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## **Day 2, Part II, option A: How to Take Control—Best Practices**

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### **How to Take Control—Best Practices**

Moderated by **Geert Lovink** (Institute of Network Cultures - INC, Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences)

**Christine Sauter** (PERICLES), *Out of the Woods: Model-Driven Preservation*

**Aymeric Mansoux** (Artist), *Ya blew it... How Creative Commons and Free Culture Have Tamed Art and Cultural Production Engaged with the Critique of Intellectual Property*

**Harm van den Dorpel** (Artist), *Tokenisation*

**Constant Dullaart** (Artist), *Developing Tools to Enable the Hand Over*

### **Overview**

On March 22nd and 23rd, LIMA hosted 'Art Host', a symposium about the preservation of complex digital artifacts. In Option A) of this section of the conference, artists, museums and collectors discuss the complexities that come with the ownership, archiving, and transfer of digitally-based artworks. The workshop session was moderated by Geert Lovink, the founding director of the Institute of Network Cultures (INC). The main anxieties that emerged out of these talks concerned how artists and art collectors and museums are to negotiate what constitutes the 'boundary' of the art object, how to decide what gets maintained, and how this process can take place. This also involves questions of ownership and propriety, to which different artists had different solutions through Art Host. Artist Martine Neddham mentioned in the symposium session 'Artistic and Institutional Approaches' how, ideally, she would like to sell parts of her work piece by piece, but maintain authorship and decision-making rights over the whole work. For now, her solution is versioning, having offered the

Stedelijk 'Version 1' of her interactive internet-based work that captures manchoux.org at a particular point in time. On the other hand, Constant Dullaart appears to want to opt for a more hands off approach; ideally he would give his decision-making rights to a third party that would confer with an escrow service and the owner of the work. Harm van den Dorpel has set up his own system of financial enterprise, in which his work can be transacted directly in bitcoins on his website, and tokens can be bought in anticipation for 'future work' in an attempt to create commodity value for his immaterial work.

### **Christine Sauter - Out of the Woods: Model-driven Preservation**

Christine Sauter was an EU coordinator of the project PERICLES (Promoting and Enhancing Reuse of Information throughout the Content Lifecycle taking account of Evolving Semantics)—a four year project which specialized in facilitating the simulation of technological 'ecologies' for digital preservation applications. Its objectives include 1) enabling trusted access to complex digital artifacts 2) evaluating the applicability of certain changes, and 3) facilitating sustainability and standardization activities. Their project partners include: King's College London, University of Borås, Information Technologies Institute, Dotsoft SA, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, The University of Liverpool, Space Applications Services NV, Xerox SAS, The University of Edinburgh, Tate, Belgian User Support and Operations Centre. It therefore mostly includes institutions from the science community. PERICLES can be applied in order to extract and embed information, and can be used as a framework to consider the 'ecology' of digital artifacts. Christine Sauter begins her talk by mentioning the difficulties of keeping up with technology, when there is no way to predict what it will look like in the next ten years. She states that, in order to accommodate future scenarios, it will be necessary to adjust certain preservation practices, and even "redefine the scope of our domain of expertise". She addresses the newfound complexity of the field, which requires many different experts in order to investigate technological changes and their impact on the preservation of particular artworks. PERICLES is not a tool per se; rather, it proposes that an integral perspective be part of the basic design of systems in general that takes into consideration the whole environment or 'ecosystem' of software. They are trying to look at the ecosystem as a network of dependencies. Christine Sauter additionally points out that ecosystems are not just digital despite being the ecosystem of a digital artifact—they can encompass hardware, software, process, policy, human practices and behaviors. and so on. The 'ecosystem' approach is important because it allows the

virtual environment of PERICLES to not only track changes and simulate their impact on their direct dependencies, but also see what other dependencies are affected. Christine Sauter points out that there are no longer 'simple objects', because "even a simple object will have a complex ecosystem depending on how far or how deep you go". The model allows a controlled and informed basis through which to conduct testing in anticipation for certain changes. The machine also takes over some manual tasks when certain areas are impacted—for example, PERICLES can edit all file names in order to clean them up. Indeed, Christine Sauter mentions that this raises important questions about the extent to which human intervention is necessary.

