



ART
AFTER
PRESERVATION

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Over the last six decades, networked art practices have evolved in response to and in anticipation of changing material conditions of communications systems, infrastructures, and technologies. Whether pre-internet correspondence art, or born-digital software-based, or net art, the material and, at times, ideological dimensions of networked art challenge existing approaches, methods, and protocols of not only the production of contemporary art but also its conservation, which this text seeks to address. Often tactically amorphous, integrated, and inseparable from conditions and questions of (im)materiality (see Lillemose, 2006), networked art resists conservation efforts to trace its edges and boundaries. Therefore, how and should we develop conservation efforts to offer access to the 'original' work in context without undermining its unruly materiality and institutional critique, particularly *after the digital*? Whether these efforts are called 'conservation' by museum curators, or 'preservation' by librarians and archivists, they share the same intent: making the work accessible. In the words of Peggy Phelan this "*labour [...] to 'preserve' [performance] is also a labour that fundamentally alters [it]*" (Phelan, 1993, p. 148). This labour further compounds the challenge of identifying the edge or boundary of the networked artwork to draw a line around it for its conservation. As apt as Phelan's observation is related to the immediacy of performance, its applicability endures with increasing urgency in terms of the performative hypermediacy of networked art practice.

Due to, rather than despite, this tension, we seek to trace the edges and boundaries of preserving both pre-internet and born-digital networked art practices. Focusing upon artworks that draw on distribution networks (such as the postal system and the internet) as their primary medium of production, we aim to unpack existing digital preservation efforts concerning online and offline exchanges. Our findings emerge from investigating possible approaches to **6 Months Without** (Nastja Säde Rönkkö, 2018–2019) and the **Museum of Ordure** (Stuart Brisley, Geoff Cox, Adrian Ward and Maya Balgioglu, 2001–onwards) as case studies. In so doing, we also tackle the present and future implications of using web archiving tools [such as the Internet Archive's **Wayback Machine** (1996–onwards)] as a preservation strategy and how they might impact artistic and curatorial agency and authorship.

NETWORKED ART: WHAT, WHERE, AND HOW?

We take recent works of art as a point of departure to survey a range of issues, challenges, and opportunities regarding networked art practice after digital preservation. Where and how does networked art happen, and how is that defined? Many of these artworks exhibit hybridity, performativity, ephemerality, dissolution, proliferation, and even auto-destruction. These "*work-defining*" properties as Pip Laurenson calls them (Laurenson, 2006) make networked art challenging to define and preserve. However, we can also observe ways in which networked art itself can be accumulative or built on repositories, even creating archives of ongoing interaction and participation as the focus of the work itself. The appropriative and generative nature of networked art critiques notions of originality, uniqueness, and materiality after digital reproduction. Networked art can even behave, somewhat ironically perhaps, as a form of digital preservation and act of media archaeology. In other words, preserving networked art can become a form of production of new work. Archivist Sarah Haylett has investigated this in the context of artworks which, through conservation and exhibition, generate their own archives (Haylett, 2022). The challenge is bringing existing approaches, methods, and protocols into alignment: the preservation of networked art will require libraries, archives, and art museums to share knowledge, and skills around preventive conservation, recordkeeping, and archiving.

Networked art's cardinal principle of peer-to-peer distribution as its primary means of co-production and circumvention beyond institutional curatorial

spaces makes it singularly relevant to our contemporary social, cultural, and political experience. As such, networked art, particularly web-based and internet art, has become increasingly attractive to major contemporary art institutions. The exhibition **The Art Happens Here: Net Art's Archival Poetics** (2019) at the New Museum and the accompanying online portal, *Net Art Anthology* (Rhizome, 2016/2019), is such an example. The project takes its title from MTAA's *Simple Net Art Diagram* (1997) (Figure 1), which concisely articulates networked art practice as a performative, live encounter or exchange within relational space.

So, where and how does networked art happen? Does the art always happen 'in between' as the MTAA diagram suggests, or if "The Address is the Art" [as mail artists Marc Bloch, Mark Pawson, and others have stamped (Ochone, n. d.)], can the location or coordinates of that interaction align with a URL? Taking our working definition of networked art as *artworks which draw on distribution networks as their primary means of production*, what might this mean for works such as Miao Ying's **Blind Spot** (2007), a Mandarin dictionary annotated to remove censored search terms on google.cn?

Or a work such as Émilie Brout and Maxime Marion's **Nakamoto (The Proof)** (2014) (Figure 2) which documents the artists' unsuccessful attempt to use bitcoin to buy a fake passport for Satoshi Nakamoto, the alleged creator of Bitcoin, over the darknet.

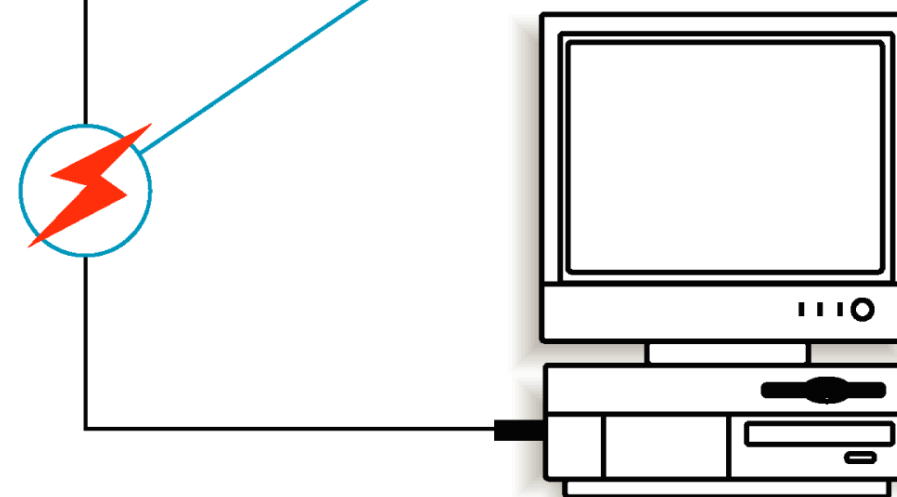
Figure 1: MTAA (M. River & T. Whid Art Associates), *The Simple Net Art Diagram* (circa 1997) Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.5; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/legal-code>

