

Remediating Internet trivia : Net Art's lessons in Web folklore

Camille PALOQUE-BERGES*

Résumé : The Internet still debates over the value of its contents. Redefining traditional media within popular culture, it shatters the proper definition of mediation – based on so-called « legitimate » intermediaries. Web folklore is considered as perhaps one of the lowest forms of Internet culture ; yet, it is everywhere.

Observed and remediated by Net Art as trivial culture, it nonetheless shows a crucial potential in interrogating new mediations on the Internet.

Mots-clés : Internet, Web, folklore, vernacular, popular culture, user, Net Art

La remédiation des trivia Internet: les leçons du Net Art sur le folklore du Web

Abstract: L'Internet est toujours soumis à des débats sur la valeur de ses contenus. Approprié par la culture populaire, il redéfinit l'idée traditionnelle de médiation – fondée sur des intermédiaires dits légitimes. Le folklore Web est une de ces médiations populaires, largement déconsidéré mais très répandue. Le Net Art observe cette culture triviale

et la remédie, en faisant un objet crucial pour comprendre la médiation sur Internet.

Keywords: Internet, Web, folklore, culture populaire, utilisateur, Net Art

* Allocataire de recherche et Monitrice, Université Paris 8, Saint-Denis, Laboratoire Paragraphe, camillepaloqueberges@gmail.com.

What is the cultural value of the Internet? How do we assess and evaluate the productions of Internet users? Should we consider legitimate a media that is handled by “the crowd”? Such questions about how information is authored and authorized in the media have been asked since the birth of the network of networks, and have found a few answers – that are still debated today. Is the traditional concept of mediation, requiring “legitimate intermediaries” in order to diffuse “valuable contents”, still relevant when information is channelled through many-to-many communication, when the Internet is everyone's media? Utopian theories have dreamed that the Internet is a self-organizing entity that finds regulation and authority when they are needed. But these very “needs” are hard to describe, precisely because information value is submitted to people who not only want to retrieve mediated information, but communicate through it.

The example of Internet folk art is both trivial and crucial. Internet folklore has been previously studied in terms of electronic interpersonal transmission: jokes and iconic images, in “*email forwardables*” (Kibby, 2005), are a word-of-mouth that is not oral but “*written, mediated through a non-traditional chain*” (Sava, 2009). Folklorisation is brought about by a rumor phenomenon (Froissart, 2002). As such, it has interdiscursive value but on an anecdotal level: leaving the capacities of the medium intact – the medium is only a carrier of more or less valuable content.

In this essay we aim at tackling the question of Internet folklore by studying practices that are not carried along by the medium, but actually engage it as such. This study is based on an experience of observant-participation the author has led in the context of Folk-oriented Net Art¹. Internet art has since the 90s shown an acute interest for Web folklore, considered as the lowest form of culture on the network. Collecting and recontextualizing trivial bits of this folklore (what we call Web trivia), it has however accompanied its acknowledgment and reassessment on a “higher” scale of values. As such, it has performed an experiment in mediation on the Web, channelling “low” triviality into a more critical form of cultural mediation.ⁱ

Mediation and remediation on the trivial Web

Triviality as mediation: Web 1.0 user folklore and new network literacies

The Internet, even before the Web, has been an experiment in shattering all preconceptions of what a media is. Not only because communication models have

¹ The author, maintaining a blog that collects Web folklore items since 2007 [<http://cpb.tumblr.com>], was invited by the collective Net Art blog *Nasty Nets* to be one of their members, thus connecting with the Net Art community at large.

shifted from one-to-many to many-to-many, but because intermediaries in information exchange have been reduced from gatekeeping to open access. Assuming one user can dispose of the hardware and software needed in network communication, she can put content online with little to no restriction. Mediation itself is redefined, as users appropriate network technology.

The Web information system (HTTP protocol, HTML coding and the browser interfacing) is a major step in this development, offering a tool that allows multimedia integration in a Graphical User Interface. Content can be displayed online as not only text, but also image and music, on a common interface, the Webpage – when before network users were limited to downloading network content on their home computer's desktops before being able to read or modify it.

