

LIMA Community Meeting: Transmediale 2018

Transcription

SUMMARY

The community discussion that LIMA held on February 1, 2018 at Transmediale led to important pointers on how LIMA should think about developing a digital art canon. Education, publication and exhibition—creating a digital art sphere—was emphasized, in order to enhance the visibility and understanding of digital artworks. Other steps were also deemed necessary in order to successfully create a ‘canon’. Firstly, there is a need to rethink the contemporary art canon, and current art history itself, due to the conceptual and practical challenges that digital art brings to these debates. There therefore needs to be a reevaluation of the art historical paradigm, and of the terms and concepts that can no longer apply to digital art (the bounded art object, authorship, original, etc.). This then leads to a need to contextualize the work within digital culture and even science history, and mapping out the diverse aesthetic discourses that influence and are a part of the digital art sphere. Secondly, there is also a debate on the role of the museums and the art historians, which have often acted as gatekeepers in the community. New alliances and coalitions must be formed, and there is the opportunity to create exhibitions in galleries, Biennales, and so on, which do not require traditional practices. The role of publication is also important, in order to create a framework that young art historians can use, and which can allow for multiple histories of this field to emerge. It was emphasized that the goal is not to create one ‘canon’ or ‘history’ but rather to make visible, to create understanding, and foster engagement. Thirdly, this leads to the idea that the digital art canonization process could be an innovative one, which uses the digital technologies and practices from the field in order to create a more participative and collaborative process. The use of mediawiki / wikimarathons was discussed.

Topics

Visibility
Canon Concept
Traditional Tensions
Timeline
Participation

Speakers

Josephine Bosman: JB
Gaby Wijers: GW
Sanneke Huisman: SH
Jan Robert Leegte: JRL
Axelle Van Wynsberghe: AVW
Zlatan Szakacs: ZS
Robin Yerles: RY
Sonja Lesniak: SL
Elizabeth Iskandar: EI
Katie Hawthorne: KH
Lia Carreira: LC
Yannick Antoine: YA
Jeon Dohee: JD

Ellen Bokkinga: EB
Jarly Schulp: JS
Angelica Schmitt: AS
Sabine Himmelsbach: SHB
Dieter Daniels: DD
Inke Arns: IA
Katherine Shawthorne: KH
Valerie Perrin: VP
Sakrowski: S
Karin Ohlenschläger: KO
Erik Axel Eggeling: EE
Unsure: U

Transcription by

Axelle van Wynsberghe

LIMA MEET-UP

JB: Maybe some of you are a bit confused about the title of what we are going to do here because this is not a workshop—it's announced as a workshop but Transmediale only has a few options of things that you can organize here, and one of them that came closest to what we do is 'workshop'. What this really is, is a sort of community meeting and discussion about problems that we see, that we have, working in the context of digital art, and this problem is basically that, as you may know **there is a bit of a friction between the contemporary art world and the media art world**. In the contemporary art world, digital art and digital technologies are becoming more common ground—that means they are discovering the field—and, **while they're discovering it, they feel like they're doing something for the first time and they're the first to do it. This is a bit of an issue of course, because there is a big history, going back to the 50's, of digital art**. So, what we... Or actually, basically LIMA—Gaby Wijers, who is sitting here—thought to do is create a sort of digital art canon. A basic list from which the contemporary art world can see a deeper view of digital art history. What we want to do here is hear your ideas about our project but also hear your own experiences and maybe your ideas about how we can go about to tackle this issue that we have. I'm not going to say much more, really. Firstly, Gaby will talk to you about why she did this and what she wants to do with the project, and then Sanneke who also works with LIMA will explain more about what we have been doing. Also, what I forgot to tell you is that I'm not just a moderator, I'm also an advisor for this project, and this project leans on a couple of advisors of which this man right here, artist Jan Robert Leegte, is also a part, so.

GW: Thank you Josephine, thank you for the introduction, thank you all for being here. I hope you talk a lot and reflect on our discussions. Josephine already said there is this friction between digital and contemporary art—**although one could say digital art is contemporary art**. But in a way, it's not so embraced by the contemporary art field and its infrastructures. Let's say, the contemporary art museums. Maybe you know LIMA is very much concerned to bring media artworks and digital artworks to the future, and often that's also a role the museums take; taking the artworks, making the canon; but for media art or for digital art they don't. So the future accessibility of digital art is not a major concern for the museums. But in this contemporary art field, a canon is a well known and very common way to express the importance of particular artists, and artworks, and genres, and so on. So we thought: let's make a canon of the digital art in the Netherlands to show the white spots and the black holes and to show the contemporary art field what they're actually missing. Give them some extra knowledge and give them also the possibility to acknowledge digital art and take action. We had a lot of discussions already. We're

part of a larger team, with more advisors, amongst them Sandra Fauconnier, Annet Dekker and Martijn van Boven, researchers and artists. We already found some resistance and pitfalls of such a canon of course, but we like to take this challenge up and make one. This is also one of the ways how we support the dissolvments of these boundaries between the media art and the contemporary art. Except for making this inquiry on the topic and producing this canon, the project also gives us super interesting topics to explore and discuss. Like the identity questions—involvements, dissolvments; what to include in such a canon, the fringe, the mainstream, which works with artists with network, how about the technology and hardware and stuff. One of the things can talk a lot about and we should is ‘what is digital art, actually?’. Because this whole vocabulary is tremendous, and we had long discussions—the word computational, and what it’s including... This whole vocabulary is not so easy. For media art, new media art but I’m not sure that’s still used; but all including this different art forms, and also the gaming and the machinima and the real time performances and the projects, and the VR, and the 3D and the web art and the software art and more aspects of digital culture. I think we are stuck for now on the term of ‘digital art’—*laughter*—but of course I want to have your reflection on that. And also when does it start, this digital art? We took the 50’s, and let’s also discuss if that’s the first point of departure. Luckily for the Netherlands, **Darko Fritz did tremendous research on the pioneers of digital art**, so there is some material to explore. One thing I wanted to express before we go to a lot of formulations and questions and works. It’s not a discussion about a chronological canon, I don’t think that would exist. Of course we are taking this time period to make it a little bit more structured, but the whole techno-social systems and others, are developed so simultaneously and not all works are developed on their own, they are part of a larger network on could say, or development, or larger swarm, and you have to take that in account. So maybe Sanneke can explain a little bit more where we are now in the process.

