DISCORDIA CONCORS: WWW.JODI.ORG

FLORIAN CRAMER

JODI NET

If the contemporary art system were not fixated on displays — whether of opulent visuals or of political correctness — and on material objects to be sold, jodi might be recognized as the most important artists of our time. Such a canonization of course seems to go against the very aesthetic subversion of www.jodi.org, all the more when considering the efforts jodi spend on contextualizing their work within a larger network, withdrawing it from easy consumption. On the other hand, jodi's anxiety to provide a defined context for their own art could be seen as a control strategy in itself, rendering the opposites of subversion and canonization more complicated.

It is, as the sinologist and computer poet John Cayley writes, "difficult to say anything hard and fast in terms of more-or-less conventional criticism about a site which is hardly ever the same on successive visits."[1] At the time of this writing, `http://www.jodi.org` transferred all its visitors to the download page of "Untitled Game". The rest of the web site could be found via World Wide Web search engines, pointing to critical writing about jodi.org which in turn pointed to its sections hidden from the front page - or by using the pirate mirror of www.jodi.org on `http://www.0100101110101101.org/home/jodi.org`. Thus undermining the corporate identity contained in its catchy web address, jodi.org requires its readers to invest net-work on their own. This strategy of withdrawal also reminds of Gnosticist writings from the late antiquity which, for a long time, had only survived through citations in the writings of Christian theologists who sought to refute them.

Poems which, according to combinatory-algorithmical rules, jumble the words they contain, are known since the 16th century as "Proteus verse", named after the Greek god who constantly changed his appearance. www.jodi.org shifts the Proteic principle from the internal data of the artwork to the meta-data of its addressing scheme and its networking. This strategy does not only cover the way to, but also the ways through and

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[1][Cay01]

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out of the website. www.jodi.org refuses, for example, to limit itself to being www.jodi.org by drawing connections between various net artistic servers ("map", `http://map.jodi.org`), providing link lists ("CC", `http://wwwwwwww.jodi.org/100cc/baklava/index.html`) and interspersing hidden internal with hidden external site links.

But at the same time the mapping out and pinning down of this context contradicts jodi's Proteic slippages away from a fixed identity. Jodi's identity is reinforced all the more by the thorough impact their work had on fellow net.artists. Given that jodi were as import tant for the code-experimental net.art as it manifested itself since 1997 on the E-Mail forum "7-11" `http://www.7-11.org`[2] as Cézanne was for cubism or as Malevich was for constructivist painting, canonization is unavoidable.

JODI ART

At the time of this writing, a "Google" search on the keyword combination "jodi.org" and "noise" brought up 228 web pages. But how is jodi's noise different from the noise and randomness in previous avant-garde arts, from pointillist painting and Dada to John Cage's music and Fluxus?[3] The difference lies in the media and in the rhetoric. In Dada poetry, Hans Arp's chance painting and John Cage's random music, randomness occurs structurally within a work, not in its transmission. Even where www.jodi.org doesn't randomize its own transmission by unstable addressing schemes, it reads and behaves as if it contained intact data disturbed only by faulty net transmission or computer crashes; but in reality, the line noise is mocked up within the data itself. Unlike Nam June Paik's visual noise manipulations of TV sets in the 1960s, jodi's disturbance is not done in hardware with only partly predictable results, but is a clever simulation of unpredictability done in software.

For the random behavior of the jodi website is but a trompe-l'oeil simulation given that it consists of linear and deterministic codes: text files written in the HTML formatting language, simple animated GIF images and terse lines of Javascript algorithmic programming.[4] While the chance poetics of Cage and Fluxus conceived of disturbance and randomness as means of radical freedom, their implication is much more ambivalent in jodi's work.

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[2]see Frederic Madre's essay in this catalogue

[3]Thomas Skowronek, who currently writes an M.A. thesis at Humboldt Universität Berlin on noise in Net.art, brought up this question.

[4]The phenomenon of the static "genotext" vs. the mobile "phenotext" in the digital arts, with reference to jodi, has been addressed first and more thoroughly in Inke Arns' paper [Arn01]

They inspire and liberate the viewers' imagination all the while locking it into deception, mazes and dead-ends. The naive Cagean ontology of chance is replaced with a tricky rhetoric of simultaneous anarchy and entrapment, a neo-baroque conceit and discordia concors of surface chaos with inscribed discipline and vice versa.

JODI NET ART

Jodi are famous for their art of disruptions and miscodings and for making, far beyond all techno-naive "multimedia" art, computers aesthetically visible as self-immersed generators of contingent data streams. However, their poetics is not simply about uncovering an (imaginary) truth hidden beneath deceptive software interfaces. What appears as code in jodi's works — like the contingent numerical stack tables of the "Automatic Rain System" sub-directory of "betalab" `http://wwwwwwwww.jodi.org/betalab/rain/` — is code pointing to code, but: code which is not what it seems to be. Jodi's codes are typically simulations of other codes: simulations of algorithms in graphic animations, simulations of screen graphics via blinking text, etc.. On October 22, 2001, jodi posted a lenghty text to the international E-Mail list "Nettime" which seemed to be a commentary on current war crises and their discussion in net cultural forums:

```
$cd ug/models/soldier3
$origin 0 -6 24
$base base
$skin skin

$frame soldierc
$frame soldierd

/*

*/

void() army_fire;

void() army_stand1    =[    $soldierc,    army_stand2    ]
{ai_stand();};
void() army_stand2    =[    $soldierc,    army_stand3    ]
{ai_stand();};
void() army_stand3    =[    $soldierc,    army_stand4    ]
{ai_stand();};
```

`[...]`

The text (which cannot be fully reproduced here, but is available at `http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0110/msg00120.html`) was, first of all, an impressive piece of concrete poetry. It made military order intervene into its linguistic and typographical structure and read like a coded inventory, a strategic plan in an obsessive code language. Readers fluent not only in English, but also in programming languages, were able to recognize that the poem is a functional sourcecode in the programming language C. It is, in fact, part of the sourcecode of jodi's "Untitled Game" which in turn is based on the sourcecode of the commercial computer game "Quake". Not mentioning the origin and nature of the code in their mailing list posting, jodi disclosed the aesthetic and political subtexts of seemingly neutral technical instructions.

