be transacted. New kinds of currencies evolve. The idea of being able to work with currency reminds me of Yves Klein who threw gold dust into the Seine as an extraordinary gesture of artistic will and the relationship of value to a certain kind of action. Yet we have within the framework of this medium, to work transactionally, to work with the transfer of wealth.

15. The net is not directly commodifiable. I used to think the same think about video until dealers started producing limited editions of artists' videotapes. There was this fairly successful attempt to commodify video until video installation became a hyper-commodified form of video. To this point now, I've not seen a way of the artworld, gallery structure commodifying net.art. One could charge a fee though. I'm thinking of Voyager's web poetry project where you had to pay \$1.50 to buy a subscription to see it. It was a small transaction, but your money was going to each poet. Imagine the scale of transaction and the money you could make--if each person visiting your site paid a dime, you could do pretty well. It's a different kind of transaction in which the artist is in the center, in control.

16. Net.art is anarchic and dangerous. We shouldn't ignore the inherent anarchy in its form. The people for whom this is the last free space, who will be dragged kicking and screaming away from the ability to work in this free space. That freedom is rare.

17. Three "nots": it's not cinema, drawing, sculpture. Defining something for which it's not may be strange, but it is something else. Unless we define sculpture in a Beuysian way as a manipulation of social space, then it can be seen as sculpture in that way. That's a bit tenuous. I haven't seen any net.art that could fit that definition, but I think the potential exists.

18. The morphing of images and texts is unique in net.art. The graphical ability to transform text and images blurs the relationship between the two.

19. It's inherently global. We can say that cinema or books are global, but net.art is inherently and instantaneously global.

20. It inspires the creation of a corporate entity. Artists seem to want to cluster in this way, perhaps because of production costs, or because of the way people work clustered together.

Questions & Answers (questions are off-mic and inaudible)

1. The idea of the reader/writer blurring, continuum, "wreader", another way of thinking of it is host, guest, non-guest continuum, twisting the roles: host invites in the guest and a non-guest, uninvited, comes in--in the form of a hacker or an error. I love the fact that you call it a three-prong thing because it's absolutely right. I'm going to give you a quote that you're going to love. Marcel Duchamp, 1943, invitation to an exhibition at the William Copely Gallery in Los Angeles. The invitation said, "Be my guest, be my host, be my ghost." And so it's the ghost that's the third part. Odd conflation of identities. I do think that's an important thing. From Duchamp's perspective, it has a sexual metaphor and the notion of the kind of blurring of male and female relationships and in the actual interaction of male and female bodies in sexual union. For him all of that kind of action had a wonderful sexual component. We do need to talk about sex because it's a curious component. I'll get to that later.

2. Can you talk about art email lists/forums? Yes. I'm on the board of Rhizome and I think it's an amazing thing. I've learned an enormous amount, I think of it as a social space. It's replaced Echo for me as well as reading all art magazines. I don't read any art magazines anymore, I only look at the web. In places like 711 or Rhizome, I find access to a dialogue that I'm vitally interested in, but also that ability to take me as part of an audience of readers and transform me into a writer, to move me into places directly. They form a critical link, one that will probably be absorbed or imitated by the museum. I think the Walker, and Dia, and The Whitney and fairly soon, the SFMoMA, will be serving as that middle space, as grounding for dialogue, a kind of finder for those who don't have time.

3. What is Rhizome? Rhizome is a website (rhizome.org). Here, we'll go to it directly. They manage and maintain a dialogue, they present works by many artists, serve as a collaborating entity. It's a guerrilla operation with no money. It's three people running it

(Rachel Green, Alex Galloway, Mark Tribe). They send out a weekly email newsletter that contains a great deal of information about activity on the web.

4. I missed your connection between the internet and sex, what was it? That there isn't any connection. There's this kind of critical distance and I've yet to see anyone trying to create work that deals with that. Of course, there's cyberporn, which is well-financed and extraordinarily popular. But I haven't seen any artists tackling gender identity or sexual issues. The only thing I've seen is Chu Lea Cheang in her piece, "Bowling Alley," which was on the Walker's site, exploring an aspect of lesbian space. But it was so obscure and hermetic that unless you actually knew what she was talking about, it was hidden from you.