SH: We started a couple of months ago and we had three general meetings where all the people from our expert group were there. In our first meeting, we asked them to make a long list with us, so to think freely of artworks or artists that they found important regardless if these works are available or not and that can in the end be part of the strategy that works can still be documented in one way or another. Some works are not there anymore, so that’s really—they are on the priority list of the agenda in a way to start doing something to not let that happen to more works. In making this long list we simultaneously worked on the selection criteria, and I think that’s really part of the projects as we imagined it, the one doesn’t go without the other, and we didn’t want to start with one and then follow with another, so we’re bringing names and saying ‘this work is good because of blablabla’, and that can then be a selection criterion. And bringing selection criteria and seeing afterwards which artwork fits, checks the box. The result we have so far is a list of a couple of hundreds of names and a list of selection criteria that are not at all reviewed afterwards, of course, there is still some overlap or things that might conflict or are still into question, and that’s also that you see here, that maybe this workshop or meeting is two-sided; on the one hand focused on this list of criteria that we can discuss with you and see if you have comments but there’s also a blank sheet of paper and that’s what came up in our last meeting because we have been talking for so many hours with the expert group about the criteria, what is digital art, what is the Netherlands, what’s a canon, and if you talk too much at one point you also just want to start writing down things. So, there’s also this possibility to start mapping out because we even couldn’t get around what should be in the canon. Is it an artist, is it an artwork, is it a network of people, is it a technological development, so now the idea we came to is to make a map, network, structure, in which these several things can coincide because they can’t be pinned down to one artwork or one person. But perhaps it is more interesting to focus on the criteria for now.

JB: I’m also on the advisory board, so I’m also wearing two hats here, and I don’t think it’s a good idea to start focusing on the criteria because then we are here until midnight. I’m a little surprised that you take

this really deep reach into the project, I thought you would stick to the last meeting and to where we came there, because otherwise we will go into every direction, which can still happen. But if you throw too many things on the table here, I'm sure that the participants will be confused. So that is why I'm intervening, sorry.

SH: No that's no problem, but I think you didn't want the paper in the end, so that's why I came back to the criteria, so.

JB: I didn't want the paper?

SH: Yeah, you didn't want to start writing names on the paper, that's what I understood, so that's why I brought it back to—but you are the moderator, so.

GW: We have one and a half hours still, so we have some time to discuss and some time to draw maybe, but let's start somewhere. And I forgot to tell it in my introduction but this is the first public meeting, because we really want to open up and give multiple voices, not only ours. So I really would like to join the discussion. And as you heard, we hardly ever agree on anything, so that's the nice thing also of this discussion I think.

JB: I'm sorry if I embarrassed you Sanneke, I didn't mean to do this at all. Sanneke has the big problem that she has to bring together the mess that is our meetings...

GW: She did a good job.

JB: At these meetings, we are sort of six people or seven—we're sort of two camps. One wants to really build a more traditional canon of names or artworks somewhat chronologically and there is a camp who wants to focus on context most of all. You know, who wants to get rid of this idea of a traditional art canon. Who wants to say, you know, these fields flow into each other, there is networks of people. But then **the problem is of course is that the whole idea behind this project is to show the contemporary art world what's in this history. If you just offer them fields and contexts and theories, they can't really do anything with that, so that is sort of the problem that we have.** We want to bring these things together, but how? So this is where we need your expertise and your thoughts, because I'm sure there's a lot of people here who have been working on similar projects or have had faced similar problems.

GW: So that would be a good starting point to ask, maybe?

JB: To ask what, which side you're on?

GW: Like asking people who are here for similar projects or approaches they found—

IA: Maybe to get a discussion going or continue a discussion... I haven't been involved in this discussion so far, but I have been working with Dieter Daniels on a similar project, but almost fifteen years ago. So, when I read your announcement it sounded like, oh that's something I know. I remember the discussions and also the publication project. First of all, I have to say I think it's really great that you want to try it.

GW: I hear a 'but'?

IA: I think it's very much needed. A lot of announcements I read you know, they very much are now discovering things that are totally new to them and then very often we would all think like '?', so there's this kind of separation, which is super unproductive. But at the same time, obviously, I mean if you look at post-internet art for example, let's say younger generations are dealing media in a different way, and they have the right to do so. So that's the first thing I would like to say. I totally understand your wish of becoming visible. That this kind of art history must become visible. I was very irritated by the fact that you want to create a Dutch canon. Because I try to think, you know, did we ever discuss making a German canon? I think right from the beginning on, and you can fill in the blanks maybe—*pointing to Dieter Daniels*—media art history, Media Art Net (which is still online, it is in German and English) really made very sure that all the German artists or projects from Germany we presented; they were always presented in an international context. So we were always, at the same time, giving international examples. I think this is something very important. **If you want to position yourself this kind of digital art history in the broad field of contemporary art, always give international contexts and examples.** Yeah, an objective history? This is what I read. An objective canon. That's something... When we worked on the project, **history is always about selection.** Unfortunately. But this is what happens when you embark on a project like Media Art Net for example. Unfortunately, you have to make a selection and you have to leave out a lot of stuff. We try to be as inclusive as possible, but obviously when you create something like a canon you have to make selections. **I think, the best—what I can suggest to you is to really go forward and to publish something, because I think there have to be multiple histories,** so there cannot only be one, so really **invite people to write about these things and to be present.** Maybe I can hand over to Dieter? But that's still the things I remember from our discussion, when he started the project.

DD: Well, it started with Rudolf Frieling and me. I agree to everything you say Inke but the start is wrong, because it started as a German project funded by the Goethe Institute. It's a time when the internet was not feasible for multimedia, you know. It was a five-year German project and a five-year international project, so overall it was a ten year funding project. The result, you can still see at Media Art Net, and in two books, you know. So to make a long story short, we had like several meetings like the one you are starting now, and the most intense period was when you entered was the early 2000's when you entered and when we got the international upgrade, so to say. And there must be a whole list of what we considered somewhere, at the time.

