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Christine Haug und Vincent Kaufmann

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Im digitalen Jenseits
der Literatur
Towards the Digital Beyond
of Literature

Herausgegeben von
Vincent Kaufmann

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Vorwort

Vincent Kaufmann

Der Autor ist tot, der einsame und stille Leser vielleicht auch, es leben die Nutzer, die Crowd, die Programmierer und die Web-Designer: So könnte man den Leitfaden der zehnten Ausgabe von *Kodex*, dem *Jahrbuch der Internationalen Buchwissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft* zusammenfassen. Unter dem Titel *Im digitalen Jenseits von Literatur* geht es in diesem Band um Literatur im digitalen Zeitalter. Es geht um die Frage, wie die fortschreitende Digitalisierung Dispositive wie Autorschaft, Storytelling, Lesen, Interpretieren, geistiges Eigentum und das Erleben von Literatur und Kunst neu bestimmt und konfiguriert, ob gut oder schlecht, und ob sie uns zwingt, unseren Bezug zu Literatur und Kultur neu zu überdenken.

Diese Fragen werden freilich nicht zum ersten Mal aufgeworfen, aber mit den nicht aufzuhaltenden technologischen Entwicklungen benötigen wir ständig neue Antworten darauf. Nach ca. drei Jahrzehnten oft ambivalenter Koexistenz zwischen Belletristik und digitalen Dispositiven sind wir möglicherweise an einem Punkt angekommen, an dem wir uns nicht nur überlegen müssen, was Hypertexte, stets wachsende Speicherkapazitäten, Tablets, iPads, Facebook, Amazon, Wattpad & Co an der Institution oder Praxis ›Literatur‹ ändern, sondern auch, ob diese in der gegenwärtigen technologischen Umwelt überhaupt eine Zukunft hat, ob das, was kommt, noch als Literatur bezeichnet werden kann. Jedenfalls wird im vorliegenden Band versucht, diesen Punkt ins Auge zu fassen, bzw. wird von einem möglichen *Jenseits* der Literatur ausgegangen und das ohne Kulturpessimismus, ohne Sehnsucht oder Nostalgie für ein bedrohtes Diesseits, dessen Aufbewahrung ein dringendes Anliegen wäre. Dieser Band soll ein Beitrag zu einem konsequenten Durchdenken der Effekte digitaler Dispositive auf die Institution oder Praxis ›Literatur‹ sein, wobei sich das Ergebnis notwendigerweise nur als Bruchstück einer Ästhetik oder Philosophie der Digitalisierung darstellen lässt: Von einer abschließenden Einschätzung oder von einem umfassenden Überblick kann hier nicht die Rede sein. Der Umbruch liegt größtenteils noch vor uns, wir haben erst angefangen, mit neuen Technologien und Dispositiven zu experimentieren und wir können nur ahnen, was ein *Jenseits* der Literatur wirklich bedeutet und wie nah uns dieses *Jenseits* schon ist.

Wie wird ein digitales *Jenseits* der Literatur aussehen? Nicht nur, weil Wissenschaft mit Wahrsagen kaum kompatibel ist, scheint es auf Anhieb schwierig, eine solche Frage zu beantworten, sondern auch, weil man nicht genau weiß und nie genau gewusst hat, was Literatur überhaupt ist, wo sie anfängt oder aufhört, was dazu gehört und was nicht. Es wird also in diesem Band über die Zukunft einer Sache spekuliert, deren Identität oder wissenschaftliche Definition uns entgeht – spätestens seit wir uns die Literaturtheorie der 70er und 80er Jahre angewöhnt haben. Wir wissen nicht, was Literatur heute ist und wie es ihr morgen gehen wird, aber genau mit dieser doppelten Unsicherheit gilt es, in diesem Band umzugehen.

Literatur mag pauschal schwierig zu definieren sein, aber sie lässt sich immerhin auf eine Kombination von objektiven Parametern oder Dimensionen wie z.B. Autorschaft oder Leserschaft herunterbrechen, deren neue Ausprägungen durch digitale Dispositive beschrieben werden können. Nehmen wir hier als konkretes Beispiel die Auseinandersetzungen um Amateurliteratur-Plattformen wie z.B. Wattpad oder auch Amazon: Oft wird gefragt, ob das noch Literatur oder ob das sogar die Literatur der Zukunft sei. Wie seinem Interview in diesem Band zu entnehmen ist, würde Martin Puchner bestimmt eher von der letzten Option ausgehen, zum Beispiel, wenn er digitale Amateurliteratur-Plattformen als die Treiber einer neuen Literaturexpllosion einstuft. Das ist freilich eine Möglichkeit, die jedoch bedeutet, dass Literatur zum ersten Mal in ihrer Geschichte keinem Exklusivitäts- oder Selektionsprinzip mehr unterliegen würde und entsprechend – jedenfalls anscheinend – auch durch keine Machtzuschreibungen bestimmt wird. Die nächste Frage ist dann nicht, ob die auf Wattpad oder ähnlichen Plattformen hochgeladenen Romane noch zur Literatur gehören, sondern, wie wir damit umgehen, was wir mit inklusiver Literatur anfangen, an der prinzipiell jeder mitschreiben kann. Lässt sich mit Millionen von Autoren überhaupt etwas anfangen? Wie beziehen wir uns auf eine durch und durch demokratisierte Literatur? Lässt sich diese übermitteln (z.B. von Generation zu Generation oder in den (Hoch-)Schulen), wie das einst der Fall war? Ist Übermittlung ohne Selektion vorstellbar? Und was wäre der Stellenwert von Literatur, wenn sie keine Übermittlungsfunktion mehr übernimmt?