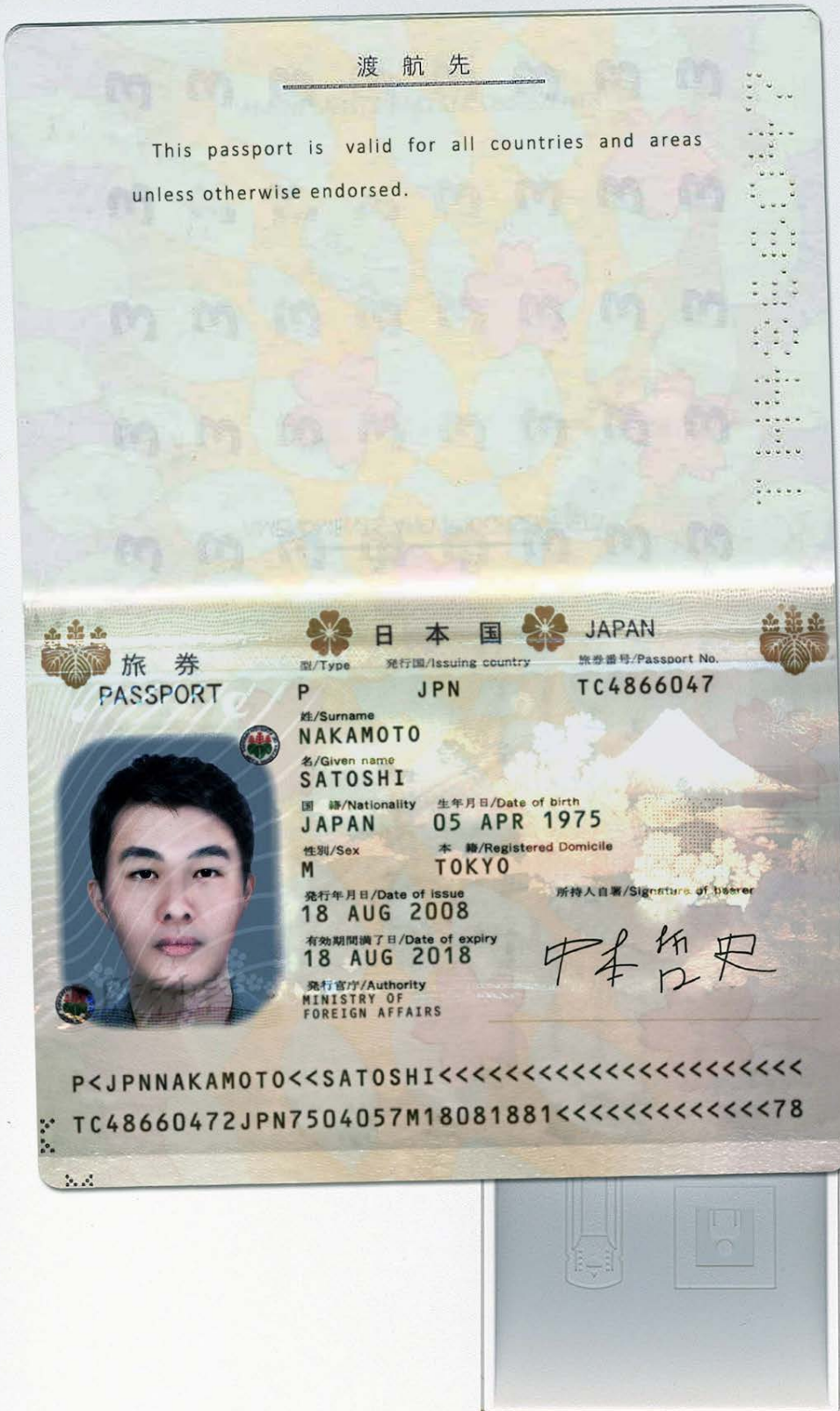
Simple Net Art Diagram



MTAA ca. 1997

The art happens here





CONSERVATION CHALLENGES OF NETWORKED ART, BEFORE AND AFTER THE INTERNET

Conservation challenges exist in the curatorial reproduction of networked art practice before and after the Internet. Consequently, as Zach Blas comments, “*untangling the relation or the collapsing of ‘Internet’ and ‘network’ whereas the Internet can be understood as being comprised of networks, but the network is not Internet*” (Blas, 2016, n.p.) is essential. For example, Robert Adrian’s **The World in 24 Hours** (1982) “*connected artists in 16 cities on three continents for 24 hours between 12:00 noon on September 27 to 12:00 noon on September 28, 1982 (Central European Time) as part of the Ars Electronica 1982*” (Grundmann, 1984, p. 86). Critic and theorist Josephine Bosma has researched the work’s possible re-enactment strategies, even “*involving a new generation of artists and various alternative network practices*” (Bosma, 2017, n.p.). Presenting this research within the context of digital art preservation discussion at *SHA2017 (Still Hacking Anyway – a hacker camp in the Netherlands)*, Bosma discussed the project as a way of addressing the susceptibility of computer network art to become lost. The analogue materiality of **The World in 24 Hours** accentuates this susceptibility, as does its hybrid platform-as-artwork ontology, whereby the work is intended to serve as an interface for artistic telecommunication on a global scale, ten years prior to the widespread adoption of web browsers.

The World in 24 Hours is an artwork that happens between exchange and transmission, creating a network-as-artwork and vice versa. Bosma considers how to resituate the work’s analogue communications technologies, such as Slow Scan TV, in the contemporary digital, post Web 2.0 media environment as central questions and issues to address in any future re-enactment. This focus reminds us of the restricted access to telecommunications media in the 1980s and the scale of ambition involved in mounting **The World in 24 Hours** as a networked planetary event. Bosma’s research seems to be as much about re-enacting the technical capacity of the I. P. Sharp Associates Network (1982) (Figure 3) as it is about re-enacting the platform on which and through which **The World in 24 Hours** works, at least as much as it is about re-enacting the artistic exchanges that happen through the network because they are so deeply connected.

Figure 2: Brout, É & Maxime, M. (2014). Nakamoto (*The Proof*). [Passport Scan]. Retrieved from <https://www.eb-mm.net/en/projects/nakamoto-the-proof>.

As is often the case with networked art practices, the context of the work and its outcomes are indivisible. Recovering a decentralised analogue network apparatus in a contemporary world of distributed digital transmission amounts to a purposeful or even wilful refusal of practicality, expediency, and convenience. In light of the political nature of the digital in the post-Snowden era, Bosma addresses the possibility of refusing or circumventing modern social media platforms. She discusses the possibility of looking at outmoded technology such as ham radio, etc., in an effort to retain autonomy from the surveillance capitalism of the control society.

How the analogue materiality and hybrid ontology of **The World in 24 Hours** challenges conservation efforts is not unusual. Other networked artworks go further still in engaging material and ideological strategies to deliberately obstruct conservation, such as Heath Bunting's **Own, Be Owned Or Remain Invisible** also known as **_readme** (1998–onwards). Bunting's work is a canonical work of early net.art and, as such, was included in the exhibition **Electronic Superhighway** (2016) at Whitechapel Gallery.

*“After copying a randomly selected magazine article onto his Web page, Bunting modified the article so that each word of written text becomes a hyperlink to itself. For example, the word ‘is’ links to www.is.com, ‘on’ inks to www.on.com, ‘together’ links to www.together.com, and so on. The selection of links is not meaningful—some words have been bought as Internet addresses while other words remain inaccessible. As a Web page **_readme** is nothing but links to other places; it is an aestheticization of protocol as such.”* (Galloway, 2004, p. 225).

Of the many accounts of the work, we prefer this description by Alexander Galloway, who goes onto remark that Bunting's **_readme** “focused on a total dissolution of the art object into the network” (Galloway, 2004, p. 225). This dissolution emphasizes the permeability of the digital object within its network context, in contrast to the opaque physicality of the analogue object.

WHEN PRESERVATION BECOMES PRODUCTION: APPROACHES, METHODS, AND PROTOCOLS OF NETWORKED ART PRACTICES

We are interested in speculating about how the material conditions of digital preservation reflect and influence the contemporary production of networked art practice. By this, we mean moving beyond the established narrative of attempting to digitally rescue and restore fragments of modernist, avant-garde destruction and decay. Far from deliberately resisting collection and conservation, we consider a tendency in contemporary

Figure 4: Morehshin Allahyari, King Uthal from the series Material Speculation: ISIS, 3D printed resin and electronic components, image courtesy of the artist, 2015.