GW: Somewhere? In which archive?

DD: I don't know, on my computer, or Rudolf's or yours I don't know. And from this long list and 7-8 meetings we boiled down to in the process similar to yours. I can check. I'm not sure whether I find it but. And one thing to consider—you're thinking about funding or you have funding already, or are you still looking for funding? Because when funding ends, what happened in 2005, then you keep on getting mails that people want to be included in—we didn't call it a canon, we were trying not calling it like that. But, how does it live on, you know? This one was frozen in 2005, with Rudolf Frieling leaving for San Francisco and Peter Wieber entering the universe as Pieter Wieber. He was not interested in things that don't create visibility for him, so it was never kind of taken out again. Now it has errors, a version with errors because it didn't have a proper backup.

JB: if I can intervene a little bit, I think that your project was a bit different than this one in the sense that you had to be inclusive as well, at the same time being selective, you say you wanted to be inclusive. That's not what we want to do. Gaby said to have top 50 artists. Yesterday I talked to Andreas

Broeckmann, and he said 5-10 artists should be a max if we would present a canon publicly. Because otherwise, it's no longer a canon. It's really la crème de la crème, that is really a canon.

KO: For me, one of the essence of digital art is that it can't have a canon, because it's fluid. It started with a dialogue between art, science and technology, where a lot of agents were involved at the very beginning. Nowadays, digital art is also from gaming, performative—it's so broad. For me it's global, you can't say oh let's talk about what happened in the Netherlands.

JB: Couldn't one say the same thing about contemporary art?

KO: For me, digital art is contemporary art, but digital art was pioneering this kind of very fluid and open ended relationship between different areas of experience and knowledge. Of course, you can say the cubists of the beginning of the 20th century, they were also involving mathematicians, but for me the essence of digital art is this. So to make it exclusive? I wouldn't be happy with this result because you cut down part of the very essence of what it is.

S: I totally agree, and I would say the canon idea is maybe the attempt to bridge, then, the lack of visibility of digital art, because this excludes, or excluded, the pioneers from the canon—that they weren't recognized by the art world because they were not fitting in the system, as described. If this paradox has tried to build the canon for this, so that it becomes recognized, it's also a question of power as was described with Medien Kunst Netz. Who has the power to build the cannon? And then there is always a taste behind, or a world view you could say. So the canon is always changing too. There is no objective canon. Always power defines the canon, so this is my question: with which kind of power you work behind to set this canon idea. Despite that point, why? Is it possible to do this for digital art? I tried it also with a different approach, but... Direct cooperation with Stedelijk? You say there are 10 artists that are in, or, this kind of power.

SH: This is the first attempt to start the discussion with, for example, the Stedelijk. Of course we are aware of the fact that a canon is never a defined or a definitive list. That is also what an art-historical canon is, what historians keep working on—this one out, this one in, this one out, etc. This is the first attempt to start this discussion, which is also what makes this project two-sided. On the one hand, maybe the digital art field, but on the other hand the contemporary art field. This latter one for me personally is the most important because we need to have this discussion with them and that's also why we use a term like 'canon', because that's in a way the terminology to get them interested. So it's really the first attempt to start this discussion with the institutions in the Netherlands.

S: I understand. Only one addition, because the Stedelijk new evolvments we talked about... They bought now works and so they start to build a canon. There is no discussion anymore because there is already a canon because they will take care of them over generations because they bought them so they will not give them away for nothing so... That means that there is already then a canon in place, and how to deal with this.

SH: It's slowly starting, so I think this is the moment! To also get the foot in.

JB: Also the way that the Stedelijk acquired a lot of the works that you are probably referring to, was kind of through a back door. There was a museum in Breda, the MOTI, the Museum of the Image, and there the director Mieke Gerritzen there and the curator Ward Janssen, they bought a lot of works from Jan Robert Leegte, Rosa Menkman, JODI, and what happened is that there was a local, political struggle in

Breda. The local government decided to merge the MOTI with a local culture museum, and the local culture museum would have a say in what happened. So this meant that the MOTI would cease to exist, basically. So they had to do something with this collection that they had, so they approached the Stedelijk and through some sort of negotiations, they made the Stedelijk take over their collection. So there wasn't really any curatorial view involved, it was sort of a back door thing, where now suddenly the Stedelijk has a work by JODI that's maybe not even the one that they should have, you know. But it's a start. But we're not really feeling the love, let's say. Also the way it was presented, like recently they did a, they now have a new collection or archive show and some of the works from this collection—digital artwork collection—are there, but the net artworks for example like Mouchette and works by Jan Robert Leegte, they have presented them on really strange screens. It's almost like Transmediale 1999. You can't really navigate the works, everything crashes easily, it's clumsy, it feels awful. So you feel that there's so much still to be learned and to be gained there, that you feel that you just want to grab them and shake them so that's also where this comes from, this idea.

SL: But are they interested in the cooperation, or is it you, that you started the project because you think they know they are doing it wrong?

JB: They are feeling the pressure.

SL: Because I think without them, this is also a strange situation, they should be involved.

JB: This is not about the Stedelijk per se. If this were about the Stedelijk, we would have them at the table of course, it's more a general project. I'm speaking for Gaby...

GW: No as an advisor, you're well informed about the project. It is true, the Stedelijk is not on board of the first group that is discussing but of course later on, like you here, they will be at the table to discuss. But it's not so much about one contemporary art collection that has ten digital artworks or something like that. It's more about gaining this awareness and also this discussion, if it's possible to make such a canon for digital art, or if it's totally not done... and then find another way to bridge the gap. It's about finding a way to raise this awareness and to share the knowledge we have and sometimes we think, yeah, maybe we have to talk another language, so let's talk 'canon'.

EE: Would you go with digital art also to video and audio, or? Computer generated or?