Das Beispiel *Wattpad* zeigt Folgendes: Zu der Frage, ob das noch ›Literatur‹ ist, gibt es vermutlich eine ganze Reihe widersprüchlicher Antworten, im Sinne eines *Remakes* der seit 150 Jahren bekannten Auseinandersetzungen zwischen der internen Autorität des literarischen Feldes und der Autorität des Publikums und der Märkte. Objektiv festgestellt werden kann aber das Verschwinden eines Parameters der Selektion oder der Exklusivität (bzw. seine Verschiebung): Wattpad wird z.B. zunehmend zu einer Plattform, die versucht, in einem zweiten Schritt ihre eigenen erfolgreichen Inhalte zu kommerzialisieren, was auch wieder eine Selektion voraussetzt, genau wie es bei Facebook, Google oder Twitter der Fall ist (siehe hierzu Julian Maitras Beitrag in diesem Band). Nachdem dreitausend Jahre lang innerhalb des literarischen Feldes Selektionsmechanismen wirksam waren, die sich auch als Qualitätssicherung beschreiben lassen und die grundsätzlich mit dem Stand der Technik und deren Zugänglichkeit, bzw. Knappheit verbunden waren (was freilich überhaupt der Grund der immer mit Machtzuschreibung verbundenen Institutionalisierung von Literatur war), läutet die Demokratisierung des Zugangs zu Literatur auf Plattformen wie Wattpad oder Amazon die Ära der literarischen Inklusivität ein. Das kann man bedauern oder begrüßen: Unwahrscheinlich ist jedoch, dass ein auf diese Weise neu konfiguriertes System der Literatur ›berühmte Autoren‹ oder ›Klassiker‹ erzeugt. Entsprechend ist es naheliegend, in einem durch digitale Technologien geprägten Umfeld, den Parameter der Autorschaft bzw. dessen gesellschaftlichen Funktion neu zu überprüfen. Dies ist erstens der Fall, weil Autorschaft notwendigerweise mit Autorität verbunden ist und weil Autorität ihrerseits notwendigerweise auf Exklusivität basiert: Wenn alle über Autorität verfügen, d.h. wenn es keine Zugangsbe-

schränkungen gibt, verfügt niemand über Autorität. Wenn jede/r Autor oder Autorin wird oder werden kann, nähern wir uns einer Welt ohne Autoren und müssen uns entsprechend weitere Fragen stellen, z.B.: Wie wird ›Literatur‹ aussehen, wenn sie sich (wieder, wie etwa im Mittelalter) vom Parameter der Autorschaft verabschiedet? Oder umgekehrt: Kann man sich in der gegenwärtigen Ökonomie der Aufmerksamkeit, in der insbesondere individuelle Sichtbarkeit Gold wert ist, Literatur ohne Autorschaft vorstellen? In seinem Beitrag zu diesem Band beantwortet Julian Maitra diese Frage mit einem klaren Nein: Alle scheinbar inklusiven digitalen Dispositive (Google, Facebook, Twitter usw.) entwickeln Technologien, um Autorität und Autorschaft wiederherzustellen. Diese These bestätigt Julia Genz in ihrem Beitrag *Vom Autor zum Blogger und zurück*: Wie gehen ›Autoren‹, die die digitalen Entwicklungen als Opportunitäten wahrnehmen, wie z.B. Blogger, mit dem Parameter der Inklusivität um? Wie unterscheidet man sich als Blogger von anderen Bloggern, um Autor zu werden? Wie erzeugt man als Blogger Exklusivität? Oder noch genauer: Was sind die Merkmale von literarischen Blogs und deren Autoren?

Es ist nicht auszuschließen, dass die mit den digitalen Dispositiven entwickelte Inklusivität etwas Trügerisches mit sich bringt. Es könnte sein, dass der nunmehr freie Zugang zu Autorschaft gar nicht so frei ist, zumal es der Demokratisierung, die er voraussetzt, nicht an Einschränkungen fehlt. Mit diesem Thema beschäftigt sich Stefan Münker in seinem Beitrag *Der Autor als Automat*. Im digitalen Zeitalter verfügt der Autor anscheinend über die größte Freiheit und Flexibilität beim Schreiben, er kann kreativer sein als je zuvor, aber das eigentlich nur, weil er sich (Schreib-)Programmen unterwirft, deren ›Sprache‹ er meistens nicht einmal durchschauen kann – im Gegensatz zur Kulturtechnik Schrift, die für uns keine Geheimnisse mehr hat, sobald wir schreiben können. Jede/r hat Zugang, jede/r kann Autor oder Autorin werden, aber alle Autoren sind Analphabeten geworden, die grundsätzlich nur noch Befehle von Programmierern ausführen.

Wenn die Literatur, die kommt, sich von Autorschaft sowie von Exklusivität verabschiedet, ist zu vermuten, dass dabei die Autorität, die Autorschaft als solche ausmacht, auf verschiedene Weise an digitale Programmierungen und automatisierte Dispositive übertragen worden ist. Und dann liegt der nächste Schritt, bzw. die nächste Frage auf der Hand: Kann Autorschaft völlig automatisiert werden? Können Autoren durch Algorithmen ersetzt werden? Wird die Literatur der Zukunft durch künstliche Intelligenz geschrieben? Dies sind Fragen, die Christian Bächle in seinem Beitrag *Enter ALGORITHMIC ARTIST – (Un)dead authors and (un)intelligent art* auf eine ebenfalls kritische und ernüchternde Weise bespricht: Autorschaft durch KI entpuppt sich als Illusion, als ein Mythos, als das Erzeugen einer Autorität im Dienste einer Marketingstrategie, bei der es grundsätzlich darum geht, etwas zu verkaufen, das als durch KI erzeugte Kunst oder Literatur dargestellt wird.

Es lässt sich festhalten, dass mit Blick auf den Parameter der Autorschaft die durch Digitalisierungstechnologien geprägte Literatur zwischen Automatisierung, Demokratisierung und entsprechend vielleicht Selbstaufhebung einerseits und Wiederherstellung von Autorität und Autorschaft andererseits schwanken wird. Ein weiterer für die Digitalisierung kenn-

zeichnender Parameter, der hier in mehreren Beiträgen konsequent untersucht wird, ist die *partizipative* Dimension der kommenden Literatur oder – wenn man diesen Begriff auch auf das Thema Autorschaft beziehen möchte – deren Kollektivierung. Was geschieht mit Autorschaft und allgemeiner mit Literatur als Schreib- oder Lesepraxis, wenn sie sich auf den insbesondere durch die sozialen Medien entwickelten Imperativ der Partizipation einlässt, wenn sie sich von ihrem seit bald drei Jahrhunderten engen Bezug zur privaten Sphäre verabschiedet, wenn sie sich als Praxis der Individualisierung oder der Singularisierung zugunsten ihrer Sozialisierung auflöst und das auf der Seite der Autorschaft wie auf der Seite der Leserschaft, deren digitales Schicksal es gerade ist, in der Figur des Users zu fusionieren?