The production of a pioneering crowd is a good example of a new literacy developed in this context, where almost every user on the network is an amateur. An expression of this network amateurism is the emergence of homepages, also called personal pages, on the Web. They are characterized by a strong appropriation of the WWW medium: a homepage displays information about its creator, displayed online under a personalized .com address or the organization address followed by the user name (organization.com/~username). “*Welcome to my homepage*” becomes the slogan of Web1.0, a name given in retrospect by Web 2.0 aficionados to the previous decade when the World Wide Web was largely committed to finding itself, in a kind of beta-test phase. Self-mediation is all about the displaying of the personal online: one's identity, hobbies, work activities, etc. Internet technologies progress by appropriation and individualization of media. Personal pages show a “re-territorialization” of media environments (Ries, in Daniels and Reisinger, 2009, p. 18).

Homepage culture is as heterogeneous as any folklore. Internet artist pioneer Olia Lialina tried to reflect on this heterogeneity in an art essay in two parts called “A Vernacular Web”, originally uploaded online in 2005 and 2007 (Lialina and Espenchied, 2009). Based on a collection of recurrent topics (text, image, music) gathered while exploring the homepage universe, the essay traces the emergence of a common media language relative to Web folklore. The title “A Vernacular Web” shows an attempt at finding topicality in media language forms specific to the WWW medium - the vernacular being a concept used in linguistics and pointing at languages pertaining to local communities and usually resistant to institutionalization. In terms of vernacularity, localism is key: homepages recreate little homes connected by a sense of group or at best, community. Localism is also networked, as the neighbourhoods of Geocities (a major Web hosting platform, now defunct), or Webrings, chains of thematically linked homepages. Also key is the development of a topical language (discursive and graphical) that binds these “locals” together in a specific context.

Lialina adopts an ethnographic point of view when characterizing homepage producers, described as “indigenous” the first inhabitants of the Web territory – as a matter of fact, the word “tribes” has been largely used to designate them in Cybercultural studies (Rheingold, 1993). They are shown to engage in a territorialisation, a form of domestication of a world still considered as wild occurring in a new literacy described as:

- emergent, in formation, no yet under the norms and standards of Web design and editing ;
- instable, contingent to bandwidth capabilities and server accessibility ;
- bound up at the articulation of the individual and the social, the idiosyncratic and the sociolectal, private and public uses of the Internet.

The vernacular Web is expressed in folkloric terms. First, it creates a popular niche in technology use, relying on cheap hosting (free with advertisements or at low-cost) and handling Web design in a dilettante posture (bugs and typos abound, along with the very much used “Website Under Construction” compulsory segment). Popular Webdesign is acknowledged as cultural material consistent in the universe of amateur Webdesign: low-cost, lowbrow productions elaborated in DIY frame logic. Second, it turns self-mediation into collective appropriation of popular topics, relying on the same discursive patterns used over and over again – for instance the expression of self through life tastes and curriculum vitae, the hobbyist expression of fan cultures, etc. Intensive and repetitive use of fixed-forms iconography such as Webpage wallpapers, animated gifs, midi music, shiny buttons, moving arrows, customized Webforms) are other dimensions of a shared iconography on the collective scale. The vernacular Web creates its own traditional frame, but a tradition based on a “bricolage” perspective, picking up and rearranging Web elements from the same toolbox rather than innovating.

The production of homepage culture has largely been disregarded as trivial, mostly by the new Web experts, a profession born at the end of the 90's in the midst of the Internet bubble. Web expertise has based its norms and standards in opposition to Web folklore, considered as messy and useless in terms of design and content production.

We argue here, with Yves Jeanneret, that triviality is actually an important part of computer networks' mediation process. Triviality taken literally as low-culture does not constitute the focus of Jeanneret's perspective, who understands the term in a broader meaning - a descriptive category to analyze creation, exchange, and institution as between members of a community or a society. The main idea is that through a circulation of ideas and practices and their meeting at socio-technical “crossroads” (from the latin *trivium*), cultural matter is given form. Triviality

“emerges, erratic and formatted at the same time, from the chain of texts produced by multiple subjects, growing from circulating forms” (Jeanneret, 2006)ⁱⁱ.

The Web is one of these major contemporary crossroads, linking in the making community and technological literacies. It is through the observance of Web popular culture that we can learn about norms and institutions. The “Web vernacular” constitutes an *exempla* of how the social and the technical meet at a crossroad, which paths haven't been clearly defined yet, in the context of the early Web.