GW: This could be a very long discussion, but we said: single channel digital video we don't take into account. We start with the, let's say, more complex works. We start with the 1950's, we think. But then it was hard to find something.

JB: I think it's because of Nat Lab, you know the beginning of experimental, digital culture in the Netherlands. I have a question for you, because you are adamant about not wanting a canon because the borders are so fluid in the digital art sphere, so we heard this at our table, the same arguments. My question back to you is: what do you do then, when you are faced with a much more dominant contemporary art field and you present them these fluid movements and cultures we are coming from. Ok that's interesting, we have an artist born in 1989 or 1995 who does exactly that! Perfect, it's the first one. So what, do you do? That's the problem we have here. You have to also be able to say: look at what a wonderful work was made in 1965 or 1981.

IA: Maybe it's about making claims. Not about canons but making claims. I just thought of a title, for a publication or for an exhibition, it's called 'Unknown Pioneers Of Contemporary Art'. This is a bold claim.

AVW: The idea of the canon is a bit difficult to put into context but at the same time I think new media arts has kind of challenged traditional concept of art history anyway, and maybe it's time to see the canon in a different light within the new media context. What could that kind of canon be like? Does it have to fit the traditional definition of what a canon is? And furthermore, I think you're right when you say that there is an anger of being subsumed into a traditional art history canon that doesn't maybe comprehend the implications. Maybe it's more about creating a comprehensive narrative for those who are not in the scene. Because to be frank, for those people who aren't in contact with this emerging field—they're very confused, they think 'what are these weird websites?' and it's about giving them a kind of context and of course that will always be negotiated. What I found to be really relevant for defining these words in a different is looking at the actual process, especially for programming based works, for example in creative coding conference I've noticed that the artwork is valued in a different light. One example is: 'that's beautiful code', you can find a lot of criteria that that group of people will judge that work to be valuable. You do have to put it in the context of art, but I think there is something there, some programming vocabulary, some kind of education in that context that needs to shed light on the artwork. Because it's not just the visual output, it's the process, the coding process and that is also very important.

EE: I have some input on that. I'm not sure it's the lack of process in the understanding of the works that is the problem. In my view, it's a lot about the fluidity and the problem of archiving, and if we look at the art market and art history in relation to having commodifiable artworks or not and being a video artist myself, I find it hard to fit my work into art history or any kind of archivable... Well, I've actually started to work more towards that, and that is kind of giving up the initial spirit of making things that are hard to sell. That's the danger also if we are thinking of fitting in to the normal artwork that we are... Because there is a lot of digital art sold on the market, but it's all physical objects and other things that are easily preservable. These are just some loose thoughts.

6: I was thinking about that too. Right at the start when you said that you wanted to have a canon so that there was access for future generations. I was absolutely thinking, okay so these works need to be reproducible or the technology used to produce them needs to be reproducible, however long into the future, so that someone can access it or understand it in a similar way. Now I'm thinking—so is it literal visibility that helps the canon form, is that like purchasing power as well, or something else? I work in theatre and the performing arts which is a far more ephemeral thing, it's hard to put it in a gallery or form a canon in a way that is seeable. In that, you know, it's a lot more word of mouth: that production in the 80's was amazing and we'll never get it back, so everyone has to trust it. So I find this idea of a canon quite unstable anyway. Yeah, I didn't start knowing where I was going to finish. But, I think I was curious to see how the purchasing power of galleries factor in the canon in this way.

JB: Do you mean to say that this sort of reproducibility would mean limitations to the work?

6: It might bias someone to choosing something over something else, because maybe this will age well, in such a fast-moving field

JB: But in the performing arts, you have different types of reproducibility.

6: Yeah, people are talking now about doing 360 degree videos of performances so we can save them in a way that they haven't been saved before.

JB: They are saved in terms of scores, right? And in terms of reenactments?

6: Yeah, that's where it become more experiential and sensory, and harder to do.

7: I don't know if that's a problem of a canon or if that's a problem of—it sounds a lot like a commodification and marketing issue, but I don't see that as a canon issue. Because the whole Fluxus art movement has the same issues. It has been canonized, but it's clearly less visible on the art market. But that's another discussion so.

6: But I was only because at the start we were talking about access.

8: I was just going to that this is going to be paradoxical because even to get the infrastructure in order to present these kind of artworks, you need to be in that canon, because the institutions will only invest in those artworks in the canon. Or if you want finance or structures to be able to represent them in a way, they also have to recognize it as a certain type of artwork that fits inside a semantic bubble.

ZS: 2016, I started a project—Gaby knows my project—the institute of unseen digital art, it was part of my graduation project at the design academy in Eindhoven in the Netherlands, where I was looking in general about digital art. I found out that there was a lot of difficulties about this artwork. A lot of art institutions very reactive about digital art, in a very conservative way, didn't want to take it in their collections, or if they want to take it in their collections they present it in a very weird way, they put it in white box or black box settings. This was the starting the idea of my project, taking an digital artwork, software-based artwork from the 90's and reinterpret it in a contemporary medium where you can still keep the artwork alive. And I found actually a lot of similarity about digital art from the 90's to nowadays contemporary digital art which is very much 3D based shapes. I was very interested how I can put this artwork back in a new way. I found a lot of problems doing this research finding the copyright from the artist, from the museum and to be able to realize this project and translate it into a new medium. This led to a new conversation: who has now the copyright? Is it Peter Struycken, the artist, or the museum, or me, with this artwork reinterpretation? Archiving in a new medium raises also new questions.

DD: You said you start in the 1950's. And the very basic question is: do you have an idea that it ends at a certain moment? Because I think it's not possible to go until today if you want to keep up with the canon idea because canonization is historical difference. And what you for example say in creative coding—you will not canonize that in any means. I just give you a very random example. Because I just came over by chance, stopped over in Potsdam, where they have a huge exhibition of GDR art. And this was for me a very canonizing experience, it was a private museum. I was the youngest guy in a very huge crowd. I thought okay, this is funny, and then I came here and I feel like Gaby and me we are the seniors you know. So the question is the historical distance, the canon I think it's like a 25-year distance it needed with GDR you know, like 10 years ago from now there was still a kind of raging debate of whether it's possible to show socialist art among contemporary art. Contemporary artists would withdraw from exhibitions, they didn't want to be shown with those guys, so. And now, it's like running smooth, there are busloads of people and everybody's looking and there are no discussions about censorship anymore. So that is canonization in maybe the worst case. It all ended in the late 80's and that is the time lag you need if you really think about a complete museumification process. But you're not discussing a closed phenomenon, you're discussing an ongoing phenomenon.