Auch auf diese Fragen wird in diesem Band auf verschiedene Weise eingegangen. Der Schriftsteller Gergely Teglasy (TG) berichtet über das Experiment *Zwirbler*, d.h. über den ersten in Kooperation mit Usern gestalteten ›Facebook-Roman‹. Was sind die ästhetischen Konsequenzen einer kollektiven Gestaltung? Wie prägt diese das Storytelling und freilich auch wieder die Autorschaft von *Zwirbler*? Werden sich in der Zukunft durch Kollektive gestaltete Erzählungen durchsetzen? Oder wird sich die Kollektivierung vor allem auf der Ebene der Sozialisierung der Lesepraxis abspielen? Dazu drängt sich der Beitrag von Beate Ochsner in diesem Band auf: Analog zu den oben erwähnten Erkenntnissen zum digitalen Wandel von Autorschaft ist ›social reading‹ gemäß Ochsner kritisch zu bewerten. Die Aktivierung der Leser mag mit Blick auf den oft kritisierten, passiven Konsum von kulturellen Artefakten als positiv, bzw. ›kreativ‹ eingestuft werden. Jedoch soll dabei nicht vergessen werden, dass die verschiedenen Plattformen, die sich für ›social reading‹ eignen, dessen Praxis grundsätzlich programmieren und den Usern entsprechend (ökonomische) Transaktionen vorschreiben. Ist der digital sozialisierte und aktivierte Leser wirklich so aktiv, sozial und vor allem freier als der einst entfremdete Konsument? Oder ist auch er eher dieser Funktionär, der gemäß Friedrich Kittler nötig ist, damit die technologischen Dispositive funktionieren? Es ist offensichtlich Zeit, auch das *Mantra* der digitalen Partizipation zu hinterfragen. Entsprechend sei hier auch auf den sehr nützlichen Beitrag von Kimberley Köttering hingewiesen, der die theoretischen Grundlagen, die wir benötigen, um die verschiedenen Formen von medialer Online-Partizipation auf eine präzise und kritische Weise einzuordnen, umfassend bereitstellt.

Mit Technologien und Dispositiven wie den sozialen Medien oder der künstlichen Intelligenz, die mit Blick auf Autorschaft sowie auf Leserschaft den Anspruch auf Demokratisierung, Partizipation und Automatisierung unterstützen, drängt sich die Hypothese auf, dass sich Literatur oder zumindest die Literatur, die wir lange Zeit gekannt und geschätzt haben, auflösen wird. Aber wie in mehreren, eben erwähnten Beiträgen besprochen, ist es auch möglich, gerade umgekehrt zu beobachten, wie neue Technologien bestimmte Gegenströmungen erzeugen, mit denen z.B. Autorschaft und Autorität wiederhergestellt werden. Die Auflösung mag irgendwann einmal kommen, aber niemand scheint es eilig zu haben. Anders verhält es

sich jedoch mit Technologien wie z.B. *Augmented Reality* (AR) oder *Virtual Reality* (VR), bei denen die Kulturtechnik Schrift und deren zahlreiche Träger – von Tontäfelchen bis zu Smartphones – definitiv hinter einem unmittelbaren, immersiven Erlebnis verschwinden. Es mag sein, wie das heute oft behauptet wird, dass Literatur unentbehrlich ist, um unsere Empathie-Kompetenz zu pflegen oder zu fördern. Aber was wird aus den schriftlichen Medien und entsprechend aus Literatur, wenn wir mit AR oder VR bezüglich Empathie über effizientere Technologien verfügen? Wozu soll man noch lesen, wenn man von einem Quasi-Dabeisein mehr hat, wenn sich die ästhetische Erfahrung gegen ein Quasi-Erlebnis austauschen lässt? Was sind die Merkmale von ›erlebter Kunst‹? Diese Frage wurde einerseits Praktikern gestellt, die auf *Virtual* oder *Augmented Reality* basierte Projekte entwickelt haben: Mika Johnsons Einrichtung *VRwandlung* macht es uns möglich, in Kafkas *Verwandlung* die Perspektive von Gregor Samsa einzunehmen. Clarissa Zurwerra-Höhener konzipiert die *Bux-App*, mit der konkrete Räume (die Stadt Zürich) oder Erzählungen, die sich in diesen Räumen abspielen, ›erlebt‹ werden können. Andrea Pinotti und Elisabetta Modena liefern die ersten Bruchstücke einer Ästhetik des mit VR verbundenen immersiven Storytellings, bzw. die Bruchstücke einer Ästhetik der Empathie, die wir dringend brauchen, um zu verstehen, wohin uns die Reise mit Virtual Reality führen könnte und was die digital erzeugte Unmittelbarkeit mit Blick auf die klassische ästhetische Erfahrung und die in ihr eingebaute Distanz bedeutet. Und schließlich bespricht Tina Madsen einen weiteren Aspekt von ›erlebter‹ Kunst, der sich kunsthistorisch u.a. von der ›Performance Art‹ ableiten lässt: die Vergänglichkeit, die als eine zentrale Dimension von Internet-Kunst gilt und entsprechend mit der Wiederholbarkeit der literarisch-ästhetischen Erfahrung kaum kompatibel zu sein scheint. Damit kommen wir ein letztes Mal bei der hier eigentlich immer ähnlich gestellten Frage nach dem Jenseits der Literatur an: Was würde aus der literarischen Praxis, wenn sie sich zur Vergänglichkeit bekennt, wie sie es z.B. mit Partizipation tut? Wie könnte Literatur, die nur vorübergeht, nicht vorübergehen?

The web of (non)narrative encounters

Tina Mariane Krogh Madsen

This paper evolves around online narrative structures and the way ephemerality affects how we experience and engage with Internet-based artworks in which variability is a factor that both the artist, the users, and the art institutions relate to. Internet narratives are discussed through the example of hypertext, its origin, development, expanded and forked into web-storytelling. Furthermore, deconstructive code-works are explored through their facilitation of (non)narrative encounters, which via networked dynamics present a rhizomatic engagement that takes place outside of the walls of the art institution. This way of working has historical reference-points to Conceptual Art and the discussion about the dematerialized art object as well as the authenticity of reproducible artworks; what is expanded here is the potentiality of *decentralized* web communication and interaction.