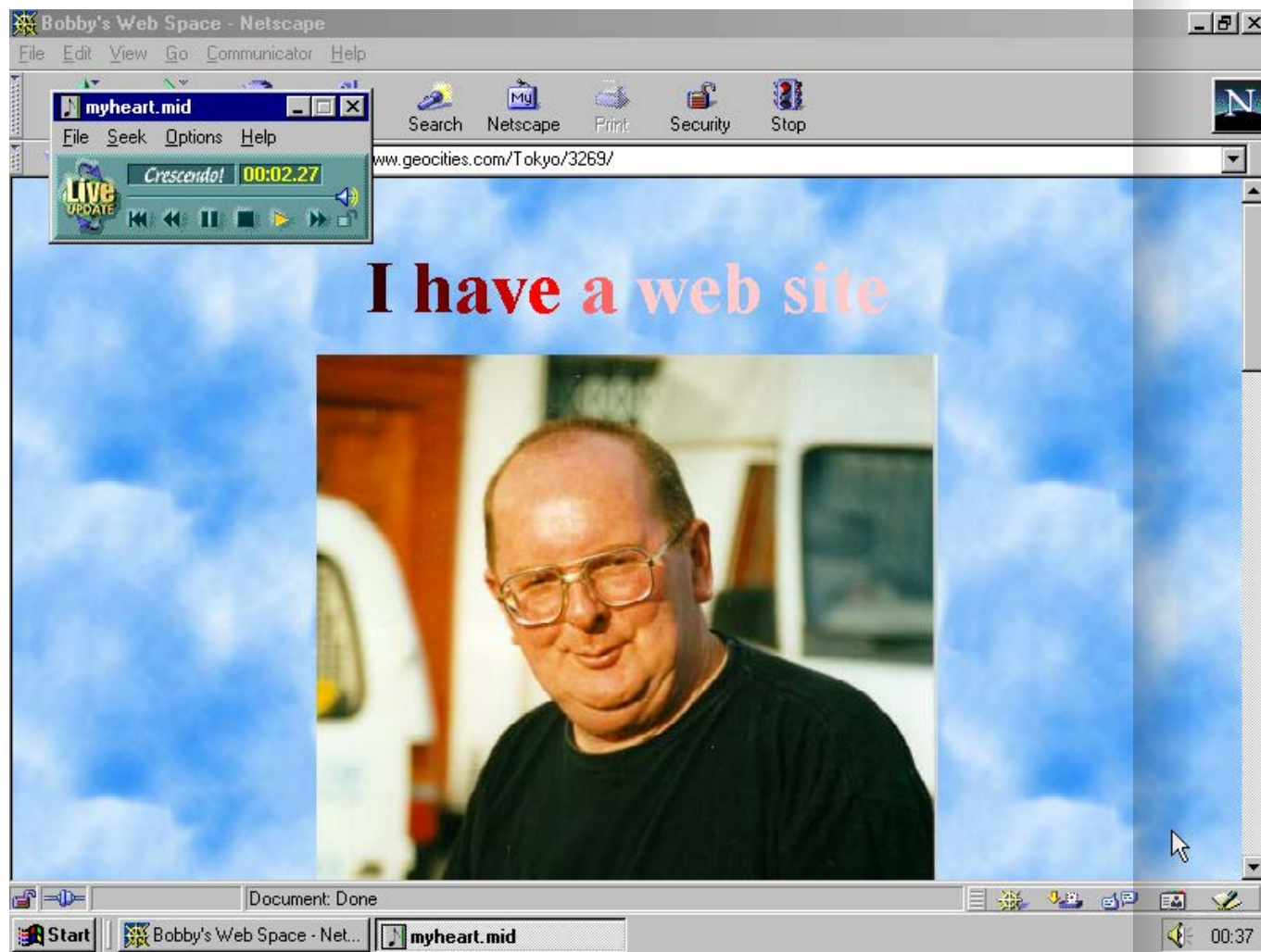


Figure 5: Espenschied, D. & Lialina, O. (2013–ongoing). I have a web site from *One Terabyte of Kilobyte Age Photo Op*. [Restoration of GeoCities web page, Screenshot, 2013, Netscape 4.51 on Windows 2000]. Retrieved from <https://anthology.rhizome.org/one-terabyte-of-kilobyte-age>.

networked practice to operate as a form of digital preservation or media archaeology, where artists shift to curatorial roles where in turn they excavate networked media processes.

Evidence of such works was present in Rhizome’s **The Art Happens Here: Net Art’s Archival Poetics** show, such as Morehshin Allahyari’s reproduction of 3D-printed replicas of artifacts destroyed by ISIS in her work **Material Speculation: ISIS** (2015–2016) (Figure 4) or Olia Lialina and Dragan Espenschied’s **One Terabyte of Kilobyte Age** (2010–ongoing) (Figure 5), which preserves and appropriates Geocities websites as “assisted readymades”.

Curators have long been implicated in the preservation of art through their own productive practices, insofar as exhibition-making offers a significant contribution to the preservation of the art it displays. The art history of networked art continues to rely on survey exhibitions. The history of new media art exhibitions, including **The Art Formerly Known as New Media** (Dietz & Cook, 2005), **Open Systems** (de Salvo, 2005), **Electronic Superhighway** (Whitechapel, 2016), **The Art Happens Here** (Connor et al, 2018), has been influential in excavating and representing artworks at risk of disappearance. Aside from exhibitions, however, there are several different ways networked art practices are conserved and made accessible, whether or not they are preserved. These include Patricia Norvell’s interviews with conceptual artists (Norvell, 2001) and Charlotte Frost’s work on preserving **Mailinglist culture** (Frost, 2019). These explorations involve uncovering networks used by artists and then thinking through how that material documents the artist’s intent, if not the work of art itself. Art conservation draws on different models in this respect, such as Renee van de Vall’s thinking on the artist’s biography and the materiality of the work (van de Vall et al., 2011), Brian Castriota’s writing about the identity of an artwork (Castriota, 2019), Glenn Wharton on the artist’s intention (Wharton, 2006), and Hannah Hölling’s idea of “relative durations of impermanence” (Hölling, 2016) in thinking about the artist’s intent as being relative to a particular period of time.

There are a variety of models and themes at play within the domain of online preservation. These include thinking about instantiation, the moment when the work comes into being on the web, and digital curation as a machinic process which can be enacted by technical tools and applications, which the Digital Preservation Coalition has been exploring (Digital Preservation Handbook, n. d.). Annet Dekker’s concept of ‘networks of care’ is central to this thinking (Dekker, 2020). Dekker’s accomplishment is in incorporating unusual conservation strategies into a framework of practice.