In 1924, Tristan Tzara formally instructed his readers "To make a Dadaist poem" by cutting out the single words of an arbitrary newspaper article, mixing them and taking out "the scraps one after the other in the order in which they left the bag".[5] While the resulting poem is random, the instruction is not. It generates Dadaist language, but its own language is not Dadaist. An even more constructivist code is the poem "3 variationen zu 'kein fehler im system'" ("3 variations on "no error in the system") by Eugen Gomringer, the German-Bolivian co-founder of concrete poetry. The text permutes the sentence "no error in the system":

> kein fehler im system
> kein efhler im system
> kein ehfler im system
> kein ehlfer im system
> kein ehlefr im system
> kein ehlerf im system
> kein ehleri fm system
> kein ehleri mf system
> kein ehleri ms fystem
> kein ehleri ms yfstem
> kein ehleri ms ysftem
> kein ehleri ms ystfem
> kein ehleri ms ystefm
> kein nehler ms ystemf
> fkei nehler im system
> kfei nehler im system

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[5][Tza75]

kefi nehler im system
keif nehler im system
kein fehler im system

The error, signified by the initial "f" of the corresponding German word "Fehler", moves right in each line until the initial order has been restored. However, since the error is induced in a strictly systematic way, there's no error in the poem.

In comparison to Gomringer's poem, jodi's sourcecode is typographically, linguistically and semantically richer, and it differs from Tzara's poem code as well in that it does not separate a poetic collage from a non-collage algorithm. Treating both sourcecode and its output as artworks in their own right, it employs the methods of pastiche and ready-made on the sourcecode itself. Unlike permutational Proteus poetry and generative art from Optatianus Porfyrius and Lullism to until recently, jodi no longer synthesize instruction codes, but for the first time use them intertextually, as found material.

<div align="center">NET ANTI NET</div>

Other works on www.jodi.org subvert the aesthetic expectation of an opaque sourcecode and a human-readable output even more obviously than the above poem. In "Location" `http://wwwwwwww.jodi.org` and "faq" `http://wwwwwwww.jodi.org/100cc/faq/index.html`, the browser display doesn't seem to be readable except as letter noise, but renders as readable plain text — with a typogram of the cartoon character Stimpy (from "Ren and Stimpy") — when clicking on "View Sourcecode" in the web browser. Just as the web site plays with its accessibility and non-accessibility on the meta-data level of its address schemes, it plays with visible and hidden codes on the data level of its files, making what's plain opaque and vice versa.[6].

"Location" and "faq" intertexually refer to computer typograms known as "ASCII Art". ASCII text, the "American Standard Code for Information Interchange" the lowest common denominator of all computer character sets,[7] was used since the 1970s to emulate graphics in non-graphical computer

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[6]A method adopted and radicalized in Ivan Khimin's project `http://imageless.net`. The website only consists of very small HTML files which only contain information in the sourcecode. (The site can be accessed via `http://imageless.net/ASCII32/`)

[7]For a history of the ASCII standard, see [Zim97]

networks, so that, out of technical restraints, it reinvented the classical literary genre of pattern poetry known since Simias of Rhodos of the 3rd century B.C..[8] With the Net.art of jodi and later the community of the "7-11" mailing list, ASCII Art was rewritten from naive mimetic figuration into an experimental and ironical art form that played with error codes, pretended system crashes and the spam-like mass mailings. "Location" and "faq" map the transition from figural to self-reflexive ASCII codes: In both pieces, the old naive ASCII Art literally becomes the sourcecode of its reflexive Net.art successor.

CODE ANTI CODE

Jodi's particular artfulness to make one type of data look like an other type of data manifests itself most blatantly in an artform which they seem to have invented: fake software which in reality is just animated graphics and blinking browser text. "Surgery/havoc" `http://wwwwwwww.jodi.org/ 100cc/havoc/` looks like a jump'n'run computer game with several zoom functions, but is actually a clever arrangement of animated graphics files. Employing the same means, "BinHeX" `http://wwwwwwww.jodi.org/ 100cc/hqx/i900.html` simulates system crashes and computer virus infection. Alluding constantly to the popular cultural semiotics of software interfaces, jodi manage to make software art — and thus also generative art — even where they don't employ algorithmic programming, a conceit that challenges the whole conceptual grounds of both art genres.

The pre-digital net art known as Mail Art promoted open participation by consequent mediocricy. Jodi.org and the Net.art it made possible prove that outstanding art can come out of bottom-up networks. What renders jodi's art an ultimate example of contemporary "argutezza" — artful wit and urbanity as it was defined in 17th century rhetoric — is it simultaneously affirms and negates its place within a network. After all, it stands out too much in this network, with the links and disseminations being the preventive weapon against undue readings and contextualizations like this one.

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[8][AE87]

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