Dieses Paper beschäftigt sich mit narrativen Strukturen im Internet und damit, wie Flüchtigkeit beeinflusst, wie wir internetbasierte Kunstwerke erfahren und uns damit auseinandersetzen – Kunstwerke, in welchen Veränderlichkeit ein Faktor ist, auf den sich sowohl Künstler und Nutzer wie auch Kunstinstitutionen beziehen. Internett Narrative werden am Beispiel des Hypertexts diskutiert, anhand seines Ursprungs, seiner Entwicklung sowie der Erweiterung und Aufspaltung zum Web-Storytelling. Außerdem werden dekonstruktive Code-Werke als Vermittlung (nicht-)narrativer Begegnungen erforscht, welche über Netzwerkdynamiken zu rhizomatischen Formen von Engagement führen, die außerhalb der Wände von Kunstinstitutionen stattfinden. Diese Arbeitsweise hat historische Bezugspunkte zur Konzeptkunst und zur Diskussion über entmaterialisierte Kunstobjekte sowie auch über die Authentizität reproduzierbarer Kunstwerke; was hier erweitert wird, ist das Potenzial dezentralisierter Webkommunikation und -interaktion.

1. Introduction

Ephemerality plays a crucial part in the way we experience and engage with Internet-based art. Possible changes and revisions lead to a variability of the artwork that both the artists, the users, and the art institutions need to relate to. Therefore this paper will discuss the fleeting nature of Internet Art with a special focus on its use of hypertextuality, narration, and the challenges that these phenomenons pose on numerous levels.

For many, the book *The Language of New Media* (2001) by the media theorist Lev Manovich has been an introduction on how to perceive, engage with and analyze digital artworks, including hypertext and Internet Art. Manovich focuses on the different characteristics of digital artifacts which he defines as numerical representation, modularity, automation, variability, and transcoding¹: many media theoretical reflections and institutional preservation strategies are based on these concepts. Emphasizing Manovich's influence within this field, Janet Murray, Professor of media and literature, writes in her article *Inventing the Medium*: »The Language of New Media is based on the assumption that, in fact, all cultural objects

1 Lev Manovich: *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2001.

that rely on digital representation and computer-based delivery do share a number of common qualities«. ²

Manovich sees Digital Art as heavily influenced by avantgarde methods, such as cut-up, montage, and collage, which can be related to the aforementioned characteristics, and discusses how a unification of these techniques result in a hypermedia environment that gathers many media in one, online. Manovich stresses that understanding the Internet and its qualities is essential for understanding online artworks as well as the methods and the environment used. Through its characteristics the Internet has a connected sense of communication inscribed, or even of miscommunication at times. It is briefly described as a decentralized network of connected servers, which enables distribution that uses signals to route messages, as a transmission system for data. ³ The rise of the World Wide Web in the early 1990s made the Internet accessible to the broader public, though it would take some years before it became widely used in homes. With the Web came an interface easy to access, which combined the technology of hypertext with computer communication and made it possible for the user to locate information via search engines. As a coded environment, the Web is in its basic structure equal to what Manovich calls »numerical representation«, where algorithmic manipulation is applicable and highlights the variable aspects of its hypertextual structure, e.g. its dynamic construction or ephemerality through dead links and deleted content. These features are important for online artistic practices and are explored in Internet Art.

The URL or *Uniform Resource Locator* fulfills a vital role in narrative Web-works and functions as an artwork signature. Since browsers alone do not make data manageable, the use of search engines is often necessary in order to filter information, a topic also widely explored artistically. ⁴ Internet Art's many shapes and themes are in this way tightly knit to the core characteristics of its online environment. It is performative, temporary, ephemeral – a click and it is gone. It is changeable, variable, dynamic and modular, with media elements coming in different bits, pixels, and scripts. Numerical values enable automation of operations and modifications through the use of simple algorithms. The hyper-link is an essential part of this structure because of its ability to forward and contextualize data and information. The Internet and the Web are in this way what media theorist Peter Lunenfeld calls an »unfinished condition«, i.e. an unfinished space representing a premise we need to accept when working with online materials. ⁵ This, I will stress, applies to both artists and users, institutions, curators, and others who actively engage with this form of art .

2 Janet Murray: *Inventing the Medium*. In: Noah Wardrip-Fruin/ Nick Montfort (Hg.): *The New Media Reader*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 2003, S. 17.

3 Niels Ole Finnemann: *Internettet i et mediehistorisk perspektiv*. Frederiksberg: Forlaget Samfundslitteratur 2005, S. 124–125.

4 The URL or Uniform Resource Locator is a generic term for all types of names and addresses that refer to objects on the World Wide Web. The term Web address is a synonym for a URL that uses the HTTP / HTTPS protocol.

5 Peter Lunenfeld (Hg.): *The Digital Dialectic*. Cambridge/London: MIT Press, 1999/ 2000.

2. The rhizome and the maze, an introduction to Web-structure and hypertext

In philosophy there are structures and thought-patterns which can be applied to the (non) narrative usage of the Web and which become obvious in early Internet-based artworks. One crucial example is the rhizome introduced by the philosophers Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in their collaborate piece *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980). It is important to mention that the description of the Web as a rhizome was never an intended usage of this theory since it was written before the emergence of the World Wide Web. However, much of the early Internet Art supports the concept of the rhizome to a greater extent than general commercial Web usage, which implements a more hierarchical structure and does not dive into the wild web of interconnected paths. *A Thousand Plateaus* is written as an assemblage, embracing its own rhizomatic structure, with no beginning or end, and as a reader, you are invited to jump around in the book as you wish. Political theorist Brian Massumi who translated *A Thousand Plateaus* from the original French into English has in his foreword commented on its open form:

A Thousand Plateaus is conceived as an open system. It does not pretend to have the final word. The author's hope, however, is that elements of it will stay with a certain number of its readers and will weave into the melody of their everyday lives. Each plateau is an orchestration of crashing bricks extracted from a variety of disciplinary edifices. They carry traces of their former emplacement, which give them a spin defining the arc of their vector. The vectors are meant to converge at a volatile juncture, but one that is sustained, as an open equilibrium of moving parts each with its own trajectory.⁶

Just like *A Thousand Plateaus* opens up for new lines and connections, with no order and no predetermined end points, Internet Art is connective at its very core.⁷ It uses and connects in different ways to other entities online in an assemblage of relations. I wish to emphasize the inclusion of the user and reader in this context as becoming part of the rhizome. According to Deleuze and Guattari, rhizomes are multiplicities in which each entity relates to the total with a potential to change the structure: »A multiplicity has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes, and dimensions that cannot increase in number without the multiplicity changing in nature«.⁸ They further state that »any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be«.⁹ Thus a rhizome connects different modes, signs and states with a focus on contextualization. Deleuze and Guattari explain this point with

6 Brian Massumi: Translators Foreword. In: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Übers. von Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, [1980] 1987, S. XIV.

7 To follow the line of thought of Deleuze and Guattari it is important to stress that the Web can only be regarded as a rhizome if it abandons the root tree structure and engages in a less structured form of navigation as seen in the more deconstructive Web-works, which will be explored later in this paper.