The practice of networked art conservation has been aided considerably by the invaluable work of *Rhizome*, not only in developing preservation approaches such as *Net Art Anthology* but also in their parallel engagement with archiving the live web – initially through **Webrecorder.io** (2015–2020), renamed in June 2020 as **Conifer** (2020–onwards). While Conifer adds a new dimension of capturing user-driven interactions

with webpages rather than only a static snapshot of the page itself, the 'Internet Archive's Wayback Machine (1996–onwards) continues to be an invaluable resource for curators seeking to research and restage online networked artworks whereby archival preservation offers different approaches, methods, and protocols. Where recordkeeping generates documentation, archiving organises those records, then preservation also involves making them accessible. These various models of documentation practice include Joanna Phillips' work on recording differences between an artwork's score and multiple iterations as time-based art (Phillips, 2015), or providing access to a variety of records exemplified by born-digital artworks such as the *Net Art Anthology*. Preventive conservation is also relevant (Besser, 2014), which includes keeping track of infrastructure and environmental problems on a micro and macro scale, and "*post-custodial archival methodology*" (Ham, 1981), through which archivists "*ensure the integrity of, preserve, and provide access to archival materials without taking physical custody over them*" (Bliss, 2019).

This methodology can be facilitated through Open Archival Information Systems – archives in which networks of people and systems work together to preserve information and keep it accessible (Wikipedia: OAI, n.d.). Whether involved in commissioning work or assisting in its restaging, curators play a role in conservation efforts as part of a network of care. The importance, however, is to understand which element of the work or its context is best preserved according to which model, for example, which part benefits from being scored or being migrated, and which parts need better documentation or new records created.

In the second half of this chapter, we will look more closely at two case studies, Nastja Säde Rönkkö's **6 Months Without** (2018–2019) and the **Museum of Ordure** (2001–onwards) founded by Stuart Brisley, Geoff Cox, and Adrian Ward and involving Maya Balgioglu and curator Rosse Yael Sirb and report back on the challenges these networked art projects present from a variety of perspectives.

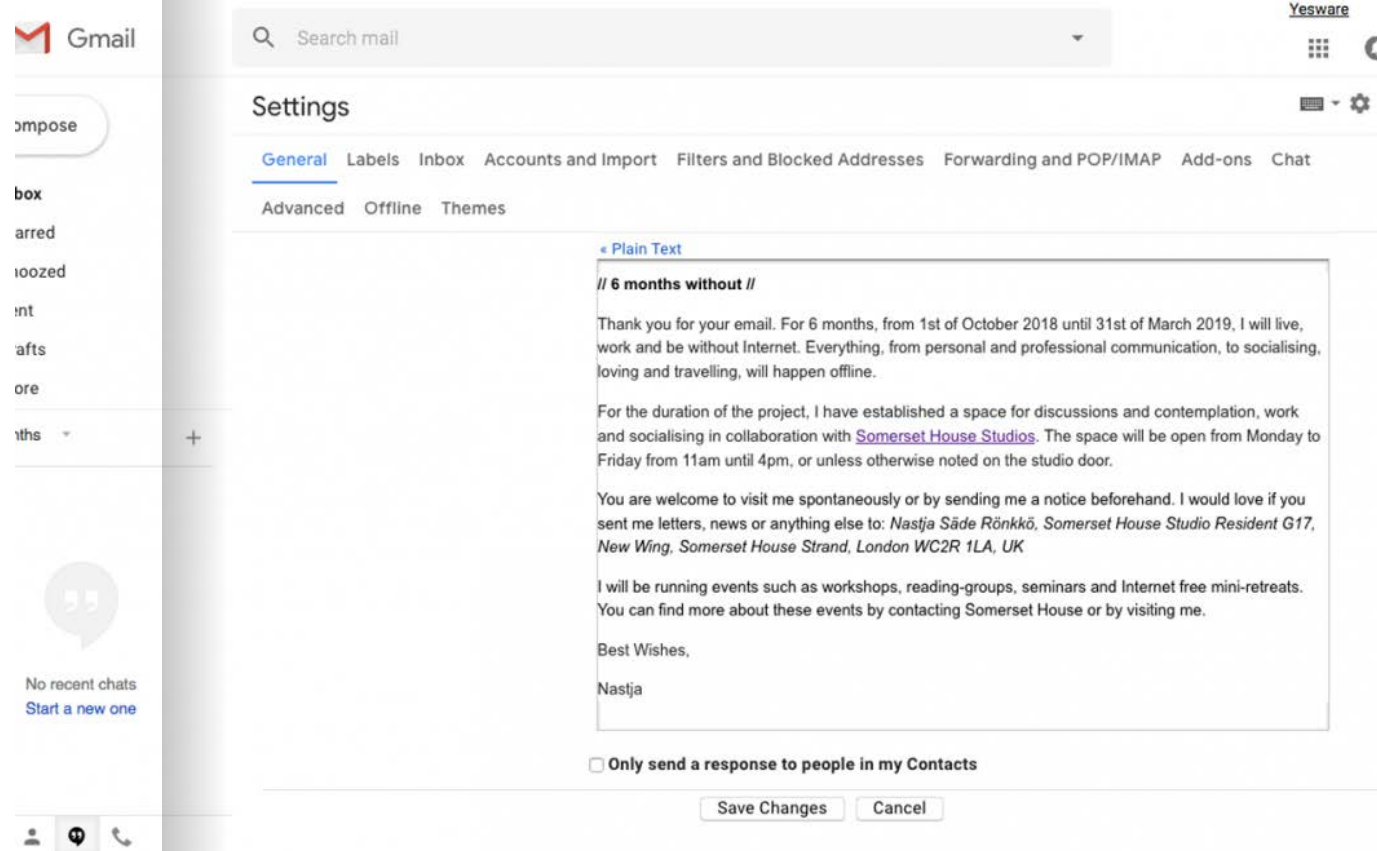


Figure 6: Rönkkö, N.S. *Out of Office Autoreply from 6 Months Without* (2018–2019) [Screenshot].

Case Study: 6 Months Without
 An interest in applying an expanded definition of networked art practice informed our selection of Nastja Säde Rönkkö's **6 Months Without** (2018-2019) as a first case study for research.

In her performance, the artist disconnected from the Internet for six months, during which time she lived entirely offline. All aspects of her life, including personal and professional communication, navigating London, socialising, connecting with people and working all took place without the Internet. From her space at Somerset House Studios, Rönkkö led seminars and workshops, while people could reach her by letter, phone calls or visiting the studio. In that sense, the work became a correspondence project, producing documentation of life without relying on the Internet.

From 1 October 2018 until 31 March 2019, the work was a multi-faceted performance of everyday life, minus the online dimension. It was captured as a documentary film, email and postal correspondence, audio recordings of the artist's reading the letters, workshops with guests sharing offline time, and all the physical evidence of navigating the world during six months without the internet (Figure 6).

6 Months Without was part of the group show **24/7: A Wake-Up**



Figure 7: Rönkkö, N.S. *6 Months Without* (2018–2019) artist's correspondence, in the exhibition 24/7 at Somerset House, 2019. Photo (c) Tim Bowditch

Call for our Non-Stop World, which ran between October 2019 and February 2020 (co-curated by Sarah Cook for Somerset House, Cook, 2019). Additionally, on the artist's website, there are two video works exploring the performative experience of these six months offline, and the abundance of correspondence the project generated.