Remediation: net.art's collections of Web user folklore

Web experts have first observed Web folklore, and classified it in the category of “bad taste” and amateur production. Net art, following Olia Lialina's interest for the vernacular Web, is another type of observer, also participating in the cultural material it takes as an object of study. As such, Net Art's interest in Web folklore constitutes a *“symbolic third party (an ensemble of values, shared practices, memory places) that in some way transcends daily cultural exchanges”* (Jeanneret, in Souchier, Jeanneret and Le Marec, 2005)ⁱⁱⁱ. It acknowledges not only the content of this culture, but its mediation processes, by remediating it.

Net Art, as an expression that actually applies to Web-based artists, is far too broad to include all artists working with networks. It has a rich tradition of avant-garde art practices, including conceptual art, cybernetics art, and more generally artists working with communication devices. However a specific group has come to symbolize the early doings of Net Art as Web-based art inheriting from Network-based art. Formed in the mid-90s, at the intersection of various artists based in Europe and Eastern Europe, among which the leading figures of Olia Lialina, Alexei Shulgin, Vuk Cosic and Heath Bunting, it has labelled itself “net.art”, borrowing from netspeak, the jargon developed within the Internet even before the Web.

From the beginning net.art has positioned itself as “found art”, drawing from the heritage of avant-garde art groups, which made a point at dealing with “popular culture” material and recontextualizing it within the art practice. In the spirit of the Surrealist and Dada movements, they offer a view into the Web trivial culture, gathered in “cabinets de curiosités”, the Cabinets of Wonders from the Renaissance reinterpreted in the modern technological age. Collecting is not only displaying items that one finds value in, but also learning from these items, in an encyclopaedic spirit: learning about the objects and the subjects that made them, but also about their making-of. Sampling is as much quoting than making new forms. In a wonder room, *“the power of the artist is exerted by positing a knowledge as well as a know-how”* (Béguin-Verbrugge, 2006, p. 266).

Collecting is thus a key practice in remediating the Web vernacular, as the organization of this stuff into lists sheds light on cultural practices and their subjects. Olia Lialina's own pages are built as Cabinets of Wonder. On Teleportacia.org, her main page, she stacks up items of digital folklore and reorganizes them as a maze where the viewer has to look around to find information. But what is key in the net.art movement is the habit of exhibiting items of Web folklore that have influenced them. This habit is rooted in the practice of curating that has taken much importance in the contemporary artworld, defining and redefining the borders of what is valuable to art. By purposively choosing to display Web folk art along their own artworks, net.artists make a statement in art mediation. Among the many exhibits stand Lialina's curation of the "*1000\$ Page Contest, a competition for people's personal homepages*"², and Shulgin's "*WWWArt Awards*" based on what he calls "*art found on the Internet*"³. The choice of disguising these exhibits under a ceremony-type of awards giving is a satiric commentary about the artworld's selection process, but also about the new cultural economy of information networks, as Shulgin hints: "*what is www art - is it public art? advertising? more data noise? does it have anything to do with galleries and critics? do we want it?*". What is at stake here is not so much the distinction between what is, what is not and what should be art on the Web, but the understanding of a new type of cultural object specific to networks. What are the criteria for choosing the best type of information? How do you distinguish meaningful and meaningless information? What does it mean to link and display found content on the Web? How do you determine the functions and values of a media that is created in an "open space", with virtually no gatekeepers to say what is worth it and what is not? Web 1.0 is still considered as a strange place where institutions have not made their way into organizing the network as a well-defined object. net.art, with an oft-ironic tone, provides a new type of gatewatching that favors Web trivia as meaningful information.

The net.art movement has transmitted the love of Web folklore to a new generation of Net artists, a loose but interconnected group gathered around the online art platform Rhizome.org. For these new Internet artists, the recollection of Web 1.0 culture is updated in the context of blogging and bookmarking, which makes the possibilities of collecting and exchanging network goods even easier. Also, with the emergence of user-content generated sites, Web trivia is to be found almost everywhere outside the frame of homepage. Hacker artist Cory Arcangel is one of the first artists to display his collection of links to Web folklore as part of his art practice, via his delicious feed to which a number of other artists subscribe. With Michael Bell-Smith, he forges the idea of "professional surfer" to designate Internet users (not only artists) who make their Web navigation and collection a cultural practice. In 2005 and 2006, they commission to surfer friends a selection of the best

2 Lialina, O., *1000\$ Page Contest*, 2004-2005 [[http://art.teleportacia.org/1000\\$/](http://art.teleportacia.org/1000$/)]

3 Shulgin, S., *WWWArt Award*, 1995-1997 [<http://www.easylife.org/award/>]

amateur Websites and Web productions they found – *The Year in the Internet*⁴. Art blogger (and close to Rhizome) Paddy Johnson picks up the trend from 2006 to this day, with a series of blogs and guest blogs under the name of *The Best of the Web*⁵. A new movement of Net artists is born from this idea of “professional surfer”, with the collective blogs *Nasty Nets* leading the way to a fashion of Net Art collective blogs dedicated to collect and recontextualize Web folklore⁶.