5. What about virtual reality? I know what you mean by that, the goggles and the gloves. But reality is reality and virtual is virtual, and never the twain can meet. There's real sex and there's virtual sex. Virtual sex is buying a porn magazine or going to a porn site. Virtual sex is like eating the menu instead of the food. And the distance between those activities is one of the things that the web addresses. The mechanical structure of the web is an information appendage, a utility. It's functioning in ways it was never intended to. It's developing a kind of aura in the Benjaminian sense. The softness and intimacy is creating networks based on poetic concepts and aesthetic predispositions and changing our relationship to this hardware into this network of connected sockets and phonelines.

6. Can you talk about the notion of mastery regarding digital media? I even wonder about the idea of the notion of mastering this media. We're probably all much more slaves to it. I've seen some activity that's come out of here [San Jose State University's Cadre program] that's technically so brilliant and seamless, really compelling visually and intellectually really complex, and I'd say on one level it seems masterful, like the C5 piece of yours. There's really some amazing things there I need to look at a lot more--like with any work of art you need to spend time with it. But I'm not sure that it was a masterful piece, whatever that means. I'm not sure that category really exists yet, it might eventually. Joel Slayton [director of Cadre] has been working pretty hard with the students and it seems they're working closely together, he's not the master. It's hard for even someone like Joel, who's been working in this area since 1985, to actually think of

themselves as a master because tomorrow the rules change and the possibilities are shifting all the time. The idea of it being teachable at schools like SJSU and at Cadre, have a role to play. I'm not a big fan of the idea of art school in general. I think they're wonder places to get access to resources, but basically learning to make art is something you struggle to do your whole life, and if you're lucky, before you die, you've figured out something for yourself and made something that's meaningful for you. But that's no different if you're working in hi-tech media or on paper with pencil.

7. Is there a divide between who calls themselves "artist" and who doesn't in this media? Our photography curator, Sandy Phillips, has commented on photography in the same way. She said, "Oh there was this wonderful time when photographers didn't have to worry about what they were doing as art. And then there came a time when there was a divide between those who called themselves artists and those who insisted on calling themselves photographers." She thought it was a wonderful moment when it wasn't necessary to be thinking of yourself as an artist to make photographs. Perhaps that's an interesting comparison to today and net.art. There are probably many people working within this space who don't necessarily consider themselves artists because they don't want to limit themselves and their activity by a set of prejudices and pre-definitions of artistic practice. At

the same time, since art is undefinable and limitless in terms of the range of activities and forms, I do think that what they're doing is making art, even if I can't recognize it or if it takes me years to.

8. Can you talk more about categorization of the work produced online as it relates to the museum? I have a problem with premature categorization because I don't think people position or propose their work within those kinds of frameworks. I understand why we need to do this--a few of those, some with more narrative elements, others that solely exist to produce links--the closest I want to get to categorizing at this point is this kind of free-floating list, as a development of a critical vocabulary. I think it does a disservice to Jodi [<http://www.jodi.org>], for example, to categorize that as formal because I think there's something else going on there--an attempt to deconstruct formal barriers and aspects of the medium. So is that really formal if they're working against the visual qualities and structures of the browser space? I'm not sure. In fact, perhaps it's more political, but isn't it all political. Can't you point to every net artist as being political, not necessarily ideologically specific. I am enjoying that blurred critical space. It's important that premature critical analysis doesn't start to create too many camps or models or patterns of art-making. That will quickly develop a terrible disease for this new space and that will be academicism. When we start to see academic net.art, and it won't be long, that's not different from any other art form. It's to be expected.

9. What's the role of the museum as a collector of net.art? First, we have to define terms, what does "collect" mean? Net.art is an experience in real-time. How would we collect a piece that hasn't yet ended, for example? I think the museum's relationship to artists and the net will be as a promoter. The curator will function as search engine. If you like the photos and paintings I collect and you relate to my version of art history, then maybe you'll enjoy the sites I choose as well. The museum has a responsibility to expand its traditional discursive space and I think it can do this by promoting websites, either on our server or not.

10. How does the rest of the art world think about net.art, do they get it? The editor of *Artforum* has been asking me for two years to write about net.art. They get it. People who are thinking seriously about art, get it. It's the lowest blow to say what you're doing is not art. But that's critics. Plenty of artists themselves have, historically, said what they're doing is not art. Duchamp, for example, said his fountain wasn't art. It's a language game. The ontological issues raised by something's artness in relationship to that particular word is an irrelevant issue. Especially when the work is raising broader, more subversive concerns.