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MILE

**CHArt 2007: Digital Archive Fever
Report**

www.mileproject.eu

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eContentplus

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¹ OJ L 79, 24.3.2005, p. 1.

CHArt 2007 Digital Archive Fever Report

9.30am – 4.00pm, Friday 9th November 2007

Basement Lecture Theatre, Birkbeck College, University of London, 43 Gordon Square, London, WC1 7HX, UK

	WELCOME
0.0	Charlie Gere, Chair of CHArt
1.0	<p>Tanya Szrajber, Head of Documentation, The British Museum</p> <p><i>Merlin on the Web: the British Museum Collection Database goes Public</i></p> <p>Over the next three years, the British Museum is making its collections database publicly available on the web. The release of the records will be phased, beginning with those for 2D art works (July 2007) and gradually adding material in a staged process. Conservation and science records will also be included, as well as those for the photographic collections, previously regarded as archival or ancillary material. The records include images as well as text, although not every record will have an image, which is understandable considering the size of the database, which consists of nearly 1,700,000 records.</p> <p>The database will be shown as it stands, as a work in progress, and will include terminology files as well as catalogue (object records). All fields will be available, apart from price paid, personal address and NGR (National Grid Reference). The public is invited to add comment to the records, and this process will assist the Museum.</p> <p>It is assumed that users will vary from researchers to interested non-specialist members of the public. No attempt has been made to re-write the records to suit an 'average' public user, should such a person exist. This is partly due to the size of the database but also because the priority is to update the records with accurate and up-to-date specialist information, in order to assist curators and researchers with their work. As a result, the records vary in content. A high percentage of records were created by documentation staff for over twenty years, working from Registers (bound ledgers) and record cards on Merlin's predecessors, and may contain very basic, or even outdated, information. At the other extreme, records edited or created by curators may contain very specialist descriptions and terminology. Although this is not the first time that the BM collections have been directly accessible on the Web, previous ventures (e.g. COMPASS) covered a small percentage of the collections, and special records were created for public access. The sheer size and complexity of the collections database, and the presentation of 'raw data' makes this project a very different venture, and challenging in a number of ways.</p>

2.0 Doireann Wallace, Dublin Institute of Technology, EIRE

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

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

This paper provided a theoretical perspective on the impact of digital technologies on the practices of stock image banks. Archive fever is a desire for context and law engendered by the archive's inherent reproducibility. This is greatly exacerbated by digital circulation- deterritorialisations at the level of technology and interpretation that have increased the desire for immediacy, familiarity and context. On a practical level, archival economy, or the institution of laws and limits, seeks to both capitalise on and compensate for these deterritorialisations, in other works, to reterritorialise for profit. Stock image agencies have built or expanded their current enterprises on the basis of deterritorialisations at the level of archival substrate.

Speaking abstractly, the business of image banks deals in the intersection of space and law, and semantics, or the reproduction of signs. Media determines the specificity of the archives, and historically, law determines that an archive IS an archive. An archive = combines the economics of both the revolutionary and the traditional. Restoring and saving data creates the need for new laws as regards digitisation. Continuation of digitisation asks the question, how can cultural scarcity compete economically with cultural richness?

Using GETTY IMAGES as an example, the impact of the initial stock which Getty bought in 1999 defined Getty's trade and created its visual context. This clarifies where the © resides - © defined as a legal contract governing use of the image. Digital watermarking is implemented by PICSCOUT, as well as image tracker technology, for tracking any illegal use of an image. Witnessing the abundance of culture leads to the question of culture and commerce. Digitisation = live (digital) archive. 'The Book to Come' - a book is a collection of signs gathered together in some place. Law is to do with ownership and access. Capitalism both de and reterritorialises; think of a papyrus scroll as the scrolling of your computer screen. The index is replicated by the search engine; Getty's is supplemented by the latest design and technology, and has been redesigned to present a user friendly interface (called CATALYST). However, Getty has no 'colour' keywording. The tagline is "search beyond expectations" - this website is an aggressive marketing mechanism.

Image banks are and should be in perpetual state of update and restructuring; acquiring new collections, redesigning online facilities, and in the case of Getty, creating new licences. A \$49 blanket use licence! This devalues Getty's own stock, in the process of re-valuing it. www.interact10way.com shows 10 different interactive experiences, produced by 10 different providers over the past 10 years. Gettyimages → change me.

At the most basic level, electronic storage and circulation have sped up and automated transactions, allowing consumers to conduct their own image searches and to download images instantly. Image banks also take advantage of the reproducibility of the digital image file, which need not be degraded through multiple use, and of new possibilities in the design of image search engines. Through their websites, which interface between agencies and users, they negotiate the 'territory' of the Internet: treading a path between the Utopian

appeal of its potential for open access and democratisation, the communicative and marketing opportunities engendered by a fluid multi- or met-media substrate, the desire for context and familiarity that the proliferation of technology engenders, and the need to provide simple, user-friendly search engines and information and limit appropriation and abuse of their economic resources. All of this amounts to the capitalisation of the possibilities of electronic circulation and distribution, to reterritorialisations both at the level of law and of user interface. This paper examined these issues with reference to the archival and design practices of Getty Images' web interface.

