What Happened to Net Art of the 1990's?
Commentary. Patrick Lichty
"The avant-garde did not die - it just got absorbed into digital culture."
-Lev Manovich

Of course, the impetus of this essay came from Garnet's query on Facebook in October 2018, which got 27 comments from surprising places, with the above quote being from Lev Manovich's well thought-out answer.

In response, I think Lev is totally correct on the larger sociocultural level, but I think a greater granularity might be in order when considering the notion of art and culture's intersection with digital culture. To me, this is a bit more nuanced.

At the turn of the millennium, the genres comprising New Media Art (which was generally defined by Lev Manovich, Mark Tribe and others in the 1990's Rhizome.org community) were recognized. Shows like *net*.condition at ZKM Karlsruhe, *010101: Art in Technological Times* at the SFMoMA, *Data Dynamics* at the Whitney and others created a lot of buzz. This would garner attention of the art world per se, and lead to the first stirrings of the Art World dragon that would become Postinternet.

We Stopped Being Young: (related to Postinternet)
Michael Connor, in his Rhizome.org article, *What's Postinternet Got to do with Net Art?* (2013) notes artists such as Artie Vierkant "The Image Object Post-Internet" (2010) distancing themselves from their historical roots. In it, Vierkant states that "New Media is here denounced as a mode too narrowly focused on the specific workings of novel technologies, rather than a sincere exploration of cultural shifts in which that technology plays only a small role." Connor also states that there are established curators such as Karen Archey who do not take this approach, but acknowledge the precursors to Postinternet (sic) as a movement. This echoes strategically of Marinetti's *Futurist Manifesto*, in which point ten of Futurism states:

"We want to demolish museums and libraries, fight morality, feminism and all opportunist and utilitarian cowardice." However, I would argue that in that Postinternet as a movement arose from New Media's translation from ephemeralilty into Postinternet's objective engagement with digital culture seen through the contemporary & art world ecosystems (which are not always one and the same), the Futurist stance is more about strategically clearing a apace in the intellectual market of ideas than revolt.

Everything Becomes Canonified.
The Rolling Stones Become "The Rolling Stones", or well-known artists become consistently shown ones, and some just leave the field for practical reasons. This is the fact of the arts, music, etc. You become "branded", build a tribe, and so on. I remember when RTMark was in the 2000 Whitney Biennial, and Cory Arcangel came up to me in SoHo, while he'd been couch hopping and asked me how to make it in the art world. In hindsight, I now want to go back to Cory (grins), and perhaps not been so anonymous in the 2000's. The bottom line is that you can only be in your 20's/30's so long, and that you have a set of opportunities then that do not present themselves as much later on. In my experience, you either become an Academic (me), a establish a studio (Cory, Lozarno-Hemmer) you go into the private sector (MTEWW, Mark Wattenberg, Scott Paterson and Mark Napier). Attempts in preserving cultural milieus in their configurations forever is not realistic and would be more like a zoo than a community, which brings us to the next topic.

A New Generation Came:
The evolution of organizations like Rhizome from the Tribe and Galloway to the current Connor and Kaplan leadership is indicative of the changes in the larger genre such as institutionalization, hyper-professionalism (sic)a change in approach. From the 90's Rhizome crowd, who were very community-based, to the institutional culture that exists today in New Media, you see the "professionalization" of the genre. This includes artists like Jeremy Bailey (who I used to crash with in Toronto in his early days) Morehshin Allahyari, Alfredo Salazar-Caro, Rafael Rozendaal, Jeremy Bailey, and many others who merged the "traditional" New Media genre with art world practice or discourses of innovation/monetization (Bailey). Rhizome began its Seven on Seven program, and Lauren Cornell began the real institutionalization of Rhizome. There are interesting people like

Keilani Nichole and Ben Fino Radin, who continue to develop their projects (Current Museum, Transfer, Small Data Industries), how they shape global media art dialogue.

Postinternet Happened:
Like Postmodernism, the emergence of Postinternet had many moments that led to the effects that are now playing out in the Contemporary Art scene. The New Aesthetic panel at SxSW, the Net.Aesthetics 2.0 panel at Rhizome that would lead to Olson's "Postinternet" neologism, Cornell's response to Bishop's article in 2007... These would lead to efforts by curators like Cornell, Kholeif, Vickers, Archey and others to create anthologies like "You are Here" and "Mass Effect", and create materialist discourses in New Media art, typified by Rafael Rozendaal's *Browser Paintings*. Postinternet allowed New Media to talk to the Contemporary in terms it could understand through the creation of objects and experiences that could circulate in the art world.