GW: This is why it's so interesting to figure out what criteria would be, cause maybe it's more about the process, and maybe it's that the process—what you really want is not possible, maybe you end up with that. And that could be, but we're not there yet. We have the courage to continue the search for these works and networks and find a way to translate it into a vocabulary that the contemporary art world has access to.

DD: You have to make a cut. Nothing enters the canon which isn't younger than ten years or something.

SH: We did talk of a historical distance, and I think we end in 2000, or 2010, and this ongoing debate is not so much further in time but more within this given period. And afterwards you can update it.

9: What you could do possibly, is to separate a past and a post Snowden era in the digital art because before Snowden, they were exploited by who I don't know, the art was something like inventing new interfaces, and things for the surveillance industry.

AVW: It's a very good point, I think. The Free Art & Technology Lab, I spoke with them a bit and they actually referred to it like that. The scene completely changed.

9: You also have to decide if it is a genre or not. This is not the case because the digital is a universal medium, as we all know, and we cannot call it a genre, it's not a genre.

JB: It's also, when you were speaking, I forgot your name [ZS]. I thought I should mention that we are not just talking about visual digital art, you know, digital-born stuff, are also talking about people building their own instruments, about people working with hardware. People doing performance, people making installation art within the digital technology context. Where digital technologies are very important. Digital art and culture in a very broad sense. It's not just 3D objects and stuff like that, and we're also not really talking about preservation, this is really about putting on the table what works have been important and even seminal. And even though many of us and me included recognize that that is a dangerous thing to do, always, because there's this saying: there's always a network of people around somebody, there's always influences, there's always collaborations, there's always indispensable technicians helping to realize works, we know that. So one of the things that we definitely want to do if we build a canon of some sort is to make sure that **this context is very very visible**, and then that is also a point of discussion, how to do that.

ZS: Back to the context of digital art, like you said, I think presenting next to the artwork or performance, the context is also very important for the audience to understand it better. Because you can also refer to the process as you mentioned, because that is part of the context and you gain more understanding of the artwork itself and the zeitgeist when it was made referring to the 50's or 60's.

JB: It's very important in this context, because in the contemporary art canon we know already so much. It's shared and it's taught in schools, and we learn it visiting museums and seeing things in magazines. Whereas digital art doesn't have this mainstream historization and contextualization.

SL: My question is related to the canon of digital art. Does digital art really want to fit in this art history canon, or should art history and art museum make the question of how to survive in the digital age? I think this is also a big issue. So it's not so much a question of 'how can we fit in the traditional museum structure and how can we fit in the way the art historians are thinking or trying to categorize everything,

or should we defend—like at Transmediale and other big forums we are defending the impact of digital technologies in society, politics, the economy and our identities so I think the big question is: what about the impact of the digital age in the museum, in art history? This is the whole area which has to change. Maybe we shouldn't even try it.

JB: I don't agree with that because for me this is first step in creating the awareness in the contemporary art world.

SH: To add, as we already saw with the Stedelijk Museum example, the museums are going to do it anyway, so we better be there to guide. Otherwise, they are going to do a different thing than it could have been.

10: Yeah, but at the same time you have to try to stimulate the discussion about the museum space. Maybe the museum has to change, and the space and representation of digital artworks has to change. Because for me, my experience was, when I started to come nearer to the digital art, to see that these artworks really need a different space. To produce, to do research, to be developed - and for the exhibitions. And the art shows, we need different spaces for digital art shows.

SHB: I was saying, it's also different concepts at work, for example: in our collection at Hek, Arts Electronika in Basel we are also collecting net art based works, and I had the hardest time. I was invited to some think tanks and as an institution we feel responsible to keep these works alive, for everybody to see. It's not something we take from them, but we make sure that it stays there. You know, for a collection, the concept doesn't exist, it's something that you take away. A lot of things have to change in order to understand what a public museum stands for. That we guarantee something that's out in the world, and not just in our storage rooms that we show once in a while.

JB: If I can just add a personal note, what I ideally would like to do is convince or make these contemporary art world aware that what's happening in the digital art field is really a continuation of practices, similar to practices that also happen in their context. What I find baffling is that whenever I go to speak to a curator, talking about the Stedelijk Museum, and we talk about net art or digital art, or art with computers they totally let go of anything that has happened in the 20th century and think that something completely new has emerged there and it only happens on that screen.

SHB: It's still like that? Really?

JB: That's the general thought, you know, that there's a connection to conceptual art, that there's all these other connections, they are just... most of the time completely blind to that. I find that shocking.

VP: For me, I do not understand why we try to get into a canon, for me there is a parallel story with video art. It changed the way of showing things. We have the white cube, and there was the block box for video art. So I think it will come slowly but certainly things are going to change. Now young artists, in college, they use digital material, so I think for contemporary art it will be a logical way. For me, the canon is about the past. Collecting digital art changed the way of the sense of collection. It's no more about patrimonial things, it's something different. For me, the point is to check it with what are the past artworks. I think it will be a very fluid thing.

JB: What I mean to say is that in the contemporary art world there have been these kind of tendencies as well, you know, outer-institutional, anti-institutional, breaking free from this museum and from the art-institutional context, it's not something solely happening in media arts.

EE: Were they able to sell anything? I still come back to that this is kind of the wrong question.

JB: Who is they?

EE: No, I mean, the conceptual artists.

JB: Yeah, they sold.

EE: In my view, it still comes back to the contemporary art world is interested in everything that they can buy and sell, maybe that is the problem. It comes back to this unarchivable media.

