

Immaterial Aesthetics – The Internet Yami-Ichi (Black Market)
By Edward Paginton

A day after visiting The Internet Yami-Ichi (Black Market), I was on the receiving end of conspicuous and equally non-descript email.

Subject: YOUR FUTURE.
From: SAVE YOUR SELFie.

Dear Edward,

Feel free to unfold your future within the **attached folder**.

E N J O Y !

Yours sincerely,

SAVE YOUR SELFie

Reluctantly, I'd been expecting this message. I'd agreed to pay £3 for my cyber-psychic reading. When I probed to find out how they would be scraping my online data in search of my cyber-self, their response was "unfortunately, we are not at liberty to share such information." There I stood, a man handing over of control of his virtual civil liberties, all in aid of artist self-exploration. I felt nauseous at the mere sense of the future. What is it hiding? Am I already feeling nostalgic for the physical past? Am I overthinking this. Perhaps.

In the ephemera of the Internet, we are defined by the data that stalks our track pad. As one moves through digital landscapes, through timeless, airless voids, footprints forever remain like carbon cenotaphs in the snow. Is it possible to recapture a certain physicality that the immaterial of the Internet has taken away?

The Internet Yami Ichi (Black Market), a project held during this year's Offprint independent book fair at Tate Modern, negotiates dialogue between neglected spaces online and the curiosity that exists in humans offline. In its own words, "The Internet Yami-Ichi is a celebration, where together we experience the afterglow offline, as the "buzz" of the Internet wears off." Based on a secret society that existed over 100 years ago, since starting off in Tokyo in 2012 it has visited Berlin, Brussels and Amsterdam, Linz, New York and more. This May it came to London for the first time and with Arebyte Gallery primed to introduce the event to the city.

Arebyte was set about 3 years ago with the focus mainly on new media and performance art by Nimrod Vardi. Based in Hackney Wick, East London, as a platform for artists, Arebyte use the main gallery space to as a studio as well as being open to the public. "We put a lot of emphasis onto the creative and artistic process, and for me this is where the magic happens," explains Vardi regarding convergence public and private spaces.

Arebyte's involvement with The Internet Yami-Ichi (Black Market) had been an ongoing conversation for a long time, as they'd long wanted to bring the phenomenon to London though they did not have venue. Then Offprint fair approached Arebyte to host it at the Tate. "Ofcourse we said yes," says Vardi. Over the course of the weekend, thousands of people filtered through Tate Modern turbine hall along the independent bookshop stalls at Offprint and into the backdoor of the Internet Yami-Ichi. Inside, you are confronted by closely weaved stand, all with vastly contrasting objects and ideas. The first encounter was with an artist whose collages of appropriated images sourced and reedited from the internet. The kaleidoscopic images were printed out with a hand written note next to them instructing people to flick through them and leave their favourite on top. The artist no press material but a note penned by busker outside Tate Modern. Quite frankly, the stalls seem less about selling items, due to their neglected virtual status, but using people's attention span as commerce and buy-in to the objects. For instance, how would you like to receive an entire SMS opera sent directly to your mobile phone via 60 text messages over the course of the day?

It brings forth different media – digital and physical – to the object. The ideas on show are drawn and inspired by digital culture and visual, manifested in the 'real world'. "It a hybrid of ideas, materials and practice," says Vardi. Often, digital acts encroach on our domestic spaces. Take Backdoored.io for instance, a voyeuristic look at how we 'watch' at ourselves. It is an investigation into private life and self-surveillance in the 21st century. Artist Nye Thompson began a unique collection of images that were documenting the lives of people capture via unsecured private webcams from around the world. Search bots filter through these open networks, jumping across IP address to IP address. Thompson archives these images, presented on her stall in the weirdly archaic form of a postcode, with nothing more than a visual and the IP address. Thompson is unable to neither revisit the same address nor navigate through the unsecured webcams – the collection is pure random.

What is fascinating about these images is the narrative we associate through them. Although it is an algorithm indiscriminately picking screenshots, our human ability to attach context is what ties together both the real and digital. Snapshots into people's lives expose the vulnerability of our connected cultures but also what the purveyor is choosing to watch. One screenshot is of a hole drilled into the wall where a web camera has been inserted, only to then stare out at an empty street. It is Romanticism in the 21st century – an empty webcam staring out into the Wilderness and sending information back into the empty corridor of the web. As Thompson states "the project asks us to re-evaluate our future notions of privacy, data security, authorship and our growing culture of self-surveillance." These slippages on the Internet between the private and public domains is theme that carried throughout the event.