Documenting the artist's experience of living for six months without the internet, **6 Months Without** is an expanded performance engaging artistic, social, and technological network practices differently at each stage of its production, distribution, and reception. The work articulates the extent to which networked cultural experience and knowledge production has become ubiquitous as its platforms providing the interface of much of our social relations. Networked artists once built bespoke

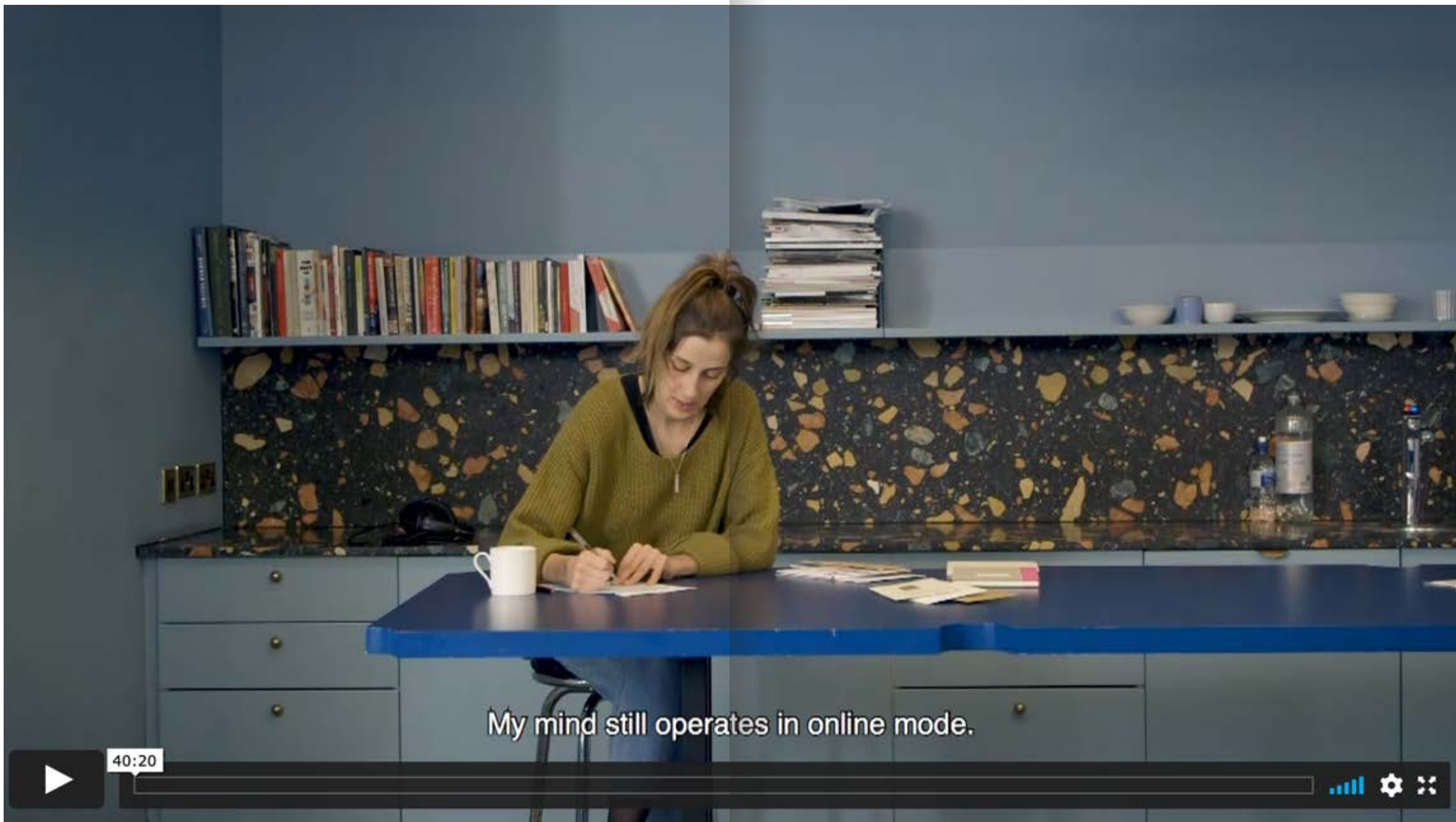


Figure 8: Rönkkö, N.S. *6 Months Without* (2018–2019) (Vimeo screenshot).

platforms of transmission and exchange but may now just as often intervene within and divert the direction of its otherwise pervasive data flows. Networked art practice, in this sense, is an interventionist practice, consciously documenting and exchanging the affects and effects of our globally networked society.

6 Months Without takes its place within a genealogy of conceptual and performance art in which documentation and information provide the work's material base. This tradition includes On Kawara's **I Got Up** (1968–1979), in which he sent two picture postcards stamped with the time he woke up from his location daily. Tehching Hsieh's **One Year Performance** series (1978–1986) also explores self-deprivation, variously of freedom (*Cage Piece*, 1978–1979), personal time (*Time Clock Piece*, 1980–1981), outdoor space (*Outdoor Piece*, 1981–1982) or personal space (*Rope Piece*, 1983–1984, with Linda Montano) or of making art at all (*No Art Piece*, 1985–1986). Rönkkö, like Kawara and Hsieh, explores regimented documentation and communication of daily existence and themes of autonomy and restriction simultaneously. Unlike the well-rehearsed view whereby documentation is understood as undermining the authenticity or liveness of performance, Kawara, Hsieh and Rönkkö's strategy arguably exists to generate documentation as the vital material of the performance.

The main distinction between Kawara and Hsieh's systems of documentation and Rönkkö's in **6 Months Without** is that Kawara and Hsieh developed systems prior to online algorithms and GPS, but Rönkkö investigates these experiences in an online world of default self-surveillance. As with Kawara and Hsieh's exhibitions too, stepping away from the pervasiveness of online experience produces physical proof that is progressively reified and fetishized. In Rönkkö's case, the archives of unique handwritten letters she relied upon to communicate across the offline/online, private/social divide come to stand both in place and as the work ([Figure 7](#) and [Figure 8](#)).

The experience of being offline for a day invites further speculation on how it would feel to be offline for longer. How long could you be offline? What would it be like to be offline for six months? When we talked with Nastja about this work, one of the things that came up was, of course, the conditions of the global health pandemic caused by COVID-19 and resulting 'lockdowns'. Many of us have spent much more time online in 2020 than we might have otherwise. And therefore, our desire to be offline might have increased. Since then, people have written to Nastja to ask her whether she felt better prepared for the pandemic because of her experience making *the* project. So, the work develops a strange resonance and increased relevance over time where her idea of its performance stopped at the end of that six months, but other people's interest in the possibility of re-enacting or re-performing the work has continued. Re-enactment as a form of preservation becomes resonant with this work, particularly in our current environment affected by anti-pandemic measures.

CASE STUDY: THE MUSEUM OF ORDURE

The **Museum of Ordure** (2001–onwards) actively resists preservation by *“present[ing] the process of digital decay ‘bit rot’ exploring cyberspace as a site where language and imagery disintegrates just as in the physical world”* (Whitely, 2011, p. 155). The formation of the Museum was directly informed by the practice of pioneering performance artist Stuart Brisley and primarily his establishment of the **Collection of Ordure** in 2000, inspired by Freud's dream of a Museum of Excrement (Brisley, n.d.). Brisley's work since the 1960s has investigated the physiological embodiment of psychological alienation, derangement and trauma. Living and working through the post-WWII and cold war periods, Brisley explored the construction and estrangement of the subject in the context of the material and ideological conditions of East-West European power relations, through durational performances. In 1972 he made the work *And for today... nothing* in which he immersed himself in a bath of black water for two hours a day for two weeks, surrounded by rotting offal. A year later, in 1973–74, during his DAAD residency in West Berlin, Brisley crossed the wall and visited Poland, later loosely chronicled in his short novel *Beyond Reason: Ordure* (2003). In this novel, he introduces the heteronym Rosse Yael Sirb as the curator of the **Collection of Ordure**.