8 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari: *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (footnote 6), S. 8–9.

9 Ebd., S. 7.

the concept of the book: »The ideal for a book would be to lay everything out on a plane of exteriority of this kind, on a single page, the same sheet; lived events, historical determinations, concepts, individuals, groups, social formations«.¹⁰

If the concept of the book is compared to the Web, the same would be applicable here, where even variability and broken connectivity are characterized in the rhizome as ruptures leading to new directions and stories, in which new potentialities and multiplicities will arise.

For Deleuze and Guattari, writing is an act of mapping, which in itself is a rhizome, with multiple possibilities for navigation. In this way the Web forms a map in a rhizome as well. A traced path on the other hand translates the map into an image.¹¹ This act of isolation and disturbance of the flow is what happens when an online artwork is put offline: it has traces and paths, but it stops there. It ends. It becomes an image and is no longer participating in the network:

In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and pre-established paths, the rhizome is an acentered, nonhierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automation, defined solely by a circulation of states.¹²

A similar concept that has a long history before its virtual manifestation is the hypertext, a nonlinear form of text that allows users to choose their own pathway among multiple interconnected elements. Hypertext has played a central role in the history of electronic literature, as well as in Internet Art and in video games. The concept of hypertext was at that time not a new idea. The author Jorge Louis Borges' novel *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941) has been a well-known literary inspiration and manifestation of the principles behind hypertext and has been regarded by many as one of the first hypertext novels. In the novel, Borges explores the multiple choices of a character and the possibilities given in a maze, or more correctly the book of a maze and the book as maze, with every possible direction: »In all fictional works, each time a man is confronted with several alternatives, he chooses one at the expense of the others. (...) In the works of Ts'ui Pên, all possible outcomes can occur; each one is the point of departure for other forkings«.¹³

What Borges applies is of course mainly the concept of hypertext as described above and the thought structure around it. The same is obvious in Deleuze and Guattari's concept of the rhizome as a multiple structure with no start and end. And James Joyce's *experimental modernist novel Ulysses, which was first published in its entirety in 1922, shows the same approach*.¹⁴

10 Ebd., S. 8–9.

11 Ebd., S. 12–13.

12 Ebd., S. 21.

13 Jorge Luis Borges: *The Garden of Forking Paths*. In: Noah Wardrip-Fruin/Nick Montfort (Hg.): *The New Media Reader* (footnote 2), S. 33.

14 James Joyce: *Ulysses*. Paris: Shakespeare and Company, 1922/1925.

One could even consider a book like the ancient classical Chinese *I Ching, or Book of Changes*¹⁵ being determined by a hypertextual concept, since it relies on coins to show which path to go and which combinations to read together in order to predict the future. When one applies this manner of thinking to technology, other possibilities and forms arise. Coming from a military background, the engineer Vannevar Bush is considered the >grandfather< of the underlying systematic form of hypertext. He proposed the Memex, a file library and memory extender, a concept only described in theory in the paper *As We May Think* (1945) and actually never implemented. Bush's ideas for the Memex were developed already in 1932 and 1933 before World War II, with the draft paper being written in 1939.¹⁶ The actual terms hypertext and hypermedia were later coined in 1965 by the philosopher and sociologist Theodor H. Nelson. Nelson defines the term in the essay »A File Structure for the Complex, the Changing, and the Indeterminate«. ¹⁷ The hypertext used on the Web is to be regarded as a sub-genre of hypertext in which he highlights more fluid styles of hypertextual methods, not as a link but as an extension. The engineer Doug Engelbart also referred to Vannevar Bush in his invention of the computer mouse, window navigation, and the word processor. Engelbart was among those who established the early Internet and he even discovered the hyperlink independently from Nelson.¹⁸

3. Electronic hypertextuality

This takes us further towards the topic of online storytelling. Our point of departure will be the early use of electronic hypertext, relating it to hyperlinked Internet Art narration. In the late 1980s and early 1990s authoring programs such as Eastgate's hypertext environment Storyspace and Macintosh's Hypercard allowed different groups of creators to make their own electronic, hypertext literature. *afternoon, a story* by Michael Joyce is an early example of a pioneering work of this type made in Storyspace. It was created in 1987 and published in

15 Richard Wilhelm/Cary F. Baynes: *The I Ching or, Book of Changes*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1950.

There is a discussion about when the book was actually written and assembled in the form which is known, but estimated by some to be partly created in 12th century BC and 475–221 BC: Encyclopædia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Yijing> (visited 30.01.2020).

16 Noah Wardrip-Fruin/Nick Montfort: [Introduction] *As We May Think and Vannevar Bush: As We May Think*. In: Noah Wardrip-Fruin/Nick Montfort (Hg.): *The New Media Reader* (footnote 2), S. 35–47.

17 Theodor H. Nelson: *A File Structure for the Complex, the Changing, and the Indeterminate*. In: ebd., S. 133–145.

18 Noah Wardrip-Fruin/Nick Montfort: [Introduction] *From Augmenting Human Intellect. A Conceptual Framework*. In: ebd., S. 93–94. It is important to bear in mind that the Internet as a structure was a military invention to begin with. Bush's work to create a relationship between the government and the scientific establishment during WWII changed the way scientific research is carried on in the US and fostered the environment in which the Internet was later created. Source: <https://www.ibiblio.org/pioneers/bush.html> (visited 30.01.2020).

1990. It is a piece of fiction that takes the reader in many directions, with intersecting lines between the characters of the novel.¹⁹ Another well known early example is Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995): it is a hypertext novel including original fiction and borrowed texts, art and theory, also created in Storyspace. It tells the story of a female Frankenstein monster originally created as black-and-white illustrations.²⁰ Both Michael Joyce's and Jackson's works were created as software and not linked to an online environment, but nevertheless created foundations for early inspiration of a digital form to be further developed online. These types of artworks are what researcher Esben Aarseth describes as Ergodic literature. Aarseth's research in the field of game studies focuses on games as narratives and literature. According to Aarseth, Cybertext is a neologism derived from a book by the mathematician Nobert Wiener on Cybernetics – a discipline invented in 1948 that focuses on both organic and inorganic systems, i.e. any system that contains an information feedback loop.²¹ Aarseth emphasizes that cybertext doesn't limit itself to electronic textuality but can be applied more broadly:

During the cybertextual process, the user will have effectuated a semiotic sequence, and this selective movement is a work of physical construction that the various concepts of >reading< do not account for. This phenomenon I call ergodic, using a term appropriated from physics that derives from the Greek words *ergon* and *hodos*, meaning >work< and >path<. In ergodic literature, nontrivial efforts are required to allow the reader to traverse the text.²²

Cybertext is a machine for producing variety in order to create verbal structures for aesthetic effects. The result is not a given (linear) experience. Another important reference in early cybertext narratives is Janet H. Murray's *Hamlet on the Holodeck – The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace* (1997).²³ Murray calls hypertext »a postmodern tradition« with its rise from post-structuralist theory, as in the case of Deleuze and Guattari discussed earlier in this paper. With a background in both programming and literature, Murray aims at audience engagement at a higher level of immersion in the creation of agency, where the actions and choices of the user are the main focus points.

