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CAPTCHA, or how to figure out if you are a human being **By Mariana Aguirre and Paulina Ascencio**

As a consequence of the digital revolution, access to information presents itself as both a right and an obligation for the Internet's citizens, who build and change roles with each click. The development of the *homo digitalis* has likewise been accompanied by a torrent of theoretical reconsiderations regarding *online* conduct: tribes created via social media, the rise of collective creation over the division of labor, and strategies of search and selection that manifest themselves in personal web browsing histories, to name a few.

It would appear that an issue devoted to net art would deal with the evolution of this art form as well as with its points of intersection with other forms of new media and with mass culture in general. Certainly, net art is linked to the rise of mainstream Internet visual culture, as is evidenced through the popularity of seemingly disparate elements and phenomena: interactive tablets, Instagram, tumblr (and its apparent replacement of blogs), the New Aesthetic, seapunk, and SOPA. More recently, the term *gif* became Oxford American Dictionary's word of the year, pointing to the rise of works produced for the Internet within mainstream culture.

Beyond all this code-based change, active users emerge at the center of these activities. In an anonymous entry, a user asked the administrators of COLLECT THE WWWORLD "What is net art?"¹ The answer is not about media, subjects or techniques, but about a new condition of the user: "the art of the *netizens*," or rather, the community that shares a territory on the Internet. If this is read as a recursive moment within a historical model, it is no surprise that communities of artists in the Internet have developed their own circuit, which has so far kept itself at the system's margins and risen during the last decade as institutional critique as well as reconsidering aesthetics itself.

1 COLLECT THE WWWORLD, The Artist as Archivist in the Internet Age.
<http://collecttheworld.tumblr.com/>

Arguably, both digital and analog projects' ability to circulate and exert influence are tied (perhaps directly) to their online presence. However, there still is a divide between the mainstream contemporary art world (market?) and new media art, which includes net art itself. Regardless, it seems fruitless to focus exclusively on debating when and how the art world will embrace new media. Given the Internet's pervasive influence on most spheres of human activity, this will no doubt occur during the following decades; moreover, the avant-garde has never able to resist the culture industry for long, nor should it.

It is more significant, at least currently, to focus on the at times symbiotic and at times tense relationship between net art and the offline world, as this might lead us to a better understanding of this medium and its standing within the culture at large. The articles we have included in this issue of *New York Magazine of Contemporary Art and Theory* deal with topics related to art living and/or created online but likewise remind us that net art, is, after all, seen and created by actual human beings. These texts engage with diverse issues such as interactivity, the user-artist, authenticity, censorship, conservation and exhibition strategies, the market for online art and projects with an online/offline presence, among others. It is perhaps the last element which has struck us the most as we were preparing this issue - the idea that no matter what technology or code a work depends on, no matter the challenges it might pose in terms of its eventual obsolescence, the implications or history related to a work of art are not fully realized or contained solely within cyberspace.

In other words, it seems that net art cannot be fully divorced from our offline art and lives; it might be that the most important and relevant projects need to be linked, somehow, to the non-digital world. This is not to say that net art should be replicated or documented in analog media, or that it must somehow supplement our 'true,' offline lives in readily discernible ways. Rather, we could consider the current inability or unwillingness of the art world to embrace net art as an opportunity. Perhaps the idea that net art is substantially different from our analog art and lives will never truly abandon us, but at least for now, the tension between those two spheres might be one of the main points of entry into this new medium.