As such, these movements in Net Art have diligently participated in the development of collective filtering, with a focus on Web trivia. Steven Johnson, in *Interface Culture*, observed and predicted the emergence of this phenomenon: “*Metaforms prosper at those the points where the signals degenerate into noise, where the datasphere becomes too wild and overwrought to navigate alone.[...] They feed on surplus information, on the bewildering sensory overload of the contemporary mediasphere*” (Johnson, 1997, p. 33). With the explosion of data on the networks, search engines and crawler technologies have come to replace indexing by hand that was the only way to tame the “wild” Web environment (that is how Yahoo began). By sticking to human indexing, an alternative the reign of black boxed algorithms and data processing, Net Art gives insight into a user culture in the making.

User experience in intermediality: recollecting and reflecting on Web folklore’s environment

Net artists of the 1st and 2nd generation (net.art and Rhizome-related Net art) have been noticed to imitate the aesthetics of early Web folklore in a nostalgic frame of mind where recollecting amateur Web design takes place in an archaeology of computer history where subcultures such as hackers and computer hobbyists play a major part. Nostalgia for the DIY serves the purpose of putting into critical perspective the emerging high-tech conventions and standards of the contemporary Web who tend to impose formats on users rather than let them do their own thing. One blogger describes this “*atavistic impulse*” as “*noisy amateurism*” that is also “*a rejection of today’s glossy, professional site design, which tends to efface the medium rather than celebrate it.*”⁷

⁴ *Year in the Internet*, 2005 [<http://www.burncopy.com/bestoftheWeb.html>], et 2006 [http://www.burncopy.com/year_in_the_internet_06.html].

⁵ *Best of the Web*, 2008 [<http://www.burncopy.com/bestoftheWeb.html>]. The author of this essay was one of the guest bloggers in 2009.

⁶ The author has been a member of the *Nasty Nets* surfblog since 2007. For a list of Net Art surfblogs, see [<http://www.camangepasdepain.net/2009/04/17/surfing-clubs-list-blogs-collaboratifs-netart-et-alentours/>].

⁷ jesseachlock.com [<http://www.jesseashlock.com/back-to-the-future-why-are-so-many-Web-designers-partying-like-its-1996/>].

What we will try to show here is that the remediation process of Web trivia into Web triviality by Net artist is a reflexive exploration of the medium, beyond the “look” of amateur design. By doing so, Net artists transfer the celebration of network technologies to a celebration of users' tactics when appropriating these technologies. Accordingly, Lialina dedicates her *Digital Folklore* artbook “to computer users, with love and respect” (Lialina and Espenchied, 2010). But celebration is not departed from a critical perspective, in the spirit of Michel de Certeau's depiction of tactical “everyday inventions”, oft-cited by new media theory, as resourceful appropriations and redefinitions of users' needs in a specific context.

We will look into this critique of the medium and exploitation of usability tricks to reinvent the Web from the point of view of intermediality as defined by Eric Mechoulan, founder of the *Intermédialités* academic journal: “*Intermediality studies how texts and discourse are not only language categories but are indeed supports, modes of transmission, code training and hands-on lessons on things (leçons de choses)*” (cited in Badir, 2007).

An experience in space and time

Tacticality is about the fragmentation of normative spaces. Also, it introduces a specific timeline, pertaining to the user while performing tactics on his own appropriated ground.

