Critical analysis of Net Art

Net Art can be defined as works of art made and distributed on the internet, using the internet as a canvas or medium for expression and experimentation. While Net Art specifically references the idea of (network art) which existed before the internet as we know it today it has become interchangeable with the term internet art. Usually these works occupy a specific time on the internet that mainly being the 90's to 2000's (Ricci, 2024) with art being made on the internet after this period being considered post-internet.

The piece I've chosen, Cameron's World, embodies the ideals of what a piece of Net Art is. It is also an historic archive of sorts acting to preserve a tiny bit of what the old internet used to look like. Cameron's World was made as a "love letter to the internet of old"(Askin) it takes the form of a webpage that is a pathwork of various collected gifs, images and text from the homepages of GeoCities sites. The webpage is made up of different sections each with its own theme and colour code. As you scroll down the page you are greeted with beautiful collages of art that would otherwise be lost. The website also offers the opportunity for interaction, you can try clicking on the visuals presented to you and you may be met with a little pop out browser called Catscape Navigator (a feline play on Netscape Navigator, an old web browser) emulating what was once a GeoCities page in a format that it might have been viewed in back in the days when GeoCities was still up and running. For context GeoCities was a website hosting service, later bought by Yahoo! That allowed users to make and host free websites. Content was organised into neighbourhoods where users could browse based on their interests. GeoCities was in a way a sort of precursor to modern day social media. GeoCities was created in 1994 and sadly shut down in 2009.

Cameron's World initially evokes a sense of wonder and nostalgia for what the internet used to be like; fun, colourful, full of possibilities and experimentation. It embodies the idea or sense of "nostalgia for a version of the world thought to be a better place"(Small, 2018), this sentiment is one shared by many on today's internet(Williams, 2015). A longing for a simpler time when the web wasn't so saturated with ads and consumerism. The work expresses a sense of "dissatisfaction with contemporary society's modes of cultural production" (Magagnoli, 2016, pg4). It presents a romanticised representation of what the old internet was like in the form of a ruin (Magagnoli, 2016). The work is a brief glimpse into the internet's past using the medium of the internet itself, getting as close to the original representation as possible without compromising on core features or principles of net art. The work is distributed online in the form of an interactive webpage that anyone can view easily. The page itself even tries to aesthetically emulate the design practices of the particular genre of webpage and spaces that it is making references to. Each element is grouped into specific themes similar to home GeoCities was organised based on topics and interests and each theme consists of a chaotic collection of relevant collected media, this chaotic arrangement of elements is also reminiscent of how people's personal websites used to look like which can be seen when the viewer clicks on elements that take them to archived pages for instance take this page:

Which contains a bunch of chaotic elements such as a line of dancing Elmo gifs a repeating patterned rainbow background and bright colourful text that is almost unreadable.

Another way in which Cameron's World uses the design conventions once found on GeoCites is in the idea of shrines. A lot of the pages on GeoCities acted as web-shrines or fan pages to the personal interests or hobbies of the people who made them. They were a place where people could share information about the things they cared about in a similar way Cameron's World acts as a shrine of the old web where Cameron shares information about what the internet used to look like and acts as a GeoCities fanpage.

While the site can be accessed on mobile devices it is clear that it's intended to be viewed as any of the sites it makes reference to would have been viewed, on a computer. Even though you can still scroll through the wonderful collection of visuals on a mobile device an element of the experience is lost, that being the pop out views of archived web pages.

This piece is characterised by another feature of net art as described by Tillman Baumgärtel (Ricci, 2024), being connectivity. The work is connected to various other pages and therefore people. It's connected to the past through the cultural artefacts it's displaying. The work also features the idea of collaboration and community. As a collage of artefacts collected from various other sources it's almost as if the piece is a collaboration between Cameron and all the other artists and websites featured on the page. It represents the now lost community of sites that used to make up GeoCities.

The work also evokes a sense of loss and sadness. Web pages that were accessible not so long ago are now lost or in danger of being lost. This work points out the sad reality of the

nature of technology and the rapid development of technology. Things become obsolete relatively quickly. This highlights the fragile nature of net art in general and is a problem that is pervasive when it comes to net art. One day, probably not too far in the future, this site as well will probably become obsolete in need of being archived itself. It points out the issue with internet art that art conservationists are trying to deal with (O'Toole, 2019). And while they have resorted to the traditional idea of a gallery space to try to combat the loss of this art it means that the art loses an aspect of its original self and while Cameron's world seemingly avoids this problem it again becomes subject to the same issue as the works it is trying to preserve.

Cameron's World explores the ideas of nostalgia for an "internet as a tool of play and enjoyment, rather than dehumanising control and surveillance" (Magagnoli, 2016, pg 7) it's also a reminder of the move towards a more controlled, centralised and monetised internet where corporate entities, such as Yahoo!, have the power to render countless works of art inaccessible. This is similar to the ideas explored in *The Art Happens Here* by as mentioned in O'Toole 2019.

Word Count 1123

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