19 Michael Joyce: afternoon, a story. In: Norton Anthology of Postmodern American Fiction special web edition, <https://wnorton.com/college/english/pmaf/hypertext/aft/> (visited 30.01.2020).

20 Electronic Literature Organization: Patchwork Girl by Shelley Jackson. In: <https://eliterature.org/Awards2001/fiction-JacksonShelley.php> (visited 30.01.2020).

21 Esben Aarseth: Cybertext: Perspectives on Ergodic Literature. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press 1997.

22 Ebd., S. 1–2.

23 Janet H. Murray: Hamlet on the Holodeck. The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace. Cambridge/London: MIT Press 1997.

4. Net-narratives and the use of code aesthetics

The engagement with the users, or participators, in hypertextual narratives also takes place in early Internet Art. One could claim that the clicking around, which is a well-known feature of the Web, already facilitates a move towards a potential narrative. The examples given below are Internet artworks which show a deeper awareness of the potential of narration and which have navigation inscribed in themselves through the use of the hyperlink. They illustrate an intended destruction and deconstruction of meaning. Internet Art as an artistic genre can be difficult to pin down, especially when its Web-presence is variable, since technological development and the fusion of online and offline space over time has moved some Internet artists outside their Web domain. Similarly, the term net.art, with its distinctive central dot has become a historical term for early Internet-based art, to be dated roughly from 1993/94 to the early 00s.²⁴ Contemporary Internet artists are to a higher degree working with the Web in an expanded practice with mobile devices offering new opportunities in the network. The form and focus has also changed with the rise of social media technologies.

The flowering heyday of Internet Art took place when the Web started to be a commodity through the launch of the World Wide Web in 1993. Internet Art is a site-specific form that uses the Web as material, context, and central topic. Its art historical references come from Conceptual Art, Dadaism, Fluxus, and Performance Art. It uses communication and distribution as means and it is performative in its hyper-textual and numerical form. Networked art such as Internet Art is similarly related to the system aesthetics of the 1960s and 1970s, whose aim was to transcend the traditional art object and to view the artwork as an information system, often with a conceptual starting point. This terminological frame was put forward by the art historian Jack Burnham in 1968 in his essay *Systems Esthetics*, which became an important source for artworks engaging in systematic thinking, from minimalism to Computer Art.²⁵ In Internet Art, data, search engines, browsers, networks, anonymity, and interaction became characteristics and components of the artworks. The artist was no longer regarded as a subject, but instead as a distributed entity, which, in early Internet Art, manifested itself via anonymous groups, spoof websites, and artist aliases. Distribution and communication structures became key characteristics, which also shaped the produced art. Many early Internet artists addressed the utopia that was linked to the Web in those early

24 The art critic Josephine Bosma regards this to be from approximately 1995–2003, Josephine Bosma: The Dot on a Velvet Pillow. In: <http://www.liveart.org/net.art/bosma.htm> (visited 30.01.2020). Media curator Rachel Green sees these aspiring years to be from 1994 to approximately 1999, Rachel Greene: Web Work: A History of Internet Art. In: *Artforum* (May 2000), https://roopavasudevan.com/commmlab/history_net_art.pdf (visited 30.01.2020). The art historian Robert Atkins dates 1994–95 to be the years that Net Art appeared, Robert Atkins: State of the (Online) Art. In: *Art in America* (April 1999), <http://www.robertatkins.net/beta/shift/online/state.html> (visited 30.01.2020).

25 Jack Burnham: Systems Esthetics. In: *Artforum* (September 1968), http://www.arts.ucsb.edu/faculty/jevbratt/readings/burnham_se.html (visited 28.7.2010).

years, particularly many of its new users who idealized the unlimited access to data and the free flow it made possible. This ideal state never became an actual reality, however, as search engines and browsers quickly began to pursue their own economic agendas – something which many Internet artists questioned and criticized.²⁶ Important in Internet Art is how societal, historical, technological, and aesthetic aspects are dependent on each other and factors that can never be separated from each other. The art is bound to the development of the Internet itself and its technological history and implementation in society, including market forces. This has a great impact on the narratives produced online as well.

Internet Art facilitates a (non)narrative encounter which through networked dynamics implies an engagement beyond institutional walls and includes other types of users than those who traditionally engage with the art world. This is a crucial point to explore, also for the artist. Net-narratives are oscillating between the modes of conceptual formalism and over-visual stimulation; like a digital *horror vacui*, fear of emptiness. Some artists are using narration in its more traditional form via the hyperlink in order to explore the Web, while others play with the viewer and deconstruct the user experience. Early Internet artists often used the Web's coded existence as a central topic in their artworks, something they continue to do. Code is language and it is used as a means to inform and orientate as well as disorientate. Collective writing became an act of creativity, which an early work of Internet Art illustrates very well. Douglas Davis' *The World's First Collaborate Sentence* (1994–present)²⁷ is using both the Web as a platform and its potential for communication as a concept, while it includes participation through its reliance on the Web-users' contributions. The sentence incorporates different styles of communication and shows how these have changed over time, thus involuntarily making the artwork a witness of the Web's technological development through the addition of new media elements to the sentence, like gifs, videos, and emoticons. It additionally facilitates more than one-way communication, which is often witnessed in so-called Interactive Art and in large portions of Internet Art through the limited potential of clicking around. Olia Lialina is another early Internet artist who works with narratives through poetic web-projects. Her artworks evolve around central characters who are at the center of a story and which sometimes include herself. In Lialina's work the focus is on the hyperlink, a core feature of the Internet. This refers additionally to the hypertext structures and narrations seen in Michael Joyce's works, which explore hyper-linearity. For example, Lialina creates the artwork as a visual poem in *My Boyfriend Came Back from the War* (1996),²⁸ where the user navigates between the different sites and paths of the work. This is an example of a semi clear narrative structure, which aims at a more personal engagement with the Web than other contemporary works

26 Rachel Greene: Internet Art (footnote 25).

27 Douglas Davis: *The World's First Collaborative Sentence* (1994). In: <http://artport.whitney.org/collection/davis/Sentence/sentence1.html> (visited 14.7.2010).