Net.art has been critical about perceiving of the Webpage as a whole (inherited from the print page metaphor): a Webpage is actually an aggregate of elements ready to be disassembled. Hyperlinks and Webforms are key elements, as they reorient the user's reading choices into enacting and performing reading as well as data retrieving, and into an architectural network comprised of other Webpages, subpages (via framing and anchoring), and databases. They are also the first lesson in interactivity, as they engage a dialogue between the Webmaster, the Webpage reader and the information system. A good number of net.artworks play with these functionalities. Among them, *Form Art Competition*, by Shulgin⁸, *Metablink*, by Cosic⁹ and *Some Universe* by Lialina¹⁰, are exercises in the style of Webpage formatting VS. design. Formats are redesigned, treated as forms in order to compose abstract figures, by stripping or diverting them of their usable functions, generating hypertext mazes where the user does not have control over commands. By doing so,

8 Shulgin, A., *Form Art Competition*, 1997 [<http://www.c3.hu/collection/form>]

9 Cosic, V., *Metablink*, no date [<http://www.ljudmila.org/%7Evuk/metablink/metablin.htm>].

10 Lialina, O. *Some Universe*, 2002.

[<http://art.teleportacia.org/exhibition/stellastar/poehali.html#onskazal>].

the Webpage itself is transformed into a spectacle, as user's interactivity is played and performed in unexpected ways. As spectacle, it tricks the user into thinking she can act on the Web interface when it is just an illusion.

The new generation of Net artist carry on this investigation of network space by playing into blog and other user-generated content sites' templates. The "Blog art" initiative, by artists and curators Marisa Olson and Abe Linkoln¹¹, compiles experiments by net artists with blog formatting. Blogs usually offer a series of readymade templates that the user can customize minimally (menu and text colors, blocks' position), either via a user-friendly interface or by digging into the HTML or CSS code. Net art works, such as *Hippy Gift Economy* by Robert Wodzinski¹², or the Myspace works by Guthrie Lonergan¹³, radicalize the relationship to the technological readymade that is the blog template: they break them, erase their structures and their usability, turning them into a free platform to host their own Web creations.

The user experience of a Webpage is also challenging ordinary perceptions of time. Time to go from one page to the other (and not incidentally, the loading time), but also time spent or lost at searching a page, that might have ceased to or never have existed (if the URL contains a typo for instance). In the net.artists' mazes, time flies as fast as URLs change owners. The triptych *Link X, ABC* and *IBM* by Shulgin displays lists of words linking to Webpages which URLs contain that very word with the extension ".com". A viewer patient enough to come back to the lists over a long period of time would be the witness of the life of URLs, whether owned, abandoned or "404'ed" (subject to the 404 error code "page not found"). New generation net artist Petra Cortright, in the surfblog *Nasty Nets*, values error icons that appear when an image hosted on a distant server and linked on a page is taken down, as they form an abstract and repetitive picture of Web defaults that can be interpreted as an image link tomb¹⁴.

Experiences in propagation

Net artists have shown an interest in propagation of content all through the Web. What is the behaviour of Web trivia when circulating on networks? When

11 Olson, M. et Linkoln, A., *Blog art*, 2007 [<http://blog-art.blogspot.com/>].

12 Wodzinski R. V., *Hippy Gift Economy*, 2007-2008.
[<http://robertwodzinski.com/index.php?/project/hippy-gift-economy/>].

13 Lonergan, G., *myspace.com/bricksss* and *myspace/blooddd*, 2006
[<http://www.theageofmammals.com/>].

14 Cortright, P., 2007, "A few of our successful communities",
[<http://nastynets.com/?p=811#comments>]

information is not diffused (from a unique source to multiple sources of influence and then to users), it propagates in the chain of trivial communication in ways that are still to be modeled. Olia Lialina and Tom Goody (both members of *Nasty Nets*) have “put on the market” items of Internet culture and tried to keep tracks of them. Lialina's dancing animated .gif¹⁵, has been found as anonymous .gif art featured in forums that are not art-related. Moody follows the propagation of his animated .gif *OptiDisc (Fragment)* into Myspace, where it has been appropriated as wallpaper. This propagation, observed from a black-box point of view (the inlinks and outlinks being the inputs and outputs), is bound to both rationality and chance. The *Digital Pogs* project, led by Michael Bell-Smith¹⁶, is an attempt at spreading an iconic game via appropriation, on the model of “image macros” (pre-formatted images that have to be filled with content), and effectively gathered a number of participants in the Net art community. Surfblogs experiment dissemination of information as a centrifugal/centripetal process: starting from the surfer's collection of items, reinterpreted into the the basic conceptual unit of the blog post, “*a building brick of signifiers*” (Ramocki, 2008), itself submitted to a new potential dissemination if picked up, republished and transformed elsewhere.

