

Anne-Marie Duguet

The “anarchive” Series as a Challenge between Art and Information. A singular approach of media art history

2019

<https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/13344>

Veröffentlichungsversion / published version

Sammelbandbeitrag / collection article

Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:

Duguet, Anne-Marie: The “anarchive” Series as a Challenge between Art and Information. A singular approach of media art history. In: Oliver Grau, Janina Hoth, Eveline Wandl-Vogt (Hg.): *Digital Art through the Looking Glass. New strategies for archiving, collecting and preserving in digital humanities*. Krems a.d. Donau: Edition Donau-Universität 2019, S. 73–77. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25969/mediarep/13344>.

Nutzungsbedingungen:

Dieser Text wird unter einer Creative Commons - Namensnennung 4.0 Lizenz zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu dieser Lizenz finden Sie hier:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

Terms of use:

This document is made available under a creative commons - Attribution 4.0 License. For more information see:

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>

The “anarchive” Series as a Challenge between Art and Information.

A singular approach of media art history

Anne-Marie Duguet
Université Panthéon-Sorbonne
amduguet@gmail.com

Abstract

Based on examples from the anarchive series of digital monographs with artists such as Muntadas, Snow, Kuntzel, Otth, Nakaya, Fujihata and Campus, this presentation will discuss the incidence of digital technologies on the ways we elaborate, think and practice art history today and more precisely the history of time-based works. Notions such as document and context, speed and connectivity, database and visualization, or augmented reality are at the core of these hybrid projects.

Keywords

Anarchive, time-based artworks, media art history

Introduction

It is a pleasure to discuss here a few topics about anarchive which is an interactive multi-media series on contemporary art, based on artists' archives and documentation about their works, initiated in 1994-95.

Each title is dedicated to the entire work of an artist and is produced with his/her collaboration, under his/her art direction. The titles published so far are:

- Muntadas, *Media Architecture Installations*, an Interom: a CD-ROM with access to an Internet site (1999)

- Michael Snow, *Digital Snow*, an artist book and a DVD-ROM, today available on the Internet (2002)¹
- Thierry Kuntzel, *Title TK*, a book of his notes about cinema and image with a DVD-ROM (2006)
- Jean Otth, *...autour du Concile de Nicée*, a DVD-ROM and a DVD Video (2007)
- Fujiko Nakaya, *FOG*, a book, a DVD-ROM and a DVD Video (2012).
- Masaki Fujihata, *anarchive 6* (2016), and Peter Campus, *anarchive 7* are both ‘augmented books’.²

In 23 years we have just published seven titles! They are long-term research projects (sometimes six years), what might not be possible anymore in the politics of academic research today.

We were not thinking of media art history at the beginning, quite few writings about media art (not yet identified as a domain) were published, and often messy or missing documentation about the artist’s works. But the topic of archives was very insisting in theory following mainly Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, as well as in several artworks of that time.

“anarchive”

The term *anarchive* has become a common use and this is fine.

Derrida coined it in 1994 in *Mal d’archive*. We had not yet read this book and we found the word through a very simple, non-theoretical way, wanting to produce one archive of an artist each time. It had to work in French and English. *Une archive*, an archive.

Of course as anarchy was resonating, we liked this quite relevant idea, as first some disorder is necessary for defining other perspectives, rethinking the existing categories and finding other meanings. Then the negative prefix underlines that a digital archive is not an archive in the traditional sense of the term: no dust, no smell, no specific place, building, basement, no definitive format. By nature it can be constantly transformed, extended, indefinitely recombined and it can migrate to various kinds of supports.

Nevertheless the first step consists of working with the concrete archives of an artist: Notes, drawings, photos, press articles, interviews, programs, catalogues, invitation cards, hotel bills etc.

1 <http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=92>.

2 <http://www.anarchive.net>.

Why does it take so long to produce each project?

Each project is at once research and an artwork based on a few principles:

THE INVOLVEMENT OF THE ARTIST...