Tate's involvement in the PERICLES project represented its possible applications for digital preservation in the arts. In their project, they focused on maintaining digital artifacts accessible despite changing technological ecologies. Case studies of software-based installations and digital video art from the Tate and the Belgium Space Operations Centre were used in order to consider the virtual and offline contexts which sustain the works. Tate points out that: "as digital content and its associated metadata are generated and used across different phases of the information lifecycle, the concept of a fixed and stable 'final' version that needs to be archived and preserved becomes less appropriate. Instead, interrelated information is generated as a continuum within a continually changing environment." Christine Sauter ends her talk by anticipating that there will be this redefinition of expertise, and notions that are part of certain fields of expertise, and that the boundaries of these will change. She also mentions that with the new EU data protection law, record keepers will have a lot of money and resources to work on that type of level, and they will need preservation experts. Furthermore, she makes an interesting prediction that: "When we buy software in the future, not only you pack metadata onto the digital object, but this software will have a model of their ecosystem so that you will see that this software goes with this, has these dependencies with these other systems and other softwares and hardwares. That's going to be the future. I think the same thing is going to happen—you will pack models onto things like you pack metadata onto things."

<http://www.tate.org.uk/about-us/projects/pericles/lives-digital-things>

## **Aymeric Mansoux - Ya Blew it...How Creative Commons and Free Culture Have Tamed Art and Cultural Production Engaged with the Critique of Intellectual Property**

Aymeric Mansoux is based in Rotterdam, and he is running a new masters there in experimental publishing. Having just finished his PhD in Cultural Studies at Goldsmiths on free culture and creative commons called 'Sandbox Culture', he gave a compelling talk which problematized the 'ready made' solutions that licenses offer to debates about intellectual property. He gives an overview of how what he calls the two 'stories' of techno-legal cybernetics and art and activism come together in these debates. They materialized themselves in free and open source software, with the cybernetics approach wanting to affect change through new kinds of code and protocols; and underground publishing, which contested certain licenses through humor and playing with audience expectation. This led to Free Culture, Creative Commons, Copy Left, Copy Free, Open Content—but these are in effect coming from fundamentally different perspectives, and applying different strategies to this issue of intellectual property. Aymeric Mansoux historically traces the development of the free culture definition and the creative commons license in order to highlight how much of the complexity, history and depth of the debate on intellectual property was left behind in the creation of this term and license. The universality of the 'free culture' definition caused a decay in the previously pluralistic definition within these communities. Furthermore, the free culture issue became a corporate and techno-legal one, without any clear relationship to the artists, writers, and open source activists that had contributed to a rich and grassroots concept of free culture. In his view, the paradigm shift was not the shift to free software and open source software— rather, "the real paradigm shift was closed source software and proprietary software, because in a sense, free and open source software was just the continuation of practices that largely predate the very coining of this term." Furthermore, when it came to the creative commons license, it was drafted by lawyers, and took into consideration potential business models in the cultural sectors, therefore being completely disconnected from the affect and politics of the groups previously involved in the debate. Mansoux makes clear that, "It was really a form of abstraction and generalization of any kind of cultural production." Although it solved compatibility issues, but it caused a loss of cultural diversity, and what we end up with is 'a sort of consumer driven, file-sharing network'. As he points out in 'How Deep Is Your Source', licenses, policies or laws adapted to the digital art world and its needs are lacking. Aymeric Mansoux therefore advocates artists, writers and activists to take on the

creative commons licensing problem, and create their own solutions—solutions that are not limited to applying ‘ready made’ licenses. His lecture remains a hopeful one, as he encourages the audience to define for themselves how their work is to be used by others—to define for themselves how they want to take back control.

### **Harm van den Dorpel - Tokenisation**

Artist Harm van den Dorpel addresses how to sell one’s work within the confines of the internet infrastructures of today. He describes Conway’s Law, where “organizations which design systems are constrained to produce designs which are copies of the communication structures of these organizations” ; and the Barbara Streisand Effect, where “any effort to kind of suppress the information, suppress the gossiping, will actually only exponentially enforce it”. He uses these two phenomena to describe the internal logic of the current cyber-scape. According to him, the internet and the social media platforms that we have now generate a particular kind of content and a particular kind of behavior that is in the character of the platforms. He also points out that the urls that we have, are decided on the people that design them, and that the address does not actually depend on the content that it is serving. Furthermore, the internet infrastructure is also not predisposed to ‘remember’—in fact, the history of the internet is not readily available online and mostly lies in our collective consciousness. This is problematic, because pages can be overwritten, and this can lead to alternative truths or certain content being lost. This additionally has political implications, and he points out how the Trump administration erased any mention of climate change from their official .gov site as soon as they came into office. In an attempt to address this issue, Harm van den Dorpel gives an overview of hashing, or ‘fingerprinting’, in which a relatively large piece of information is rendered into a seemingly random set of numbers. Using a hash, censorship can also be avoided, since the content is not hosted on a site but rather parts of it are hosted by different people. As Harm states, the benefit of hashing is that: “There are infinite gateways that lead to the same addressing scheme, so it’s basically impossible to shut this down”. He briefly mentions the possibility of a kind reinvention of the old peer to peer system in order to keep track of versions of websites online.