These observations come at a time when a similar folk theory emerges on the Web about the phenomenon known as “Internet memes”, reinterpreted and popularized from Memetics (founded by Richard Dawkins), that postulate that memes are to culture what genes are to nature, as they strive to fit cultural environments by replicating and expanding. Memes are autonomous entities using cultural habits to propagate; they rely on “*the pattern-evolving machinery of their hosts' brains to create, select, and replicate them*” (Gabora, 1997). If observed through propagation, memes show fitness at growing from appropriation, imitation and variation, much like in Jeanneret's theory of culture as triviality (although the underlying postulate of how propagation is led, by immanent or transcendent causes, probably a point of divergence). The Internet has been a medium showing ease at both observing and participating in memes' propagation, especially in the era of Web 2.0 when the trivial emerges in mainstream culture and serves the interests of a cultural economy based on entertainment. But if Net art has been poor at playing the meme game, still shy from strategic attempts at recuperating folklore tactics, it has acknowledged how much information propagation is less about the tools than the users, who are affected in return by the flux they contribute to feed. Guthrie Lonergan, one of the founders of *Nasty Nets*, testifies to this: “*I think a lot of these artists are going in subtly different directions, though we share an interest in what the Internet has done to us, how it affects culture and consciousness*”¹⁷.

15 Lialina, O., *Animated Gif Model*, no date [<http://art.teleportacia.org/exhibition/AGM/>]

16 Michael Bell Smith, Mike's Digital Pogs Page, 2006 [<http://mikesdigitalpogpage.com/>]

17 Lonergan, G., 2008, Interview by Thomas Beard [<http://rhizome.org/éditorial/5>].

Conclusion. Towards an institution of Web folklore: turning the trivial into heritage

The fate of Geocities, one of the first and biggest free-hosting service for personal pages (from 1995 to 2009) is a good example of how the vernacular Web emerged into the vehicular Web – a form of global acknowledgement of triviality. Its closure by Yahoo (who bought it in 1999) on October 26th, 2009, generated an uproar all over the Web and was announced by all major Internet culture Weblogs and magazines (from Wired.com to BoingBoing.net), even finding its way into traditional newscasting sites worldwide. It is no coincidence that artist and “professional surfer” pioneer Cory Arcangel was there to mourn along by writing a piece compiling his “Geocities Top Ten” on BuzzFeed.com, a prominent news aggregator and propagator¹⁸.

Fall of 2009 saw the set up of several amateur archiving projects of Geocities, working more or less closely together: the well-known archives.org, but also the Archive Team (at geociti.es), Reocities.com, Geocities.ws and Internetarchaeology.org. Working with crawling software and other Web reaper scripts, they were followed by an emphatic crowd answering their call for help and spontaneously handing out their own personal archives of Geocities pages. Also, micro-communities of fans led their own rescue of contents that mattered to them, for instance the fan fiction subculture¹⁹.

We would like to point out the Internet Archeology project as it was clearly influenced by Net Art’s previous initiatives, its founder Ryder Ripps introducing himself often as a Net artist. It constitutes the most visual attempt at archiving Geocities as content for collections that are recontextualized, in the spirit of Cabinets of Wonders. Acknowledged by most prominent Internet-news related sites on the Web²⁰, it stands on the edge of vernacular and vehicular perspectives on Web folklore, like the other archiving projects.

As a matter of fact, the perception of homepage culture has come a long way. Web folklore was considered, in the early 2000 as a participative ceremony without stakes (Froissart, 2002). In the words of participants themselves, the ironic motto “*Internet is serious business*”²¹ shows how much Web trivia was (and still is, to

18 Arcangel, C., “Geocities Top Ten”, 2009 [<http://www.buzzfeed.com/arcangel/geocities-top-ten>].

19 Fan History’s Blog, « Fanfox: The plugin to make Geocities history saving easier », 2009 [<http://blog.fanhistory.com/?p=1002>]

20 [<http://www.internetarchaeology.org/press.htm>]

21 A slogan created and appropriated in the forums of self-referent Web culture, among which the prominent 4chan.or, a major actor in the creation and spreading of Internet memes.

some extent) taken in the literal meaning of triviality, but can be upgraded to cultural value depending on the point of view and the humour of the observer. A shift in public perception occurred accordingly, with Websites dedicated to Web folklore as “a serious matter”, whether for cultural (the archiving projects) or for entertainment and economical purposes (with many professional weblogs selling trivia to the masses²²). As noted by New Media theorist Alex Galloway, being a network progressively evolved from pure entertainment (“play”) to a professional activity (“labour”), even if these two perspectives are highly convergent and mixed altogether (Galloway, 2008)²³. Similarly, the archiving projects are a step up from entertainment, but also from art practice related to Web folklore: they pave the way to remediation of Web trivia as an upgraded value and institutionalized, making the vernacular into a vehicular mode of appropriating Web culture.

