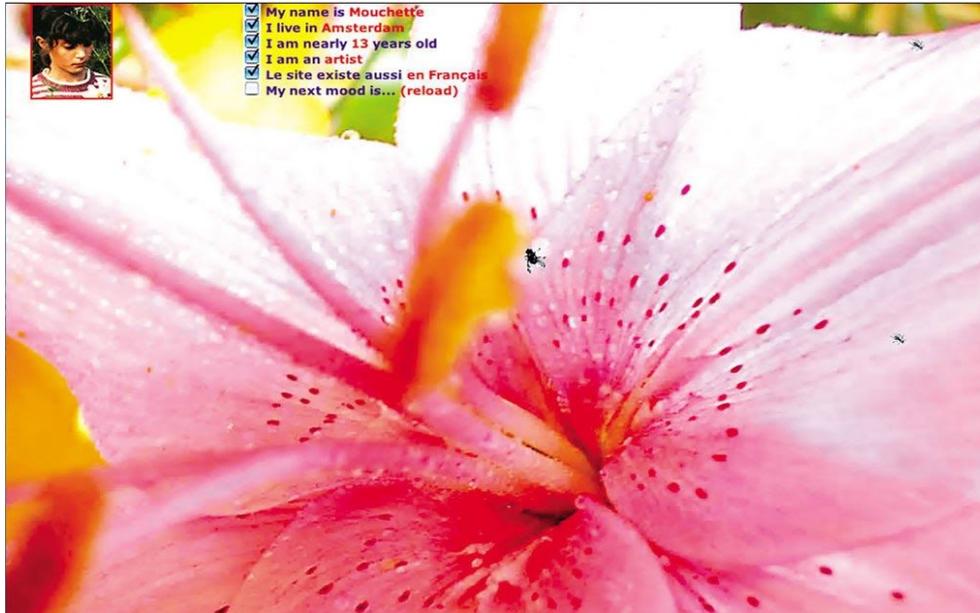


Documenting Mouchette, 1996 | by Martine Neddham (netart)

June 16th, 13:30 - 15:00 o'clock

By Patrícia Black (LIMA)



Front page of the website *mouchette.org*.

Mouchette in Digital Canon: <https://www.digitalcanon.nl/?artworks=martine-neddham#list>

Mouchette in Net Art Anthology by Rhizome: <https://anthology.rhizome.org/mouchette>

Screen Capture Video in Martine Neddham's Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/154855063>

“Mouchette” (1996) is a collaborative net art performance from the Amsterdam based artist, Martine Neddham. Presented as an interactive website, the ongoing platform evokes the online presence and rather subversive diary of a young character named Mouchette, a 13 year old girl who likes to express herself around themes like death, desire and suicide.

Online for more than 20 years, *mouchette.org* disclosed a very private and playful universe, mainly consisting of image/text compositions that leads the user to multiple narratives. Entering the first page, visitors have many paths of interaction, which includes puzzled clicks, flash image animations, check in boxes, answering web questionnaires or listening to odd and quite humorous sounds. Most of all, actions include doing what Mouchette tells you to do: “Kill that cat”, “Put your cheek on the monitor”, “ Help me”, “Answer me”, “Browse me”.

Behind Mouchette, Neddham’s authorship was a secret till 2010, creating a powerful anonymity tool that was also working as its own fuel. Essentially, much before social media, “Mouchette” was becoming a platform for online meetings. The mystery behind the character’s real existence

provoked visitors to engage and, as a consequence, the artwork was somehow turned into a tool for collective communication. Because of a certain personality - the one Neddham was constructing, and that involved specific dark features - this identity was allowing specific context and themes to converge and to be discussed, like suicide and young sexuality.

The website presents a lot of documentation and preservation challenges, since it contains a combination of different elements and it's highly participatory. During its existence, it incorporated several side projects, as live performances and installations. The artist sees it as a performative brand, which means that rather than the main web artwork, her character also expands itself through other projects and media. This makes its documentation not only more complex, but also more sensible if we really want to understand its essence and reflections on time in a more profound and integrated way. "Mouchette" is then provided by a documentation based on memory, events and places, rather than just one static artwork.

Also, the website has a quite complex structure, containing several interactive pages, more than 3.000 active links and an ever growing text database. Technically, the work grew in a very free, flexible and organic system during the years. Because of that, it's very hard to map it in an objective way, as also to document it in a static point of view.

The old programming and aesthetics it's also one of its conceptual essence, which makes technical updates not so simple as a choice. To clean it, or organize too much, could also be a way of killing what makes Mouchette what she is.

Since the main maintenance it's being done by the artist, all the knowledge of how to preserve the website has a very personal approach. During the years, this process had to be part of the artist's routine and life.

Flexibility, re-creation, interaction and collaboration are the main factors for this artwork. Therefore documentation should always care for its mutable ecology.

Questions:

How to present this work in the future?

How can we shed light to the documentation of an artwork that extends itself for more than 20 years?

How can we better understand and therefore document this highly participatory and performative artwork?

How can we address the social complexity of this artwork and embrace it in its documentation for the future?

Can we find a collective approach for keeping this work alive?