He then introduces a ‘proof of concept’ for a way in which non-materialized artworks can be purchased and gain value over time using blockchain technology and

cryptocurrencies. It is based on his website of Left gallery, through which users can purchase artworks directly by paying with Bitcoin—or, now Ethereum—through a browser extension. With this project, he introduces a system in which the ownership of these artworks is stored in the blockchain through a token—because, as he mentions, storing much more than that becomes incredibly expensive. If the owner purchases a specific work on his website, they get the complete artwork and a token which identifies the work. It is also possible to purchase an artwork that has not yet been materialized, through the purchase of what he calls a ‘wild card token’. The way that Harm van den Dorpel explains his token system is that “each token is unique and can develop its own price over time, and each token can be connected to an artwork”. With the wild card token, although it is initially fungible, these “transform into non-fungible tokens once the metadata is set, once they receive the first version in the chain”. The way that the token can accrue value is by being sold to another party after the initial purchase of the token. Furthermore, there is not much chance that Harm van den Dorpel will lose the value of his work as the wild card token prices are based on his most ‘expensive’ work. Speculation can therefore become possible in his wild token system, and this can be considered an innovative way to create ownership for non-material ‘future’ artworks, and to allow its value to increase over time in a certified yet reliable way. His system also allows for versioning through using hash.

### **Constant Dullaart - Developing Tools to Enable the Handover**

Constant Dullaart addresses ‘how to take back control’ as an artist by focusing on how to make web-based works an exchangeable commodity through the use of certain tools. As he mentions, in order for the artwork to be commodified and traded, it requires “multiple agreed-upon values to be complete or ready for exchange”. For this, a single point of entry such as a domain or hash is needed. He outlines his method of creating a ‘body of work’, which entails not only the artwork itself but also its documentation. He compiles the documentation by crawling the web for certain keywords and registering the social responses to his work. He rightfully puts emphasis on the importance of context, although unlike Harm he does not attempt to create a system in which ‘one history’ needs to be authenticated. Rather, it is through the fragments compiled in his documentation that the work’s context can be taken into consideration. All of these elements would be included in the handover. The public accessibility of Constant Dullaart’s works is of high importance to him, which is also why he mentions the need for contracts for the caretaker-ship of his works. Constant is concerned about this

caretaker-ship, and setting it up in a way which would allow a third party such as LIMA or Rhizome to take certain decisions in particular situations. He proposes that an escrow service be used to mediate between the trusted partner, him, and the collector. In terms of a certification of authenticity, he points out that despite the use of stamps and hashes, it has occurred to him that in many cases there is a system of social relations which surrounds a work, and which in and of itself 'authenticates it'. He is working with LIMA in the creation of Art Host, which will be released in the summer. Like Harm, Constant considered the use of Ascribe, but it made it very problematic to sell work as buyers did not understand the technicalities of such a transactional process.

### **Reflection**

To begin with, Christine Sauter, Aymeric Mansoux, Harm van den Dorpel and Constant Dullaart all touch on the complexities of ownership and commodification when it comes to digital artifacts. Christine Sauter's overview of the research project PERICLES gives insights into the ways in which digital artifacts are always-already part of a larger ecology—which includes not only technical components, but also policies, and so on—and how these larger ecologies are also involved in the maintenance of the work as 'dependencies'. Aymeric Mansoux points to the inherent local struggles which occur on the internet when it comes to copyright and ownership, making clear that despite attempts to standardize and universalize key concepts and practices, there remain ambiguities and space for artists to self-determine. Harm van den Dorpel experiments with commodifying future non-materialized works through his innovation of wild tokens, attempting to stimulate exchange. Constant Dullaart additionally pointed to the ways in which artworks must have a single point of entry that can be 'sold' in order to be considered a commodity, and how this can be navigated through the use of an escrow service.

Secondly, these lectures shed light into the complications that come with digital artifacts, in terms of their life span and anticipated 'death'. Christine Sauter attends to the inevitable obsolescence and change of technologies through using a modeling system. Aymeric Mansoux points to the ways in which the life of a work can be extended through subcultural practices such as xeroxing. Harm van den Dorpel attempts to find a way to compile a 'history of the internet' through old peer to peer

systems. Constant Dullaart solves this issue by focusing on how to manage the care-taking of his work in a way that is sustainable, through the use of an escrow service. These different approaches to the inevitable 'death' of a work reflect the ways in which artist intent remains important long after the inception of the work. It makes clear that the work is not only constituted by its form and content, but also by how its form and content is positioned, framed, and accessed.

### **Bibliography**

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