The stated mission of the Museum is *“to examine ‘the cultural value of ordure, shit, rubbish’ and the waste of human resources through various ownership, production, and management regimes”* (Museum of Ordure, n.d.). A museum dedicated to shit, to the excremental product of capitalist overproduction and consumption and its cultural, environmental and political implications and impact more broadly. A reliquary of something which, since the late eighteenth century, has been anathema to sensibility, something undesirable to be expunged, never to return. The efficient management and disappearance of which becomes a hallmark of public hygiene in maintaining health, efficiency, and taste, and hence, by extension, a society's civilizing influence in comparison to *“primitive cultures that had failed to differentiate muck from what mattered”* (Moore, 2018). Shit is undoubtedly essential, however, whether as bodily or social excrement. It is also inescapable, we realise, in the context of the climate emergency, with digital oversaturation and overconsumption, bullshit jobs and human-induced ecosystem collapse, when *“it is easier to imagine an end to the world than an end to capitalism”* (Fisher, 2009). In elevating something as apparently transient but wholly imminent as ordure as a deserving subject of museumification, the **Museum of Ordure** critiques assumed cultural value otherwise and elsewhere.

The earliest snapshot capture of [“www.ordure.org”](http://www.ordure.org) by the **Way-back Machine** web crawler took place at 01:22:00 on 24 January 2001. It comprises of links to an introduction, “OrdureAbfall” by the curator Rosse Yael Sirb; two texts concerning Sirb by Brisley, one a biography and the other entitled “The Viable World of Rosse Yael Sirb” that later featured

Image::copy

Adrian Ward (adrian@ordure.org)

You may choose any 32x32 portion of one of the images below. You must provide a valid email address, to which you will be sent that portion of the image, and it will be blacked out in this copy. As more people take away their portions, the less of the original will exist here.

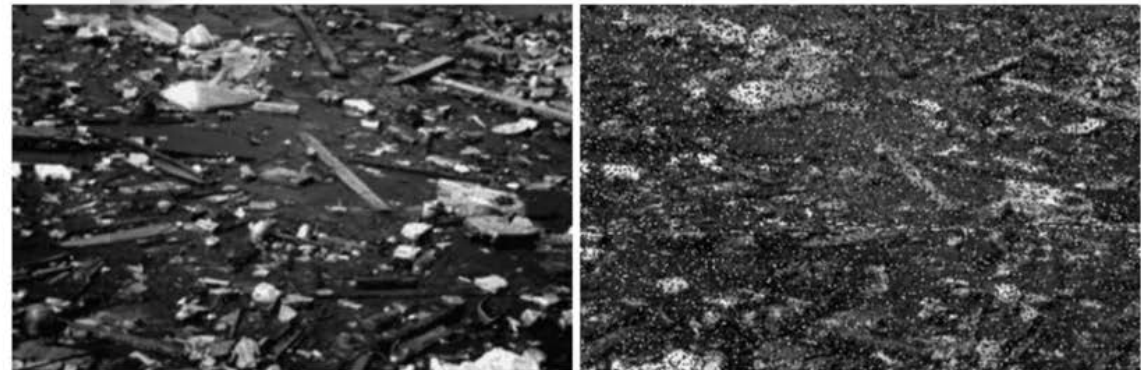
There are three images to choose from, please choose which image you want a piece of, type your email address, and then click on which part of the image you want.

Your email address:



Figure 9: Ward, A. (2001).
Image::copy. [Screenshot].
Retrieved from www.ordure.org.

dust



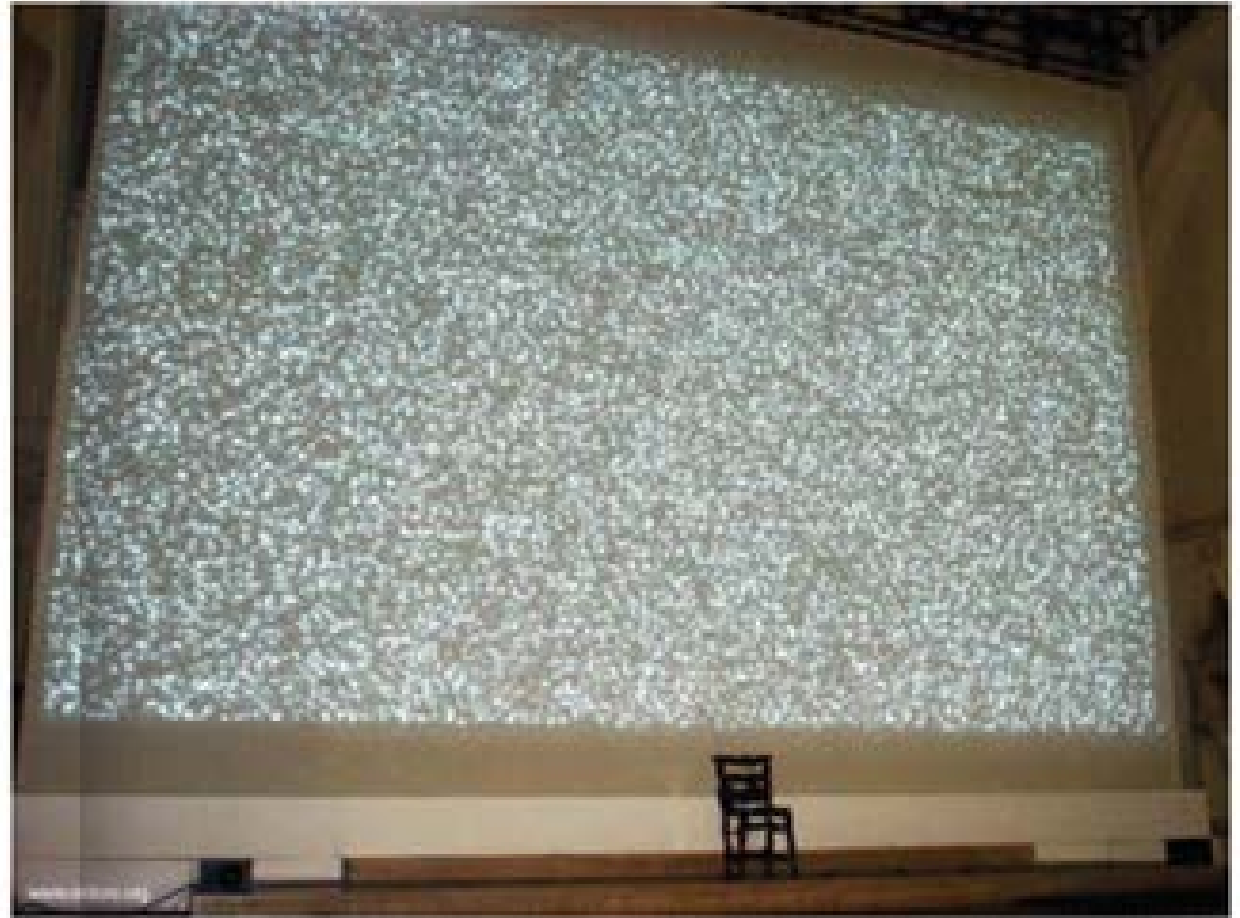
Given time, any digital storage medium loses its data. Corruption sets in as [bit-rot](#) spreads. The image on the left is the original, the image on the right slowly turns to dust.