Simple Net Art Diagram

The art happens here

MTAA ca. 1997
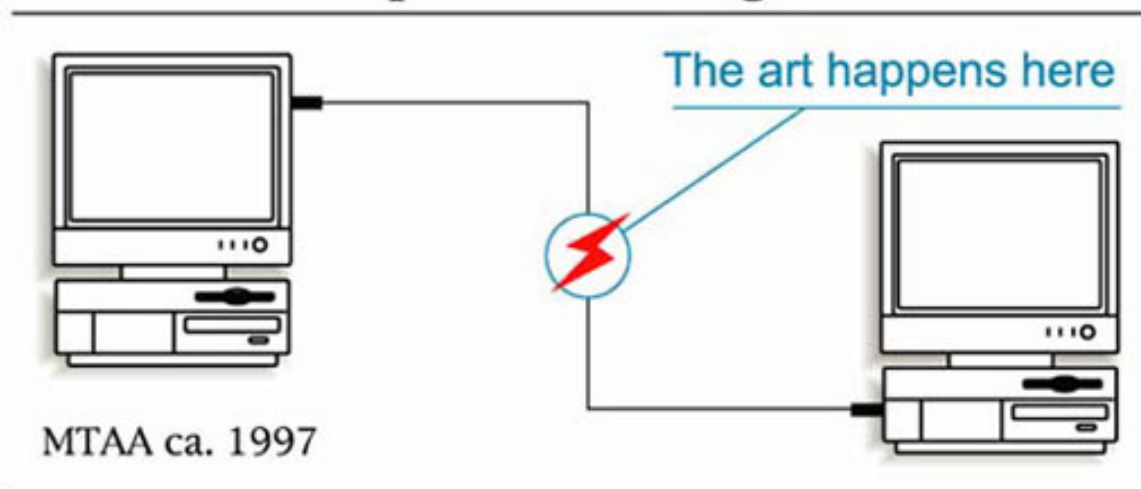
SIMPLE POSTINTERNET ART DIAGRAM

PATRICK LICHTY 2016

My reinterpretation of Whid and River's *Simple Net Art Diagram* is a playful reinterpretation of then shift of Net Art Practice to Postinternet. Where new Media, and Net Art focused on processes and networking as a formalist criteria (which goes back as far as Robert Adrian, et al's *World in 24 Hours* [1982]) to a largely materialist reinterpretation of the mediation of culture through the Internet into contemporary/objective practice. The world, thrown through the dim mirror/sausage grinder of the Internet, emerging as (mutant) Contemporary Art objects/media represents the shift from technology as an end in itself at times, to something consumable by the art ecosystem, leading to…

The Art World Finally Paid Attention
(see above). It has agendas, languages and conventions that are different than that of Net Art or New Media Art, such as less emphasis on creating work compatible with the material and conceptual discourses in the traditional Art World ecosystem.

Postinternet translated New Media into the Contemporary.

Cooptation by the Academy:
In 2000, there were almost no New Media art programs. Now, academies have these programs or Multimedia Design, or something related. Many New Media artists were non-degreed, and went to grad school, like Klima, Kanarek, and myself. And honestly, having an academic career makes it hard to be running a studio, so if you go academic, having a high artworld profile is very difficult.

New Situations/Genres Emerged:
In part due to the pressures on art institutions by neoliberalism, others by cultural developments, some institutions were pulled or were forced into other genres. Arts organizations like Furtherfield (who has been arguable in a contestational relationship with the NYC crowd) has shifted heavily into Blockchain culture, which is a fascinating and unexpected turn.

We're Still Here (Sort of…), (also see *We Stopped Being Young,Canonified):
For many of the Net Art crowd who did not succumb to practical pressures, or plain survived, our practices changed a lot. Using myself as an example In my case, I moved to the Middle East and created a VR/AR research unit, am one of the Directors of the Wrong Biennial, still publishing chapters, and Second Front is pushing virtual performance out of Second Life into embodied VR. People like myself are still here, but the practice developed in various directions.

Also, there are a number of people who came out of the 90's like Claudia Hart, Lorna Mills, Marisa Olson, and Carla Gannis who are riding a strong mid-career wave through the championship of newer international organizations.

This is my reflection of the past 15 years, as incomplete and partial as it might be. But on the other hand, it seems that to think that the attitudes and ethics of Tribe's Net.Art period be preserved or maintained verbatim is a mistake. Movements change, and in many ways, the shift from New Media Art/Net Art to Postinternet is consistent with historical patterns in that current movements seek to displace the previous ones. Net Art gave way to Postinternet; Net.Art is still here, but as generations and trends emerge, situations change.

Net Art is Dead; Long Live Net Art.