DD: The conceptual artist is a good example, because you can also sell ideas, so I think that's really not the question.

15: Even code-based artworks, the Whitney museum had an auction, they sold code.

GW: And net art is sold...

S: With this canon question, I would add to Inke's idea of doing an exhibition or so. How the Fluxus artist become part of the canon of art history, it was because people were writing about them, they had exhibitions, they were perceived and they had somehow an attention. Then, they came for collectors, they had support, then they came to museums in the end, so it was a process. It was a performative process, I would say—in the sense of exhibitions or so. This could be the way to fill out all this gap in history, to put a spot on it. Setting up some rules and criteria or so, I think this cannot be the approach, I think it has to come through education, that people of the next generation are aware of it, pointing that out, and so on. Because I think still, the argument is valued that these kind of works, especially and for example the net-based works, they avoid from their beginning, from their whole structure, the possibility to include them in the canon. And they did a good job because no one knows them.

SH: Maybe I was not clear about the criteria because that was absolutely not a list we would give to the institutional field, it was really for us to come to an agreement. Because if you sit six experts to a table you already don't get to a final list. Then at least you would have a sort of checkbox to make decisions.

GW: Also when you make an exhibition, you make a selection of a whole variety of concepts and rules.

S: Yeah, yeah, but they are not objective. They are totally subjective.

GW: Yeah, I don't think something like objectivity exists.

SH: If we go for like five works, it's absolutely not that—

S: Coming back to what Dieter also mentioned, about the power argument. Because if it is subjective, there is also a strong relation to political view or a third view as I called it before. I think the GDR canon is not done, and there are some exhibitions in the last year, there were others too, from creators, who are

free to move on that are offering their perspective on the canon. So the canon has always to do with a special political view. I think it has left out some of the political art because it's not like, easily tradable and represented a generation that had some different ideas to the mainstream.

DD: Can I add to the discussion on the necessity to have something material? I totally agree that you can sell ideas, it's not a question of materiality any longer. It's a process, since maybe a couple of years you can sell even performances, which is recent you know, and before conceptual art already traced and conceptual art was already sold before video art. Video art was a kind of retro even in that sense that it went back to physical carriers.

EE: My point is not to say that everything that is not physical is not sellable but that the market has to learn how to sell.

DD: There comes in a new problem that wasn't discussed because if you buy an idea or if you buy a performance, it's just a conceptual act with a piece of paper that proves that you bought it, but when you buy a digital, even analogue electronic artwork, it raises costs, you know. Because of the preservation, and so you have not only to buy but also invest in it. So that's also a problem. I'm preparing a talk, funnily enough, that there has to be an equivalent between the speculation raise in price and the money you invest to preserve. The canon may be about this—who is worst to invest and preserve, and who will be lost because he will be not a kind of, investment. And this depends on the technical standard. If you think about early silicon graphics machinery, with video now it's smooth, with the work that Gaby is doing. You can calculate the risk of it.

GW: No but I don't agree with you when you say the performance is different. I think it's difficult to maintain a performance, but at the other hand, executing the performance, this is where the cost is. And also the mediation of the knowledge, how to perform this script, is very cost-intensive, so.

DD: I totally agree. But it is not like this permanent rent which you feel like you; you want to do it, then you have to invest, but if you don't do it you still own it. And **with a digital piece you have to invest, because otherwise you lose it.** This is a slight but important difference. When you have the digital piece, and nobody wants it... It's an important shift for a private collector.

S: I would like to respond, shortly. I think this depends on the expectations we have from an art piece. If it should be treated like a painting—so with a lifespan of maybe 200 years or so and then also with this strange idea of authentic appearance and presentation also - and preservation too. But if we don't apply this on digital art, in the sense that we go more with this performative idea in the sense of what came with Fluxus or Happening, there is a moment in time described and then we can collect the documentation, and then there is already a transformation which could fit perfectly in a private collection, the documentation. It's not really necessary, if the private collector has not the approach to have something original. Which is somehow contradictory to the whole idea of the digital piece for me. I think this is also what we have to learn, not only as a person but also as an institution, **how to deal with also the terms which are changing.** So there is no author anymore, no piece and so on... and maybe to canon.

JB: I would say that this does not go for all the works that we're talking about. There's diversity of practices and some do stick to more traditional ways of thinking. Don't you think?

S: Yeah sure. Your idea is broader than my idea. But for games or a lot of things.

JB: Are there any urgent remarks here? I was thinking maybe we can lay some sort of ground rules, basics of what would be important for us to reach our goal. So we're not talking about building a canon... For instance, one thing that keeps coming up is visibility. And with this I don't mean, like, you can see it but you know that it's present.

15: Recognition!

JB: So what else besides visibility? What else do we have to have to reach our goal of more awareness of seminal pieces from digital art history? Anyone?

S: Contextualization. Fitting in the the so-called contemporary art history so that there are some points where no one knows that there was somehow a parallel digital evolvement or world. I think this is... also a work of mediating these things.

JB: Wouldn't you also need, next to this contextualization within the contemporary art field also need a bit more specific to this field contextualization.

17: I'm just going to extend that because someone said that before. **It would be interesting to contextualize also in contemporary culture or digital culture.** What are the values today? What is good artwork, an interesting artwork? I think she had said it before.

AVW: I also think you might have to redefine, like, if you want to put it within the contemporary art history, timeline, you have to take certain concepts to task which might be a really complicated process. Like autonomy, authenticity, aura, and I can think of a million other things. So, I feel like that would be really complicated, so perhaps taking a more cultural approach would be better to start off with and then have that negotiation occur over a period of time. All I'm saying is that there are a lot of concepts upon which the contemporary art history is founded upon that may not be able to be applied in that way.

JRL: I was also thinking of—because like the pioneering, unknown pioneers, hidden discourses, parallel histories... All this weird obscurity going on I think a lot of it is like we said, live coding, so much fields which have an aesthetic discourse which is completely invisible to the general public which makes sense because it's usually very technical, subcultural, or. I sort of want to **map out these aesthetic discourses.** Because in fine art there's also obscure pockets of aesthetic discourse as well so it's not that different. But they take effort to sort of surface, it would be interesting to map them out. **See which sort of networks of specific works pop up.** It would take a lot of experts, but, interesting.