The decay is triggered by viewing the image. The more people that view the image, the more prevalent its decay.

Adrian Ward

Figure 10: Ward, A. (2001).
Dust. [Screenshot]. Retrieved from
www.ordure.org.

Ordure::real-time is a huge projection. It responds to the presence of visitors moving pixels from one location to another. When the person leaves the image rewrites itself back to its original state. It was exhibited as part of the touring exhibition *Generator* (2002-03), at Spacex, First Site, and Liverpool Biennial, and initially at 291 Gallery, London (2001 – see below).



in *Beyond Reason: Ordure* (2003); a file directory titled by its subdomain “dump.ordure.org,” comprising at that time correspondence, emails, links, logfiles; and two works by software artist Adrian Ward. **The first is Image::Copy** (2001) (Figure 9) through which the visitor selects, by clicking, any 32x32 portion of an available image, which they would later receive by email upon entering an address, leaving only a black square void in its place.

The second, **Dust** (2001) (Figure 10) similarly explores deterioration but this time as decay rather than removal by presenting a duplicated image side-by-side, purporting one to be the original, while the other slowly turns to dust incrementally in relation to the number of times it is viewed. Further works and projects by the Museum would appear over time extending beyond the online, digital space into offline performances, events and interactive installations. The aesthetic, conceptual and material principles behind **Dust**, for example, became **Ordure::real-time**, described at the **Museum of Ordure** website (Figure 11) as a large-scale projection of the same image which responds to the presence of visitors moving pixels from one location to another, and then noumenologically “rewrites itself back to its original state” once the visitor leaves. More projects and events followed in a range of galleries and festivals, as did donations to the collection through its iteration as the UK Museum of Ordure (UKMO) hosted at the domain “www.museum-ordure.org.uk.”

Figure 11: The Museum of Ordure. (2001) *Ordure::real-time* [Screenshot], 291 Gallery, London. Retrieved from <http://www.ordure.org/collection/ordure-real-time/>.

The **Museum of Ordure** is also notable as an artwork comprising a **Preservation Policy** (2004). The policy outlines its approach and consequence of preserving ordure more than declaring an intention of how it should itself be kept. The principles underpinning this policy, however, are relevant to understanding, as von Hantelmann suggests elsewhere regarding “*the experiential turn*”, how the work “*situate[s] its viewers’, the values, conventions, ideologies, and meanings inscribed into this situation which leads to a shift from what the work “says” to what it “does”*” (von Hantelmann, 2014). The Preservation Policy is therefore worth reading in full:

*“Everything that is represented in the **Museum of Ordure** is subject to the vagaries of an uncontrolled internal process which slowly deforms and disables all information held in the museum. This is comparable to the decaying processes which affect all artifacts in museums, regardless of all attempts at preservation: the retouching, repainting, cleaning, etc, which are incorporated risks to the purity of artifacts when first acquired by museums. Even ‘successful’ renovations are subject to periodic changes resulting from shifts in conservation policies. Eventually (and in accordance with the fallibility of memory) artifacts are institutionally, progressively, determinedly and inadvertently altered by acts of conservation (sometimes unintentional acts of institutional vandalism) until they cease to be recognisable as the objects first acquired. Of course in both cases – in the virtual environment and in the material world – the processes of generation, decay, and entropy are paramount. Museums are by this definition charged with achieving the impossible.”* (Preservation Policy, 2004)

In pointing to the impossibility of preservation, the **Museum of Ordure** sets out the scale of challenge of preserving works which sit in-between the virtual environment and the material world, or in this case, in cyberspace, “*as a site where language and imagery disintegrates just as in the physical world*” (Whitely, 2011, p. 155).

DISCUSSION: THE CHALLENGES OF PRESERVING 6 MONTHS WITHOUT AND THE MUSEUM OF ORDURE

Geoff Cox and Nastja Säde Rönkkö agreed to the **Museum of Ordure** and **6 Months Without** becoming case studies for our research. They joined our ISEA 2020 workshop (Hunter & Cook, 2020) to share first-hand insights with participants to develop novel approaches to preservation issues and concerns. Annet Dekker and Anisa Hawes also made opening presentations to frame critical questions and developments in the field. Researchers Bilyana Palankasova, Lozana Rossenova and Erin Walter played an important role in blogging about the workshop exchanges, posted on our archive site, www.networkedart.blog (and contributed to this chapter). With a further twelve artists, curators and conservators participating, the five-hour online workshop was a networked event in itself, taking place across seven time zones from São Paulo to Melbourne. Preliminary questions dealt with defining the boundary around the work to establish the relationship between the *what-is-to-be-preserved* and the *how-to-be-preserved*. For example, invited researcher and web archivist Anisa Hawes asked Geoff Cox whether we should consider recapturing www.ordure.org in whole or in part.

Discussion about what-is-to-be-preserved of the **Museum of Ordure** focused initially on the 110 blank pages in *The Collection* section of the website (<http://www.ordure.org/collection/>), which, although blank, might be necessary to archive to ensure an accurate representation of the website in its entirety as it appeared at the moment of capture. Geoff responded, describing it as “complex negotiation” as pages were unintentionally blank. Therefore, the decision of what and how to preserve would involve many agencies, echoing Annet Dekker’s concept of a network of care. Seeking cues on how to preserve the **Museum of Ordure**, if at all, curator Judit Bodor, wanted to know about the “conception and development of the Museum” regarding “(co)authorship, control over its development and the role of the curator and administrators including Geoff (as a ‘node’)”. Our research blogger, Bilyana Palankasova, asked how Geoff’s view of “forgetting as an important component of memory” was incorporated into the Museum’s preservation strategy while the project was still active, in anticipation of “the waste and API issues caused by the decaying infrastructure of the website itself”. Geoff suggested that such detailed consideration might take the website too seriously, however, given that it has merely fallen into dormancy. He suggested the question may be more significant to a museum conservator or researcher of net art than the artists themselves who’ve allowed it to fall into disrepair, potentially inverting the idea that the artist’s intent is central to decisions around the preservation of the work.

Geoff expressed that the arbitrary choices of material captured by the automated crawlers of the Internet Archive **Wayback Machine** may have

more relevance to the nature of the project. Navigating Adrian Ward's image decomposition pieces through archived pages on the Internet Archive **Wayback Machine** back and forward through time seems an apposite and empathetic form of historical engagement with the work. Doing so might also help address the issue raised by another participant, Gina Cortopassi, of translating "the conceptual dimension of a work" to its archive even when an "experience of deprivation or corruption". The experience of accessing past and present iterations of *ordure.org*, travelling through the archived time-based future of an image's decomposition, might be even more relevant to the work than a viewer's recollection of experiencing those contingent and fragmentary pages through the live web alone. More so still when now navigating *ordure.org*, dump.ordure.org and museum-ordure.org on the live web and through its archive across different browser tabs. Conservator Lisa Mansfield questioned, however, the authenticity of an instantiation as captured through the Internet Archive Wayback Machine created from "hybrids of different snapshot fragments not all from the same time". Capturing a situated viewing of the historical site through Webrecorder or Conifer would have addressed that better should the technology have been available at the time. Yet again, achieving an authentic instantiation of "www.ordure.org" would be at odds with the **Museum of Ordure's** Preservation Policy, which discloses the actuality of its impossibility and maintain a critical stance and distance toward the construction of history itself.