The immaterial aspect of our digital culture poses such an interesting space for artists but a modern day anxiety for others. Artist Shinji Toya who was selling CD-R's with "decaying data" on it, explores how our information can die online,

visually and audibly. As Vardi acknowledges, “we still find it hard to grasp the digital. We find it hard to put a price tag and situate it within our physical world/aesthetics.” The 'glitches' it presents in our physical world is problematic for some Vardi points out. “Anxiety is caused by an overflow of content, data and information.” With the need to remain on top of everything and stay connected it has made it harder to maintain both digital and physical lives. “Maybe we need to choose and this is where the anxiety begins,” suggests Vardi.

Another project that addresses are future concerns of being outsourced by technology is the I Ching, the Book of Changes and one of the most famous systems of divinations worldwide, translated through Google by Fabio Lattanzi Antinori. As Antinori describes, “it was made to draw our attention to the way we normally employ algorithm based technology in our everyday life and the way this is rapidly and silently affecting the way we relate to it and define as reality.” As Google rapidly improves its Statistical Machine Learning systems for translations on-the-go, AI is trying to predict users behaviour and needs. Soon translations will be adaptive and responsive to changes in colloquialisms and regionalities .The Google translated Book of I Ching, makes space for unexpected association of ideas, through employing wrong and weird translations of the original Chinese text into English. As Antinori says, “I guess the piece is ultimately a document of the way these systems work *today*, as it is rapidly improving every day.”

For Arebyte it was important that it was held at Tate as they wanted to present a different form of art to this environment. As Vardi states The Internet Yami-Ichi can not only be a place for a community of artists to exchange ideas but also to interact with new audiences and entrepreneurs. “Its uses new language, bringing different worlds together that might make art easier to approach, being more 'accessible'.”

Minutiae, for instance, felt less like art practice but a start-up project. It is an “anti-social” media experiment that documents the banal, “non newsworthy” moments of peoples lives. Everyday you will be asked to take a picture at a random time of whatever it is that currently is in your line of site. You have 10 minutes to respond before it is too late and you have to wait until tomorrow. If you don't share an image, you won't receive an image uploaded by another random user from around the world. These images do not share any data as to where they are from, or whom they are from, and you can only see it once before it disappears off like another face in the crowd. Not only does it ask you to embrace anonymity, but if you don't engage then the app administrators will kick you off. “As an 'anti-social' media, we don't recommend this app for everybody,” says one of the. You are forced to share a repository of banal everyday moments for 1440 consecutive days. For now, I think I'll stick with Snapchat.

Speaking with Tine Scharffenberg, who assisted Vardi at The Internet Yami-Ichi she explained how the open call for artists attracted many from far afield, some as far as United States. One graphic designer, who was selling “lessons in how to play Piano like the Piano Cat,” a popular internet viral video, had been inspired

to apply after being swept up in the hysteria of the Amsterdam Internet Yami-Ichi. Another young man who made glitch glasses, a VR-like headset that distorted your view as to play/obscure with your own reality, had travelled from Paris for the weekend. It has the feeling of early web chat-room communities all connected by their own isolated ideas and exploration, who share solidarity in this digital commune.

“We wanted to show that this kind of art exists in the UK and worldwide - the idea of exposing new forms is important and fruitful,” explains Vardi.

Returning to the attached folder I received from my psychic selfie, I click on. Over the course 27 internalised folders, each a question revealing themselves like Russian dolls, I reach the end of my future. I’m left with a private vimeo link and a password, unwillingly ready to watch on...

Q&A – Nimrod Vardi

With algorithms that not only write poetry but mimic, style and tone of voice of existing authors, producing original works, how might this threaten the notion of experiencing art in the future if computers are the potential audience?

This is a very interesting concept, but problematic in its essence. We programme computers to our understanding and physical boundaries. It will always be in our shadow – to an extent. But still, with the idea of 'new aesthetics' and how these processes affect our world, it does open new channels of interpretation and language – art essentially. We will always produce; our art might change in the media, objects or idea, but it is inherent we need an output.

Alternatively, will it enhance our human experience in the tangible, the real – our physical environments?

It will create new relationships and expand our knowledge of the world. The idea of *world building* is a fascinating one and it really asks us to think outside our perception. To re invent the possibilities, but remain, humane.

Do you see The Internet Yami-Ichi as reclaiming a certainly physicality that technology has removed?

Not necessarily, as the physical is still very much our experience and perception of the world. What it does is that it creates links between the two, allowing us to look and respond to the *digital* in a different way. It is a different way of thinking about tech and its effect on our lives and us.