In conclusion, what has Net art contributed to Web folklore ? First, an acknowledgment of its cultural material. Second, an observation and participation in a reflexive way, operating *in situ* recontextualizations of the amateur Web user experience. Third, a constructive criticism of Web folklore beyond the readymades and illusions of the interface. As such, it constituted a form of avant-garde, being able to consider the trivial material of network's information and communication systems as valuable material feeding the cultural history of the Internet and reflecting on its economical and social developments. A critical archaeology of Web folklore, it has helped legitimize it by opening the way for archiving initiatives, and beyond, for a new evaluation of trivial material with a potential for being upgraded into the Internet's institutions. As a matter of fact, in 2010 the American Library of Congress decided on archiving the material of Twitter, another, more contemporary stance on the trivial Web. Most importantly, Net art has helped rethinking mediation from a creative point of view, based on practices more than norms.

References

- BEGUIN-VERBRUGGE, A., 2006, *Images en texte / Images du texte*, Villeneuve d'Ascq, Presses Universitaires du Septentrion.
- DIETER, D. and REISINGER, G. (dir.), 2009, *Net Pioneers 1.0. Contextualizing Early Net-Based Art*, Berlin : Sternberg Press.
- FROISSART, P., 2002, « Les images rumorales. Une nouvelle imagerie populaire sur internet », in *Médiamorphoses*, n° 5, INA & Armand Colin, pp. 27-35.
- GABORA, L., 1995, “Meme and Variations”, in Nadel L. et Stein D. L. (dir.), *Lectures in Complex Systems*, New York, Addison Wesley, pp. 471-486.

²² The icanhazcheeseburger.com empire is a profitable figure in the Web folklore / Internet meme game.

²³ Galloway is drawing from previous theory on the consumer as producer, or “Prosumer” (Alvin Toffler) and the “professional amateur”, or “ProAm” (Charles Leadbeater et Paul Miller) and (Alvin Toffler).

- GALLOWAY, A., 2009 “The Ecosystem of Playful Things”, in Conference « The Internet as Playground and Factory », Nov.9-14, Eugene Lang College, The New School, New-York [<http://vimeo.com/user2103510>].
- GOODY, J., 1979, *La raison graphique*, Paris, Minuit.
- JEANNERET, Y., 2006, « Analyse des pratiques de communication et trivialité », in *Médias et Culture*, numéro spécial, “Discours - outils de communication - pratiques : quelle(s) pragmatique(s)”, Paris, L’Harmattan, pp. 40-54.
- JENKINS, H., 2006, *Fans, Bloggers, and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*, New York, New York University Press.
- JOHNSON, S., 1997, *Interface Culture*, Basic Books.
- LIALINA, O., 2009, « A Vernacular Web » et « A Vernacular Web 2 », in Lialina, O. and Espenchied, D. (dir.), *Digital Folklore*, Stuttgart, Merz and Solitude, pp. 19-33 et pp. 58-69.
- KIBBY, M., 2005, “Email forwardables: folklore in the age of the internet”, in *New Media & Society*, vol. 7, n°. 6, pp. 770-790.
- RAMOCKI, M., 2008, “Surfing Clubs: organized notes and comments”, in Conference NSCAD: “Obsolescence and the Culture of Human Invention”, Halifax, May 28th [<http://ramocki.net/surfing-clubs.html>]
- RHEINGOLD, H., 1993, *The Virtual Community*, New York, Perseus Books.
- SAVA, E., 2009, « Eléments d’ethnologie contemporaine. Le folklore sur l’Internet », in *Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai - Philologia*, n°. 2, pp. 47-64.

ⁱ All links have been verified valid on June 28th, 2010.

ⁱⁱ Translated from the French by the author.

ⁱⁱⁱ Idem.