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An Interview with Claude Guillemot

Samantha Mach

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An Interview with Claude Guillemot

Samantha Mach on Apr 8 1999

issue 11

interview with Claude Guillemot

Interview with Mr. Claude Guillemot, author of the ARCHEOLOGIE DU FUTUR

Samantha Mach: Which other sites do you like? Why?

Claude Guillemot: Hard to answer and make a list. There are few sites that are by themselves original creations that use the net for what it is and what it can be, caustic, impertinent... It is the same also for the "multimedia creation", the CD-ROM for instance. But I also like on the net the very simple personal site where the author presents himself, with his passions, his taste, himself, his family and his dog... He is there, on the big web, equal to mister IBM or mister Microsoft. It is a genuine new form of expression, free and independent --- for how long? And I like the letter you can receive from an anonymous sender at the ends of the earth, and the letter sent as a message in a bottle to the sea. We are all more or less wrecked persons, lost on a desert island in the middle of the vast world...

SM: Do you think that in five or ten years, your site will still be relevant?

CG: Fundamentally, yes, it will unfortunately still be relevant. The evils I expose will still have no cure. On the visible aspects, I am less sure. The non-hierarchical web will probably be dead. Out go the independents. The amateurs, the creators, will be ousted to make room for commerce. And in ten years, other images will have dragged me into new adventures, I hope.

SM: Is it a "finished" site or will you keep working on it from time to time?

CG: The site is not "finished", but the CD-ROM, of which it is the echo, is done, pressed, duplicated, final. There is some kind of contradiction. The site can only be the image of the final work and not its copy. The site will allow me to "publish" results of new investigations, new images I won't be able to insert in the CD. Unless a new CD comes to life, a follow-up to the first one. But I doubt it, because the amount of work on the first one has been enormous and I am a bit disappointed by the many setbacks I have suffered with my editors.

SM: How would you do it again today or tomorrow?

CG: I would do it the very same way I did today. If I were having any remorse, I would do it again instantly.

SM: Is the age of the author or of the spectator an important point for you?

CG: No, but when I receive an e-mail, I know to which generation it belongs. Each age group uses a style that is completely its own, and this freedom is beautiful. I welcome the "Hi, what's up?" and the "Dear Sir" with the same wonder. For instance, there was a presentation of my site on television in Canada, "Generation W" I believe, and for a week, I was a "site in vogue" for teenagers... And it is fascinating to see the variety of people who have opened my wrecked man bottle.

SM: What future do you see for the web?

CG: I am not very optimistic about the future. I think I have already answered. Money (dough) crushes the non-official culture before it completely takes control!

SM: Do you know about net.art? What do you think about it? Do you think your site is net.art?

CG: I am very suspicious of labels, even when they include the word art (which is itself-sufficient)... So no answer, except for the first question.

SM: Do you see the web as a new museum?

CG: The web is all and nothing at the same time. So why not a new museum? A museum where, after long lasting research periods, one deserves what he finds.

SM: Why isn't your site in English?

CG: Good question! It is easy to measure on the web the tiny size of our francophone (French-speaking) space... and the desire to escape towards the vast anglophone (English-speaking) space is high. But the language is a real prison and I have not mastered (written) English well enough to venture alone into these unknown territories. I could not, in English, answer your questions without betraying my thoughts and this would distress me.

SM: Would you be interested in the realization of such a site about another country or another culture?

CG: The realization of the images of this site demands an acute knowledge of the described reality, even more, a true impregnation of the environment. I had to measure, figuratively but also properly speaking with a ruler, the scale of the disasters to be able to represent them. And I hardly see how I could do the same work somewhere else, except if I stay somewhere else, which means being invited and remunerated...

SM: Why do you think one should see your site?

CG: I would like to turn this question to you. But here I go, without any modesty: because it is funny and because it is sad. Because we are all concerned by this site and if I do not have the power to change anything, my images can improve people's awareness.

SM: What do you want visitors to remember about your site?

CG: That after the visit, one sees the world around us with a slightly different view.

SM: Which advice or request do you have for future "web artists" [English in the text]?

CG: I do not feel like an advice giver. But... make it so that there lives a free and independent web.

SM: Do you currently have a project, if so can you talk about it?

CG: No big project currently. A little ant-like work: try to distribute, through the francophone net, the "archeology of the future" CD-ROM to try and get back my auto-editor investment.

SM: What did this site or this work bring to you?

CG: Anguish, and also the pleasure of opening my electronic mailbox in the evening to discover the e-mail of somebody I don't know, the disappointment too, to only find commercial spam, like in the old "message box" of our ancestors.

Additional Questions posed by Switch Staff

Switch Staff: Many items discovered in archaeological digs are everyday utilitarian items, which were most likely not considered for their aesthetic value at the time they were used. Today we put so much money and time into designing products, do you think that items not considered beautiful today might have aesthetic value in the future? In the same vein, many examples of architecture that were initially despised by the public were later embraced and have even become icons of a city's identity, for example: the Eiffel Tower, San Francisco's Coit Tower, and the Paris metro entrances. Might not buildings considered ugly and unplanned today become romantic and aestheticized over time?

CG: I chose, very scrupulously, the discoveries of my archeology so that no such questions would be asked and so that I wouldn't have to answer them. I was very careful that nothing of what I show could be the subject of a debate on its esthetics. I can objectively talk about "visual pollution", since nothing I expose can be judged in terms of beautiful or ugly, nothing can be a matter of taste, nothing can be the target of a subjective judgment. There has been and there are still "pros" and "cons" about the Eiffel tower. But nobody can defend the "architecture" of shopping malls (for instance), because it has nothing to do with architecture (when I say nobody, I except developers

and investors on these operations, who obviously have no interest in creating beauty for future generations...). We can't even speak of these buildings as "ugly" (which would leave space to doubt and subjectivity), they are non-buildings, symbols of a non-architecture. I doubt that the future could one day find a reason for this unreasonableness.

SS: What are the philosophical foundations of your work and how do you see them manifested in the web site?

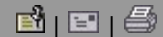
CG: For my "spectators" to do it, and find answers in my place... I chose the Image and its obsessing silence to say what I have to say and not the deafening uproar of words...

SS: One of the central issues in archeology and anthropology has been the subjective vs. the objective and how these states influence conclusions. Your work presents a pessimistic perspective on the possibility of objectivity. Is this attitude what separates artists from scientists, or can you identify spaces in which the problems (between artists and scientists) can be reconciled?

CG: Art could in no way be objective... Are scientists, and in particular archeologists, really objective? It is this space of doubt between the two that brings us closer... each of them goes forward on the path that leads to the other one.

SS: In some contemporary fine art circles, there is a movement away from art that makes conclusions and toward art which asks difficult questions. Which strategy best describes your work? What "art world" (or social context for the arts) do you see your work as existing within?

CG: By creating the "new synthetic images", we are in the situation of pioneers on new territories. Everything is new, everything is to be discovered. By giving to our dreams the misleading appearance of photographic realism, we cause trouble and provoke reactions of rejection. By cultivating the Art of False, we take the risk to be seen as making False Art... There will be a long time, I believe, before these images are recognized for what they are, a creation of its own. In the mean time, we are lonely, and very often misunderstood...



::CrossReference

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