Some terms

Cultural Commons = an ideal.

Branding = the building of an image (e.g. Gehry, Bilbao, Guggenheim)

Archive = spacialisation of time which works in a spatial and temporal logic (with reference to Foucault).

The archive is a metaphor for what's happening now, digitally.

3.0 James McDevitt: Reinventing the Art Historical Archive, Funeous and Rhizomatic

We're witnessing a digital revolution. See André Malraux, 1947, *Voices of Silence*. Malraux posited a revolutionary merging of traditional art historical discourse with a modern photographic means of dissemination. In fact, art history and the institutions that have 'disciplined' that discipline (such as university survey courses and museum archives) have always been intimately interwoven with technology, from the magic lantern to digital archives. A "Museum without Walls", a model for wider diffusion of cultural works to a previously untouched audience. Malraux was more interested in levelling than celebrating difference.

A serious restructuring of the art historical canon is now under way with a conceptual restructuring and expansion of the art historical archive made possible by Web 2.0 technologies. As countless semioticians have demonstrated, categorisation fundamentally gain significance from the 'order of things'; each object's 'meaning' is directly tied to its position amongst other objects. Within this context, power over the construction of the art historical canon is structurally linked to those individuals and institutions responsible for the selection, organisation and maintenance of art history's archived specimens.

"The Kantian model is alive and well.
"Divisions of labour within the field... are essentially divisions of interest."
(Andrea Fraser, *The Appearance of Disinterest*)

This has meant, in the not-so-distant past, that the supposedly objective and academic archive and its associated institutions have served to further the political intensions and voyeuristic desires of those groups and individuals of the dominant class, race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, etc etc, responsible for creating and maintaining the collective histories of society.

Also ref. John Ruskin's *The Stones of Venice*, and ref. Judith Butler; the normative is regulated through the repetitive. Museums are resisting transition. There is no correspondence between the signifier and the signified. A mediated currency = plastic money. Discourse as subject. Mediated forms experienced in spaces opening up the possibility for different interpretations. Each object's meaning is predicated by its position in relation to a framework of other objects. This leads to Object Privileging. The anamorphic nature of the art historical archive arises simultaneously with a privileging of certain objects over others - preferencing a professional printing vs amateur snapshot - and a causally connected structuring of certain objects in relation to other objects - a preliminary sketch leading to the finished painting. There is the potential for contextual lacunas within most archives, and it is this hierarchical and causal relationship, which is structurally built into the archive, which allows museums, art historians and art critics to create grand narratives of authorship, nationhood, and epochal chronology.

The concept of a Funeous Memory is derived from Ireneo Funeo, and is capable of recalling every last details. (Although this is not possible, even digitally, as the file would be too large. Ref. Donald Preziosi, *Avoiding Museo-Cannibalism*.) Digitally networked archives are freed from physical limitations - they are limitless, and all-inclusive. But who decides what is mainstream and what is alternative, or liminal? Funeous archives can be inclusive, creating a socially dynamic dialogue, not a caste system;

"We are never going to stop talking with one another."
(Ref. David Weinberger, *Everything is Miscellaneous*).

This in turn leads to Organizational, or Rhizomatic, Dichotomies, e.g.

Both / And

An amplification system as opposed to Either/Or, which is a hierarchical system. The database can be seen as a symbolic form. It is anamorphous – forcing viewers into a certain position using spatial manipulation. Ref. Deleuze, *1,000 Plateaux...* . and the new ant-canonical archive strives to be inclusive rather than exclusive. But this creates mutation anxiety on behalf of museums! An infusion of 'noise' into a system causes it to reorganize at a higher level of complexity. Sensory overload makes any interpretation true, but not exclusively so, and lack of change is death. Physical space can be ruptured by digital dialogues. Think of metadata as what you already know. Data is what you're trying to find out.

By doing so, any perspectival position, any anamorphic narrative, is countered by other, equally valid, specimens from the archive. In effect, the Enlightenment project of categorisation and organisation has imploded upon itself by its own structural logic. The proverbial "museum without walls" must reinvent itself as an archive without hierarchy, a narrative without limits.

4.0 Paula Cuccurullo, University of Edinburgh: EDina Services for Arts Education

EDina is funded by JISC, the national data centre. It provides the educational face of Getty Images via its Education Image Gallery. This contains images from Getty collections, contemporary and archival images, and all images are © cleared, screen-res, and have no watermark as they are for educational use only. There is a minimal charge for this service, and images can be digitally stored in perpetuity. However, some of Getty's metadata is not up to scratch, so be wary of your search terms.