The discussion of **6 Months Without** opened with a consideration of the boundaries of the work of art. The group agreed that a start date may be indicated by the artist first conceiving the performance and expanding to activities such as research, notes, conversations, discussions and even funding applications. However, establishing the end date was more challenging and led to questioning whether participatory works could ever have a definitive end date, if engagement with the work continues. On the question of what-is-to-be-preserved regarding **6 Months Without**, archivist Annet Dekker asked whether we should also conserve the presence of Rönkkö's films on YouTube in addition to the video itself. Is there an irony in streaming video work made from being offline on probably the world's most popular online streaming platform? This consideration speaks to the expanded nature of performance and its edges and boundaries in relation to engagement by audience, researchers, exhibition, activism, or possible restaging of the work. Discussions around participatory action in **6 Months Without**, such as seminars and workshops, expanded the concept of networks within the work and provided further insight. Rönkkö and Sarah Cook, as a curator of the Somerset House **24/7** exhibition, discussed the work's inclusion in the show as a performance, thus shifting the boundaries of the work from performance to exhibition. What is more, this shift also included the exhibition evaluation, reviews, audience images and interaction with the work. This brought about questions about performance interaction and exhibition interaction and their respective engagement, through exchange of physical letters or

social media documentation of exhibition presence. In that sense, the discussion of **6 Months Without** led to thoughtful observations and further problematised the tension between a performance piece, which interrogates living offline, having created digital records, such as videos, automated emails and other web residue. In that sense, the discussions about what-is-to-be-preserved focused on defining the boundaries of the work and considered its migration from the analogue to the digital. In a parallel manner, in shifting the boundaries of the work from performance to exhibition, the discussion considered exhibition as a tactic of restoration and preservation in the canon of history of art. Restaging a work or selecting it for an exhibition often increases its value and repositions it historically. What is more, a conservator acting as a producer and a manager over the lifespan of a work frames their work as discursive and positions them as an active caretaker within the network of care.

In considering **6 Months Without** alongside the **Museum of Ordure**, the conversation focused on the role of forgetting as an essential part of memory and the ways in which the omission, decay or resistance to documentation influences the value of the work. Both case study artworks were realised in a wide network of actants, agents and conditions, both human and non-human, on and offline. These expanded webs of interaction, constituting a huge aspect of the networked nature of the works, were also considered as part of a potential network of care, following Annet Dekker. A dispersed and decentralised network of preservation, however, would have implications over the ownership of the work in question. The discussion reflected on how qualities such as fragmentation and obsolescence were present in the preservation of performance or net art and how that determines the value of the work.

Keeping up with the discussion about the edges of the work, the conversation considered documenting a performance score. In determining boundaries, the group wondered what information constitutes the score and whether it needs to be recorded for future re-performance, activism or research. More importantly, how does this, as a form of documentation, reflect and communicate the conceptual dimensions of the work and the artist's intention? What pieces of documentation are necessary to capture the artistic context from which the work emerged and will translate that essence in future restaging? Drawing parallels with the **Museum of Ordure**, it is worth highlighting that both artworks like to resist or neglect their dependence on the Internet. If **6 Months Without** generates a huge amount of physical artefacts and is perhaps an unorthodox choice for a case study on networked art practice, its study aptly addresses our increased dependence on networked technologies and offers a valuable consideration of complex artworks, presenting challenges to preservation. Capturing the value of the **Museum of Ordure** and particularly the artists' intent in the work is difficult while planning a preservation strategy which is arguably going to

generate more information. Is it 'meta' to try to preserve a project, which is a commentary on the systems determining value in the first place? There seems to be resistance on the part of both case studies of artworks to cross over to the other side, whether it is conceptually embedded in the work to decay and thus hard to establish its boundary and appropriate preservation. Moreover, it lends to considerations whether preservation questions or challenges the work itself by producing digital artefacts, possibly in conflict with the work's intentions.

PRESERVATION OF NETWORKED ARTWORKS AND PRACTICES... IN THE NETWORK

This chapter has offered a survey of approaches to the conservation of networked artworks and practices without undermining their unruly materiality and criticality of institutional process and spaces. Mindful of jeopardising the underlying principles and dimensions of the practice itself, we sought nonetheless to trace the edges and boundaries of the preservation of networked art practices. Ongoing debates about omissions and distortions in the construction of art histories and their subsequent influence on the production of future art practice add further urgency. Ensuring a reliable understanding of networked art practices during the last sixty years and contributing toward the evolution of preservation methods in response also helps us understand, in media archaeological terms, "*how we ended up in this digital culture and [perhaps] find alternative ways of thinking about [it].*" (Parikka, 2001). Given our conception of materiality has changed since the digital turn, we can only expect that artworks in the future will continue to evolve in further contingent, precarious and hybrid ways.

We identified the problem of networked art practice preservation as distinct from media art challenges of preservation. We highlighted the necessity to focus on the performative processes of social, cultural, and technological exchanges that underpin the work and maintain its interaction with contemporary cultural ecologies.

Networked art practice comprises exchanges that can be revisited, reemployed, reconsidered, and resituated due to their integral relevance to our contemporary social, cultural and political experience. Thus, we see greater promise in the undertaking of media archaeological excavation of processes that underpin these works. Here, we see the possibility of harnessing a source for the generation of new work, that is porous and susceptible to contemporary discourse.

Of further interest is how artistic engagement with the internet and other networks reveals a curatorial dimension already present in networked art practices. While the future of networked art preservation depends on collaboration between artists, curators, conservators, and archivists performing their existing roles, we recognise that networked art practice

is itself an outcome of artists already behaving curatorially – seizing the means of dissemination as essential to the production of the work. As such its preservation would thus benefit from collaborations that see curators encouraged to think and behave artistically.

If these are the considerations that those responsible – artists, curators, conservators, and archivists – have to consider, then what about the non-human elements, the artwork and its network? What are the differences for networked art practice before and after digital preservation? Does it depend on whether the artwork was made before or after the Internet, or used non-digital or non-electronic means? Our interest is in digital preservation of networked art rather than digital art's preservation – the work doesn't have to be digital in the first place. As networked art practices predate the web, then what did offline/online mean before the Internet? Digital preservation suggests a move from one (unstable) format to another (more stable or which makes the work accessible). This move could however exist in the work itself – away from the intangible digital to a more physical manifestation, as in **6 Months Without**, or the opposite, in the **Museum of Ordure**, towards the abstraction, digitality, decomposition, and glitch of the digital dump. There are 20 years between the two case study artworks discussed in this chapter. That gap arguably includes the moment when a threshold of society's increasing digital ubiquity was crossed: the point where it became imperative that the internet never be turned off (Fisher, 2009). We note that digital preservation on the industrial scale undertaken by museums, libraries and archives is far from carbon neutral and risks being subject to the same capitalist and environmentally damaging excesses of hoarding and storage as other corners of the art world. This tension, and others raised through this research, indicate where current preservation and conservation processes – enacted by humans or by machines – may risk sealing unsustainable impermeable material and historical boundaries around networked art practice, thus depriving its potential to act in the world and form connections with new nodes in its always-on network.

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