

WJ-Spots Brussels

Domenico Quaranta

Draft of my talk at WJ-Spots Brussels

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WJ-Spots is a concept by [Anne Roquigny](#)

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Good evening! My name is Domenico Quaranta, I'm a contemporary art critic and curator and this is my website [1] <<http://domenicoquaranta.com/>>. I first discovered the internet quite lately, around 1998, when I was studying contemporary art at the University. I intuitively realized that there was something big happening there, something that had the revolutionary potential to change the rules of the game in art production and dissemination; and I suddenly decided that I wanted to make my MA thesis on this subject without even having seen any net art project. It was a crazy idea, the fruit of my naïveté rather than my awareness; but it proved to be wise when I first met [2] <<http://wwwwwwwww.jodi.org/>>. I found this website, and many others, thanks to a book, written by Italian art critic Gianni Romano and called “Artscape”, published in Y2K. I ended up making my thesis on [3] <<http://www.adaweb.com/>>, which proved to work better in an art historical perspective. Founded by Benjamin Weil in 1994, äda 'web worked as a digital foundry until 1998, when it was shut down and entered the digital collection of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis.

After graduating, I started writing and organizing exhibitions as a free-lance curator. More recently, I co-founded the LINK Center for the Arts of Information Age [4] <<http://www.linkartcenter.eu/>>, an institution whose mission is to increase the awareness about the languages and the issues of the information age.

What first attracted me to the internet is what still keeps me interested in it: its ability to change the world we live in, the way we communicate, socialize, produce and circulate culture, the way we make and lose money, and the way we relate with power. Using it as a new platform for artistic activity, and as a new medium, is just a small part of the whole thing. What I'm most interested in is its impact on art in general: its production and dissemination; its economies; its core issues. What I have witnessed along the last 15 years is the raise, fall and stabilization of a medium, at a point that makes it impossible to understand the world we are living in without an understanding of the internet. Today, the entire world population is affected by the internet and the economic structure it is part of, but only 1/6 of it actually uses the internet. Contemporary art is part of the cultural production of this small part of the world population. This just means that art can't be contemporary if it doesn't address, in some way, the information age; if it isn't, in a way or another, "internet aware". If you didn't get it, just try to answer this question: how many internet memes can we find here: [5]

<<http://www.flickr.com/groups/cattelanall/pool/show/with/6374403165>>? How does this show relate to the media circulation of images?

Unsurprisingly, the art formerly known as net art evolved from a small, avant-garde community and an online, self-referential practice into a two folded practice, happening both online and offline, and practiced by artists who understand to live and make art in a networked world. While there can't be contemporary art that is not "internet aware", that art that puts this awareness at the core of its practice is still working as an agent of change:

a. updating codes, languages and issues from the last century to adapt them to the information age;

b. using the internet as a platform for a work that resists commodification, challenges authorship, and addresses a broader, unspecialized audience. In 1968, artist Shigeo Kubota wrote: “Video is Vacation of Art”. The internet is vacation of art, too. It's about making art for you and your peers, outside of the market rules, outside of the art world laws, and in a distribution system that can either release your work to 1 or to 1 million, allowing them to copy, modify, improve, destroy, and share it. It's about making art in a flow, without a label, without a value.

But these two paths don't go in different directions. There is not, in these practices, an art for the internet and an art for the art world. Art that engages internet as a medium can take place in the physical space more and more often. At the same time, offline art takes place in an hybrid environment in which the gallery walls are penetrated by flows of information. That's why I happen to love more and more [6] <http://harmvandendorpel.com/>: a place where the borders between the physical and the digital are redefined endlessly, as in life.

The future of the internet as a place depends on the people shaping it. It can be either dark or bright, and probably it will be both, until it will be inhabited by both companies and activists, tycoons and cowboys, yes men and hackers. As an arena for conflict, it has the potential to be interesting for a long time.

My list of the most important websites of the last 15 years would include a lot of expectable, boring stuff: geocities, google, the internet archive, tumblr, wikipedia, wikileaks etc. The same would happen with my list of unmissable art websites, from jodi to internet archeology. So, what I will submit here is just a list of the links that I will miss the most, if they got lost in the flow:

- [7] <<http://www.easylife.org/award/>>, because it provided me with the inspiration for these motivations;
- [8] <<http://agroporno.com/>>, because it's still available;
- [9] <<http://elections2032.com/>>, because it makes me hope in the future;
- [10] <<http://www.sittes.net/menu/>>, because it's where I go when I want fun;
- [11] <<http://art.teleportacia.org/exhibition/stellastar/>>, because the web has never been so starry;
- [12] <<http://www.frequentlygreen.com/>>, because it often works;
- [13] <<http://www.luciofontana.com/>>, because I love Lucio Fontana, Miltos Manetas and Rafael Rozendaal;
- [14] <<http://encyclopediadramatica.ch/>>, because we need some alternative knowledge;
- [15] <<http://burundi.sk/monoskop/log/>>, because it feeds my kindle;
- [16] <<http://oss.jodi.org/>>, because it keeps destroying my browser :-)