19: It's also another call for another issue of how to define these artists that—because nowadays artists don't define themselves as digital artists or media artists or whatever.

19: And even if you... So we have to ask, who is actually defining who is a digital artist? And if you ask them: **do you think you are a digital artist,** maybe they won't... Something that maybe happened with net art, when people asked: are you a net artist or not? That was a big debate. I guess now it would be the same issue.

JB: This is also not exclusive to this field, also happens in the contemporary art field. Any other basics?

20: I might say, to the conceptualizing or the contextualizing, it's not about art as well. For me it's, like, what you say as well, it's also about science, it's included science history and also technological history so I think it's not just art per se.

21: **The development of art history in general is the question. What was the point when art went other ways?** So, the last century, 18th, 19th, century when photography has overtaken, technology... [*german*], and then art started to go into different materials, different techniques like dadaism and surrealism, they took things from the the tree, from the wall, from everywhere. The movement is like—the artist took things from everywhere. Because, there was no necessity anymore to make a portrait. I think you all know the development of art... And then, this development in my opinion goes on; one of the next steps is the incorporation of the audience. Then it was no more the stone from the street or something like this, it was the audience, the recipient incorporated into the artwork.

JB: Sorry, I'm going to cut you short. Are you going to give us a whole history lesson or?

21: I want to cut to the point, how can we understand digital art? The thing is—and this is really a difficult story—if you want to bring the concept of digital art to the contemporary art canon, so one has to rethink the contemporary art canon. We got there: what is the art canon? Then we can plant a place for the digital art within this, maybe **new understanding of the art history in the 20th century**.

JB: I think that's basically what we are trying to do...

21: Because in the post-digital thing, you still see this development. When artists left the digital, the the computer, and step out into society, society is becoming the material of art.

JB: We're basically taking that as one. Post-digital and digital... Yeah. But you said something interesting which is, take into account the audience. Is there something that we need to do with that in our basics? How open should this project be? This is just something that popped into my mind.

14: Do you mean users?

IA: Do you mean audience participation?

GW: Yeah, let's do a dutch thing.

JB: This is probably not basics, right, that we should point to an increasingly active audience in the field. I was thinking that in digital arts and culture the audience is more important than it is in the contemporary art world. It has a different role.

22: Different role.

JB: In general.

GW: No, it's a different role I would say but it's not less important.

JB: And it's also fluid.

GW: But there was a question over there? Or remark or feedback.

23: About the audience, I think maybe we could start back to the Stedelijk. Because I saw she was laughing at the point where you said: why these curators keeps coming back, defining digital art as something that's only confined within the screen. And the museums has been in history the mediator between artist and audience, so **if we start with the museum it would bring more knowledge to recognize what digital art is**. Because the most audience would not be aware of how to categorize or how to recognize what digital art is. So we start **educating**, and curating, what digital art—

JB: you see an important role for museums? Basically.

23: I mean not to fall back into the fault of categorizing things or fall back into the traditional way of showing what digital art is; showing objects and materializing it. But maybe we can curate it in a way that, in an alternative environment which could act as a medium to—

GW: If I understand you correctly, you actually want to say: we should educate curators?

23: Well maybe we should be curators. Not educate. Because if they cannot do the job well then we should probably have a better knowledge to do it well.

IA: I think it really comes down to education. What do you learn when you're studying art history? And all those curators at the Stedelijk or other museums, they possibly have never heard of this, like I did when I was studying. Art history ended at the early 20th century basically so. Again, about those curators only recognizing things in the screen... Actually this reminds me of a book which I, at the time when it was published, I criticized heavily, which was coming out of our own context. Lev Manovich, 'The Language of New Media'.

JB: Let's not go there.

IA: That's a problem, because his canon, the canon he described in his book was limited to visual media, basically. I was so upset at the time when he published this, because again and again it was going back to a purely visual art history in a way. This is a problem because this book in a way also became so prominent. It's being used in education.

JB: Are you saying that a basic thing that we also need to do is to 'attack' or criticize these kind of important literature?

IA: Yeah but, where to start, you know?

GW: I think it would be great if we could in a way find in education a way to spread the word but also in publishing. There is still—although we know are already some texts—, some publishing about this whole context, about the pioneers, about this issue we are dealing with. I still have the idea that it's either 'a book for the salon table', or it's a text for the more 'in-crowd', but there is lots of room **in education and at universities and art academies; there is not so much material also**. And I also think in a way we should push there, or pull or do something that can be generated. Obviously, there's a lack.

JB: I've been trying to get the basics of what we need to do on the table. The last things I've jotted down here are: rethink the contemporary art canon.. Education and publishing I don't consider the basics because this is what we're doing. Creating visibility... and with this we also need to contextualize the

work within contemporary art history, within digital culture, and within science history and then take concepts to task. Like authorship, the way it's used in art history for example. Then I have: veal aesthetic discourse of specific practices. Is there anything missing?

17: Yes, for me a very important are the new narratives related to the digital age and the digital society—and only the digital art can work with these issues, really. In the narratives and the content. What are the new contents about the digital art. We don't talk only... For me the important point is not only the media or the aesthetics but: what is the content. What is different in their narrative? How do they deal with... A lot of points we can find, during the whole history of art. How do they define identity in a different way. We can see it here at the exhibition.

JB: Can I rephrase your remark? In saying that we should be able to express ourselves in the media that we have today.

17: Not only. But **to recognize the topics, the problematics. We need these critical points of view. What is going on with this digital society? What does it mean? How does it impact every... On our way of thinking, our relationship, our identity...** There are a lot of issues which are very common in the whole history of art. But the way we define identity in the digital age for example, it's very different?

JB: But can it only be expressed through digital art or digital technologies, that's what you seem to say but that will be contested. They will not like that, and I would agree with them actually.