28 *Olia Lialina: My Boyfriend Came Back from the War* (1996), <http://www.teleportacia.org/war/> (visited 20.04.2020).

within the field. Media Art curator Rachel Greene calls this a medium-conscious work.²⁹ With the same awareness, Lialina created a hyper-textual journey around the Internet in *Agatha Appears* (created in 1997 and reconstructed in 2008).³⁰ It's the story of a girl named Agatha and her meeting with a system administrator who takes her on a trip from server to server, accompanied by sound and text dialogue, which adds a multimedia dimension.

These examples all have a fairly logic hypertextual narrative in their composition, something which was not the case with all early Internet artworks. Many of these use a more playful and critical approach to Web-narratives and try to give another experience and idea of what the Web is. A pioneering example of this is the duo JODI, Joan Heemskerk and Dirk Paesmans, who since the beginning of the 1990s have created artworks that critically turn the Web inside-out, using deconstruction as a tool. They show source code in what could be called a code (anti-)aesthetics and consider numerical qualities as visual statements, playing with dysfunction and the control of the machine. In addition, JODI don't use high tech computer graphics and are aware of the functionality of the Web as a critical tool. JODI became known for being the first to consistently use so-called »glitch« in their work, with the error as a central aesthetic element. Their works often show abstract layers of code which challenge the user's navigational patterns online.³¹ In the early 1990s, not many people owned a fast Internet connection. Mainly big companies and corporations could afford it, a circumstance that made it a political act for the artists to use simple aesthetics in order to make the websites easily loadable and available to people even though they had poor connections. Other ways of critical engagement online can be observed through hacking, cloning, copying, and appropriating, which can be used for the creation of digital collages in which questions about copyright and authenticity are central issues. This is a direct consequence of the network's coded materiality, which threatens the works' authenticity if considered from an institutional perspective. While most Internet artworks have a general consciousness of the Internet's functionalities, there are also some direct activist Internet Art groups who to a higher degree pay attention to the Internet's commercial interests and its movement online. Internet artists can choose a tactical media practice which is characterized by the artistic use of whatever means and media available in a political act and interventionist practice. A well-known example of this is the artist collective [®]TMark's fake George W. Bush and World Trade Organization websites,³² where the latter laid the groundwork for the tactical media group The Yes Men's numerous interventions. Another important example of political Internet Art and tactical media is *FloodNet* (1998) created by the Electronic Disturbance Theater 1.0, a tool for online collective action and protest using DDOS (Distributed Denial of Service) attacks and creating

29 Rachel Greene: *Internet Art*. London: Thames & Hudson 2004.

30 Olia Lialina: *Agatha Appears* (1997/2008). In: <http://www.c3.hu/collection/agatha/> (visited 14.7.2010).

31 An example of such a work by JODI is www.jodi.org (n.d.), <http://www.jodi.org/> (visited 29.01.2020).

32 [®]ARK: gatt.org and *G. W. Bush website*, both sites are no longer online.

electronic civil disobedience.³³ The first usage of *FloodNet* was in support of the Mexican Zapatista movement. The use of hacker-tactics combined with a specific language practice – an important part of this act – create a form of poetic and narrative flow that amounts to an artistic manifestation. This adds another element to the use of online narration and underscores its decentralization and rhizomatic structure, in addition to the fact that it adds the voice of protest as storyteller.

5. The Internet – a performative space

The Internet is in itself performative through its variability and dynamics. To a large extent, Internet Art reflects this performativity, since online interventions and performances emerged from the very beginning. Some artists set events into action via the Internet's own mechanisms and distributive nature. *Mouchette* (1996) is an interactive website, a pseudonymous character for an artist who calls herself Mouchette, »with her innocent salutation and claims to be >nearly thirteen<«. ³⁴ A website that initially appears as the personal Web presence of a young female artist evolves into darker themes in its subsequent pages. The identity of the artist and creator of the website was for many years a well-kept secret, but a few years ago it became known that the artist Martine Neddham was the person behind the project which discussed online identities and the construction of networks. The virality of the Web as an artistic tool has been used by the artist duo 0100101110101101.ORG aka Eva and Franco Mattes in collaboration with the hacker collective Epidemic. *Biennale.py* (2001) is a computer virus that redistributes itself and takes on a life of its own online.³⁵ It is a generative organism that changes itself to hide away from antivirus software. Important in the context of Web-narratives is the fact that this work is a text-based piece, a functioning computer virus written like a poem in the programming language Python. Many years after the release of *Biennale.py*, the open source developer and artist Camilo Martinez contacted Eva and Franco Mattes and told them that he had created an *Antibiennale.py* software that could recover the files infected by the *Biennale.py* virus, since Martinez had on purpose let the virus run on his computer in order to infect its files.³⁶ This intervention creates another type of Internet communication and introduces narratives as response, a crucial attribute of contemporary online behavior.

33 Electronic Disturbance Theater 1.0: FloodNet (1998). In: <https://anthology.rhizome.org/floodnet> (visited 30.01.2020).

34 Martine Neddham: Mouchette. In: <https://www.neddham.info/mouchette-org/> (visited 29.01.2020).

35 0100101110101101.org and Epidemic: Biennale.py (2001). In: <http://0100101110101101.org/biennale-py/> (visited 29.01.2020).

36 0100101110101101.org's website, about *antibiennale.py*: <http://0100101110101101.org/heres-antibiennale-py/> (visited 29.01.2020).