Films and sound files are also available online, and this is a free service. See *A Colour Box (Dufay Colour)*, at Film and Sound Online. It also provides VSM Portal, which is a national arts-based portal, and Newsfilm online, which contains ITN's and Reuters' collections.

See www.edina.ac.uk; email edina@ed.ac.uk / or tel. 0131 650 3302.

5.0 Sarah Parsons, York University, Toronto, Canada: From Information to Knowledge; An Unfinished Canadian Case Study

This wasn't particularly useful for MILE, but it was an interesting case study. It focused on the Canadian Centre for Contemporary Art, which has assembled a growing collection of previously inaccessible or hard-to-find quality information on Canadian art and on a broad range of artists working in Canada. Placing this resource on the Internet has made it available to a diverse group of users in Canada, serving the art community as a whole by drawing together and meeting the needs of both content providers (artists) and users (teachers, students, researchers, curators, writers, collectors and the general public). In that sense, the CCCA has become a technological interface for the Canadian art community. Although the project has received significant government grant support through digital initiatives and arts councils, it was a community, not a government initiative.

Therefore, the CCCA can be seen as a new kind of cultural resource, one which seeks a community managed balance between 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' access to cultural resources. The Canadian art community has not traditionally been understood as a cohesive entity. Fractured by cultural and linguistic differences, geography, profession, and by market niches, its shared needs and goals have never been well understood or served. However, art teachers, curators, artists, collectors, writers, and researchers all have a vested interest in a centre for the documentation of and research on Canadian visual culture. They require access to images, biographical information, interviews, archival finding aids and critical writings. The core information they need does not differ dramatically but how they turn that information into knowledge does.

6.0 Douglas Dodds, V&A: Computer Art Then and Now: Evaluating the V&A's Collections in the Digital Age

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

The bulk of the artworks consist of line plotter drawings, screen prints, inkjet prints, posters and photographs, but there are also examples in other media, including 3D images and computer files. The Patric Prince Collection in particular also contains a huge quantity of books, archival material and ephemera. The V&A is working on ways of making all of this accessible to the widest possible audience, and has plans to digitise key works from the collections and make the information available online, building on earlier work undertaken by the CACHE project at Birkbeck. The V&A also plans to include key works in future inhouse exhibitions, displays and publications. One of the challenges is to ensure that the collections can be framed in an academic context, and presented to a technologically and aesthetically advanced audience that now takes computer-generated imagery for granted. See www.technocultures.org.uk; email info@technocultures.org.uk

7.0 Nick Lambert, Birkbeck University: Curation in the Digital Age – How are Digital Media Changing the Way we Preserve and Curate Work, and What are the Implications for Audience Experience and Audience Development?

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

Birkbeck is running the Cash Project, looking into long-term digitisation strategies. There are different levels of complexity regarding different artwork formats – paper works, screen-based works, static 3D works, dynamic 3D works and performative works. See *Seeing Double: Emulation in Theory and Practice (2004)*, The Guggenheim, www.variablemedia.net/e/seeingdouble

Without strategies for preservation, many of these vital works – and possibly whole new genres such as early Internet art – will be lost to future generations. Long-term strategies must closely examine the nature of ephemeral art and identify core aspects of these works to preserve. Will the future experience these works as physical traces and documentation? Emulated media artefacts? Dynamic cultural events re-performed? All, or none, or these? The Variable Media Network examines behaviours for talking about artworks which are installed, performed, interactive, reproduced, duplicated, encoded (computer code or score), networked (added after the work, with other curators focused on variable painting and sculpture).

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

How to keyword unusual media is another challenge. Special requests by artists' estates have to be taken into consideration, and some works are unretainable, e.g. Helen Chadwick's *Cacao*.

Dan Flavin's *gold, pink and red, red* contains carcinogenic materials which are no longer produced. Obsolescent materials present problems. Potential strategies for preservation are

- i) Store
- ii) Migrate
- iii) Emulate
- iv) Reinterpret (although this is a dangerous technique when unwarranted by the artist.)

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

A resource intensive VMN approach would be

- i) no artist to question
- ii) problematic archives (re preservation)
- iii) originals in bad condition / disappeared
- iv) conflict of interest

So how to create documentation that is open, living, and updateable?

How best to navigate the database structures?

How best to disseminate and present documentation on digital art?

Viz. Nine Evenings Reconsidered, Berlin, 2007.

How can collaborative partnerships help to test new interfaces for publishing / researching data?

In conclusion, the aim is to reproduce an authentic experience as possible of the original artwork. The question now is to decide what to save, and how new approaches such as social networked Curation might help. Some final thoughts: the artist's status has risen to celebrity status – does this complicate archiving? And a piece of digital media has a lifespan of 5 years.