... working in collaboration with a young team including an art historian, a programmer, a designer and other researchers. This “implicate history” is an immediate one in which the artist is the object and the subject of the research. We work with human beings first, not only with abstract data. We confront not just missing documents, but loss of memory or wishes, forgotten parts of life activities. This process triggers affects and time operates as an unpredictable parameter. I became aware slowly of this responsibility of the research rarely addressed, asking the artist to recall, to reconsider a whole life.

BEYOND THE DATABASE, A CRITICAL APPROACH

The constitution of a database is an important resource and a very demanding part of each project. But to build it has never been our main goal. From the first project until the last one we developed an analytical level usually defined by keywords which were discussed with the artist. They are main concepts, constant principles in his/her work, such as for Antoni Muntadas: media, project, visible/invisible, archetype, context, and so forth; or for Peter Campus: duration, perception, lumière, je, convergence, nature, etc.

Works are connected through these words and this level of interpretation deals with the entire œuvre of an artist. The quick establishment of multiple relations between the works by jumping from one data to another one, from a work to another one, from an image to a text, to a sound, contributes to produce a kind of “analytical simultaneity”. This ease and speed in the production of quasi instantaneous associations is a fundamental component in another way of making and reading art history.

In the elaboration of “documents” about works or art attitudes, the description is a very important issue. The kinds of works we consider first are highly variable, unreliable, time based and machine/software dependent, such as installations, performances and interactive works. When beginning this project, as a teacher and an art critic in the field of video art at the beginning of the 1970s, the need to describe such works was urgent. I was confronted with a se-

rious lack of information as well as its dispersion and poor photographs, if any existed at all. It also became clear that descriptions were a relevant way of preserving such artworks as installations.

In all our projects we insist on the process of production, gathering all kinds of preparatory drawings, technical sketches, notes and producing new documents like 3D models. The purpose then is not to offer a substitute of the work, but to develop a comment, an interpretation of how the *dispositif* functions, to make it explicit. Sometimes it becomes another version of the work as in Masaki Fujihata's project. Visualization with computer technology is a particularly interesting concept. We visualize processes, potentialities, more or less abstract phenomena. It is free from realism and illusionism, free from details.

AN EXPERIMENT BY OR UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE ARTIST

There is no graphic chart for the Anarchive series. Each interface and each design are singular. Just an example: Michael Snow has chosen a fifteen minutes long sequence in his film *Rameau's Nephew by Diderot (Thanx to Dennis Young) by Wilma Schoen* (Canada, 1974, 270 min). The objects moved by the artist's hands constitute active zones of groupings from which we get access to the description of different works. One interest of this interface is that it keeps its own evolution: the duration and transformation of the film sequence itself.

Obsolescence and updating

The anarchive's projects are confronted with the need for constant updating. Firstly, the updating of the database's content, as most of the artists are still active in producing new works; secondly, due to the obsolescence of the computer systems and the evolution of the equipment similar to other projects from this pioneering period for digital art. Older DVD-ROMs and DVDs can hardly be played on new machines.

We are using a few strategies to solve this problem, such as emulation (Muntadas) or re-programming for Internet (Michael Snow). But we are also moving towards recent technologies such as Augmented Reality. The two last titles of Masaki Fujihata and Peter Campus are 'augmented books' from which we access the digital databases.

Augmented books

By choosing to use an augmented reality app for accessing videos, photos and other data on his artworks, Masaki Fujihata was not just thinking of the technical obsolescence (- who knows how long we will be able to read these apps !). Augmented reality doesn't provide an immersive experience, but it maintains both a distance toward illusion and plays with it. It triggers a contradictory experience. Fujihata has always been working with this kind of simultaneous confrontation on two levels of reality, the one of the virtual image and the actual one, the physical space that we share and which remains perceptible. This is precisely the kind of « relevant » interface that Anarchive is looking for, relevant to the artist's approach.