6. Ephemerality, dematerialization and authenticity – the relation to institutions and users

Being ephemeral means that something is temporal; it will disappear and pass away with time. Working with ephemerality as a core artistic element is not new and has historical reference-points in Conceptual Art, and among others in the discussions of the dematerialized art object by the art theorists Lucy Lippard and John Chandler in the article *The Dematerialization of Art* (1968) and how Conceptual Art resulted in the art object becoming obsolete.³⁷ Internet Art is linked to (Post-)Conceptual Art through its use of information, communication, interaction and systems as core form and content.³⁸ As stated earlier, Internet Art is an elusive and sometimes anarchic art form which uses the Web as its primary material. It often draws on data from other online sources and websites and this gives the artworks their distinctive dynamic characteristics, copy-ability (as well as delete-ability). Perception of and interaction with these artworks have been characterized as modular, where variability is a concept and a manifestation that we have to take into account when dealing with them. This reproducibility threatens the authenticity of the artwork, at least according to the statement of philosopher Walter Benjamin who famously wrote that in the age of mechanical reproduction the artwork would lose its mythic aura.³⁹ According to the media theorist and philosopher Boris Groys, the Internet introduces a reverse aura, an aura without objects. At the beginning of the 20th century, avantgarde artists started a campaign against art museums and against the preservation of the sacred art objects from the past, aiming for a more democratic view of art, where the past is not considered as being more important than the present and no objects are considered more valuable and authentic than others. This view is an attack on realism, as well as on the traditional preservative mission of the museum. Groys states in this context:

That is why the radical avant-garde wanted to destroy museums and other traditional art institutions that protected the artworks from their immersion and possible dissolution in the material flow. The artwork had to be put at risk and confronted with the same forces of destruction that endangered ordinary things.⁴⁰

Instead, this view facilitates the development of what Groys calls »direct realism«, where art results from practice as a processual work that doesn't produce objects. This includes artists who use the Internet. These artworks are ephemeral in nature and would not survive in the future in their current state. This, in turn, leads to a new focus on preservation and the myth of the (not existing) artwork. The characteristics provided by the Internet for this kind of artistic practice result in a performativity that can only be preserved through documentation. In this

37 Lucy Lippard and John Chandler: *The Dematerialization of Art*. In: *Art International*, 12:2 (Februar 1968), S. 31–36.

38 Rachel Greene: *Internet Art* (footnote 30), S. 31.

39 Walter Benjamin: *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* [1935]. In: Claus Claussen (Hg.): *Kulturindustri – udvalgte skrifter*. Copenhagen: Rhodos 1973, S. 58–94.

40 Boris Groys: *In the Flow*. London/New York: Verso 2016, S. 118.

context, it is useful to look at how Performance Art is documented and its ideas preserved if one wants to take Internet Art's performativity seriously. Matthew Reason, a professor of theater and performance, states that »Time and ephemerality can only come together in the present moment in what can be described as the >performative now<«. ⁴¹ This performative »now« lies at the the core of Internet Art as well, where the encounter with the artwork takes place through the narration made possible by the online environment. To supplement this thought, the feminist scholar Peggy Phelan, who works with Performance Art and with a focus on the live event, states that:

Performance's only life is in the present. Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being...becomes itself through disappearance. ⁴²

This is applicable to Internet Art as well, namely as a factor that needs to be embraced in order to fully understand these works, to focus on the now, the live and the ephemeral as an artistic quality in its own right.

7. Conclusion: paradoxical narratives or deconstructive possibilities

The creation of narratives through the use of ephemeral methods – a topic which has been discussed in terms of HTML-code and hypertext in this paper – points towards some crucial questions related to their existence online. If variability makes this a fragile path, is this something that has to be regarded as a paradox or an artistic possibility for a narrative encounter?

The existence of dead links in hypertextual artworks can ruin the narrative experience. At the same time to keep an emulated website offline will break an Internet Art piece's connection to the network that it is vitally dependent on, keeping it falsely alive. Online narratives flourish through their interconnection, with error and code becoming part of the story. Lialina's *Agata Appears* was reconstructed in 2008 with the artist herself as an advisor and was altered by changes in the history of technology. New browser types and features needed to be adapted, its dependency on external servers was challenged, with broken links having to be fixed. ⁴³ In such cases it is important to return to the characteristics of the Web as an important participant in

41 Matthew Reason: *Documentation, Disappearance and the Representation of Live Performance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan 2006, S. 10.

42 Peggy Phelan: *The Ontology of Performance*. In: Ders.: *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. New York/London: Routledge 1993, S. 146.

43 Elzbieta Wysocka: *Agatha Re-appears*. Preservation report for C3. In: Center for Culture & Communication Foundation (2008), <http://www.incca.org/preservation/390-wysocka-e-agatha-re-appears-net-art-resoration-project.html> (visited 31.3.2010, document no longer online).

the creation of Internet artworks, since the Web is part of the narration through its unfinished condition as characterized by both Manovich and Lunenfeld. Deconstructive code-works such as those created by JODI and *Biennaly.py* by 0100101110101101.ORG and *EpidemiC* also activate a viral and decentralized, rhizomatic experience online. The challenges of authenticity through ephemeral characteristics are known territory within art history and theory, where Land Art pieces are erased by nature itself and Performance Art exists only within a defined time frame. As stressed earlier, much of the vocabulary used when dealing with ephemeral art, including code-based works such as Internet Art, its documentation and preservation, comes from Performance Art. Parallels can be drawn here to the way an artistic medium functions through its presence in the »now«, while being reliant on evidence for its future accessibility. Ephemerality thus eventually raises the following questions for the institutions and other players dealing with these art forms: How and in which way are documents able to sufficiently represent what has happened, given the many forms of the document, when there is no evidence remaining? An additional question could be: why is it necessary at all to document ephemera? This question takes us back to the contradiction of the terms of these artworks, as described by Phelan.⁴⁴

Documentation is necessary for researchers, academics and others who write about, and work with, these art forms. When narrative Internet Art facilitates an engagement with the user, how will the dialogue continue to grow, as seen in Douglas Davis' sentence, if it is not preserved? In its specificity, Internet Art provides possibilities as well as challenges since it deals with the clash between the art world and activist, open source culture. Pranks, hoaxes, and narratives made of words and pictures become inter-weaved with no boundaries. A great deal of these materials exist at the margins of art and this leads to a differentiated picture of its identity. Internet practices challenge the traditional notions of art, the way art is made and exhibited, and renew the discussion of aura and authenticity in the field of cultural heritage. Internet Art as a form has moved from being for only a limited group of people to reaching multiple audiences, including the random visitor. Furthermore, the Internet expands the curator's field of action and the possibilities for contextualization and mediation on many levels. The different approaches and uses of the Internet thus comment on, transform and disseminate the artworks in many ways. The communicative nature of the Web offers new possibilities for narratives, e.g. by creating feedback loops between the artist/ author, the curator and the user and viewer. In the end, a broken link may cut off the narratives of Internet Art, but this can be regarded as a (non)narrative strategy in its own right that underscores the Web and its ephemeral and performative nature, its ability to create something new, in the flow of time!

44 Peggy Phelan: *The Ontology of Performance* (footnote 43).