17: To me, it's the most precise way to represent it. Because it has a lot of characteristics which have to do with performativity, connections with programming, with... If we talk about identity nowadays, if we want to deal with them, we have to take into account bioengineering, the internet and a lot of things which nowadays has to do with identity construction. Of course, you can represent it in a painting or photography, but not in the same way. If you want to define what is essential, at the beginning on the 21st century in contemporary art, I would say it's very essential. Of course, you can compare it with what was defined as identity...

JB: I have to cut you off because, it's clear what you wanted to say.

S: I would add one point for the list maybe, using this to build a canon... Using modern tools to make the process transparent. So the workshop is really... Because this is often a problem, all these discussions, because of closed doors: about who is in the list, and so on. Make this transparent, and use then the media that you're talking about. So—the digital—to open it up to a potential audience which would be maybe interested to add something. It's not that I mean set up a wordpress blog or a forum or something like this but use these kinds of tools to make this transparent and give the possibility to contribute.

JB: You're talking about more than a comment section.

S: More than a comment section for sure, yeah. For people, make it transparent all of your internal discussions. Stream it or.

19: I was going to say, people are doing a lot of **wiki-marathons**, as well. Especially for women in arts or women in media arts. This is a way of **using the dynamics of digital culture to actually address digital culture**.

27: **It is also important to describe the characteristics of what a piece is.** or example, if you take Olia Lialina's piece 'Summer', which is you know, driven by the internet. A lot of my colleagues for the contemporary art world, you know, they don't get it. They see, like, a video. I think this is important, to explain the workings of these pieces, which is not just visual, it's what the computational image is. Not just having it as a work but describing the fundamental characteristics. My experience is, a lot of people still don't understand what they see. They see a video. And it's not a video.

IA: Thank you for this wonderful example. I think when you talk about a canon, then you have to talk about the gatekeepers of the canon. Art historians, I mean I'm coming back to my old topic. Art history. Who is working in museums today, it's art historians, and this profession is really protecting its own field. They are really hardcore doing this. They don't accept anybody else in their profession who has not studied, who has not gone through this machine of art history. And when you are in the machine, you don't learn about these things. And so, that's why I said earlier it's a really huge enemy to tackle.

JB: How would you suggest we do that?

IA: I don't know, I'm looking at my colleague of art history, maybe he has some clues how to do that. He's of course one of the people who is already working on this you know. I think you have to find alliances, make coalitions, make a network and really know who is the enemy, in a way.

DD: Yes but I must—It changed a lot I think. Art history is becoming more and more conservative recently. It's more about renaissance and stuff like that; it started with contemporary aspects but I think it's defending itself, art history in a way, against all the other important voices entering the field of contemporary art. And if you look at the most important personalities as gallerists and curators, most of them are not art historians, in no way. If you go through the list of the recent Documentas, none of them are working—

IA: Yeah, but they are not working in museums.

DD: Yes, but they now put incredible visibility and the museums and art history are in a kind of defense position against the world of Biennials, Documentas and galleries in a way, which is not occupied by art historians any longer. There is a generation of people who don't write academic texts, only do things, you know. Who just position and develop artists in the same way that gallerists do it. I think that the lack of serious work of art history has to be defended by now. Against this overwhelming power and visibility coming from now a scientific background.

JB: Can I ask you something? There is a similar thing happening within art criticism, and art critics are organizing all kinds of symposia and so on to **deal with art criticism coming from the audience—blog culture**, basically. It's the same thing happening in the art history department.

DD: Yes, I mean art criticism was the first thing that kind of had to totally break down, you know. Because the early avant garde critics were like the opinion leaders, and now they are just badly paid page fillers, you know. Art history is trying to evade that, you know.

JB: What are they doing exactly?

DD: **They are trying to build a canon for example!** They raise a lot of money and do big projects, they try to kind of enter a field of science politics in a way, competing with the sciences, natural sciences, and

biosciences... The more money you raise for your science project, the more important it seems to be independent from the result. Attempting to compete for the attention of Biennials, the galleries and the art market, where as an art historian you have no chance. In this kind of hyper visibility. If you try to make a fundamental research, you have to do it another way, but this competition against other fields is also a very difficult one.

IA: A very short footnote, usually I never really speak a lot at these kind of things. If you look at the programs of Biennials, digital art zero... Most of them. Documentas.

18: Also to add, if we think that education is important, educate people about digital art, then how to do it? Because it seems that the old—by the way, I'm also an art historian—messages are really hard to apply. No one really tried for example to describe...

JB: Are you talking about education in schools?

S: Schools, universities, galleries, public spaces, wherever you want... So it's really complicated. No one has really created a tool to describe this performative visual art because normally that is in theatre science, they have their vocabulary to deal with it, then there is film science, they deal with it in a special way—they try to deal with it now, they develop their own vocabulary. But **the classical art historian they have really problems to deal with interactive works, the digital, all their terminology is falling apart**. How they can train the new generation for this... There would be needed **a canon of books** where they could refer to and where they could take it as a base to start their own study and develop a new toolset. For this, maybe a new performative moment, or bringing out a new book as for example **a critique on Lev Manovich** to make a better one... Yeah, yeah. I think that it's really missing, so. This is what this project should do. Also they should **engage young art historians to try out new forms** of dealing in a reflective way, to think about these kind of works because then they get engaged and understand.

ZC: I would like to add to your idea. As a book, you already serve limits, you already serve a target, but what about having a book and **hybrid publishing format like a an interactive website** where you can connect also to videos, to processes, and the context also of the specific digital artwork so you have immediately all the information, biographies, references and hyperlinks to other cultures, in a way.

JB: In a sense we already have that, like in Monoskop, things like that. I am not sure how to end this.. We are going to take with us, of course, these basics. They are very important to have. Our original plan was to ask you for names of artists—and I am really glad we didn't do that. What I would like to suggest, I would personally like it if we could keep you up to date. Maybe you leave us your email address so that we can inform you and send you the report of this meeting. It would also be great if you can send us input—**for instance this canon of books**. It would really be great if you can help us build this.

GW: And we are also very interested in being connected to other projects that are related; related research or related exercises.

JB: Thank you all very much for your time, and for being so generous!