From Rhizome Digest 6.04.04

3.

Date: 6.03.04
From: Luci Eyers
Subject: [] low-fi update 26 - Broken Histories

[] low-fi update 26
[] http://www.low-fi.org.uk

[] guest selection: Steve Dietz on Locative="Yes"

[] low-fi selection: Broken Histories

[] http://www.easylife.org/netart/ [Natalie Bookchin & Alexei Shulgin]
[] http://www.calarts.edu/~line/history.html [Natalie Bookchin]
[] http://www.mteww.com/images/netartdiagram.gif [M. River and T. Whid]
[] http://www.linkoln.net/complex/ [linkoln.net]
[]http://www.whitney.org/artport/commissions/idealine.shtml [Martin
Wattenberg]
[] http://www.verybusy.org [Stephan (Spiv) Schröder]
[] http://www.iniva.org/xspace/index [InIVA]
[] http://www.sfmoma.com/espace/espace_overview.html [SFMOMA, Benjamin
Weil]
[] http://193.123.212.249/ [ICA, Tom Holley]
[] http://www.walkerart.org/gallery9/ [documenta XI] [Walker Art
Center, Steve Dietz]
[] http://telematic.walkerart.org/timeline/innertimeline.html [Steve
Dietz]

It is now possible to find many histories of new media art. These
histories appear as maps, timelines, plots and narratives. This
includes a number of totalising monographs, as well as online histories
which range from critical (see Introduction to Net Art 1994-1999) to
parodic (see Simple Net Art Diagram and Complex Net Art Diagram) to
earnestly autobiographical (see x-space and E.space). Each is
inevitably partial (some more concerned about their partiality than
others). And each attempted history invariably establishes definitions
for new media art.

A simple observation anchors "Broken Histories": beyond their
conceptual partiality, many of these histories are literally (and more
than literally) broken. Many appear buggy: where dates and events might
be, there are gaps or ellipses or scrawls that appear to be graffiti
(see Telematic/s). Often, there are long spans between updates and then
an abrupt stoppage (see The New Media Centre ICA, Gallery 9, The Story
of Net Art, IDEA LINE, Verybusy). What was it about 2001 and 2002 that
stymied so many net.art histories?

These bugs—the gaps, cessations and glitches—don't always appear to be
tactical or polemical. They seem to want fixing. But what, exactly, is
broken? What is it about such histories that so fosters incompletion?
Are they, in fact, incomplete? Or are they incomplete-able? Do they
challenge what completion might look like or mean in the context of a
history which is also a definitional act? Do they make us ask why we
would want to finish such a project? Obviously broken histories make us

look again at the histories with no obvious flaws. How is the trick effected? Where is the break that has been smoothed over?

Histories are machines and as such they have parts and these parts can break: wear out with age, jam, be sabotaged. The history-machines we've collected establish a particular image of new media art. New media artworks, in turn, intervene in the process of their own historicisation, even while participating in it. This month's list invites consideration of the aesthetics and politics of the historiographic glitch: of projects that seek to historicise new media art and of the points in this process where breakdowns are revealed or obscured.

Brief abstracts of the projects in "Broken Histories" follow:

"Introduction to net.art (1994 – 1999)" is the intriguing attempt by Natalie Bookchin and Alexei Shulgin to define, explain and historically locate the term 'net.art.' It is wryly written with a definite air of demystification worthy of any 'for Dummies' publication. It seems at first to belie underlying ambiguities and complexities inherent to the period of self-historicisation in 1999.

Bookchin's 'story of net art (open source)' was a teaching tool for her Cal Arts students and as the title suggests it was maybe intended for wider dissemination and modification. This timeline, from a net.art insider, relates net art projects to formative discussions and texts on net.art through a parallel chronology.

'Simple Net Art Diagram' is a humorous and ironic image of net.art creation. Simple and probably true.

'Complex Net Art Diagram: A Remix' of MTAA is a remix of MTAA's simple net art diagram, linkoln.net have created the complex version. It's a map, a history, and a parody of one hundred things: net art and net art's various historicisations, diagrams per se, histories per se, anything at all done in a totalising spirit, etc.

'IDEA LINE' is a beautiful and very functional representation of web-based projects that is displayed in a timeline, arranged in a fan of threads. Each thread corresponds to a particular kind of artwork or type of technology. The brightness of each thread varies with the number of artworks that it contains in each year, so you can watch the ebb and flow of different lines of thought over time. The time line maps web based work up to 2002, and was created from a public request for projects.

The Verybusy.org site, created in 1998 and still operative, works as a combined interactive portal, forum and archive for net.art where user collaboration is what creates the portal. Verybusy has consciously created non-hierarchical ways to access their database so that no particular work is privileged or made more visible than another. They are working against the tendency to select and historicise. As the user collaboration is infrequent at the time, the site is now dozing, and the archive contains many abstracts attached to links which no longer exist in the webspace any more.

Since 'x-space' was launched in 1996, this repository and archive of

commissioned artworks is self-proclaimed as 'central to inIVA's online presence.' Yet with its most recent work dated May 2002, we can only assume that this 'online presence' is not too central to inIVA as a whole.

'E.space' launched in spring 2000. Most of the work is a museum collection of digital, online projects acquired between 1997 and 1999 by Aaron Betsky, former Curator of Architecture, Design, and Digital Projects at SFMOMA. The site is an exhibition space for work acquired by the museum. Other commissioned work is also represented on the site. The last commissions date from 2001.

The ICA's newmediacentre site is a further example of an institutional new media site which is completely out of date. Although the ICA has maintained a small new media programme, this hasn't had any online presence since 2001/2.

"Gallery 9 is the Walker Art Center's online exhibition space. Between 1997 and 2003, under the direction of Steve Dietz, Gallery 9 presented the work of more than 100 artists and became one of the most recognized online venues for the exhibition and contextualization of Internet-based art" [from the website]. But Steve Dietz hasn't been there for some time now, and the juxtaposition of present and past tense here is curious.

The 'Open Source Telematic Timeline' was developed in relation to the show on communication based art curated by Steve Dietz 'Telematic Connections: The Virtual Embrace'. The open contribution system has allowed a broad approach and the timeline starts with some interesting entries with for example info on a proposal in 1684 for 'The First Coded Optical Telegraph System'. The timeline remains useful and relevant but the unmoderated system has allowed the system to break down with some graffitied and spurious, futurist contributions at the end of the timeline for instance "end of all life on 3rd planet from sol" should have occurred earlier this year.

[] Artists are welcome to submit info on new projects to the database - please use the submission form on low-fi locator.

[] LOW-FI
[] http://www.low-fi.org.uk
[] net art locator