

artpool.hu: a user's guide

Remediation, Digitization and the Networked Art Archive

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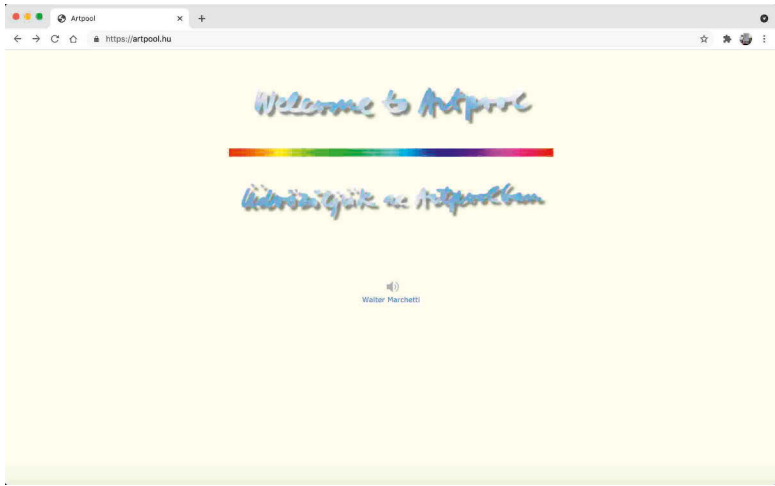
** /* addressing artpool's coordinates
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In 1979, Artpool's first postal address was György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay's 'apartment-institution' at 1023 Budapest, Frankel Leó út 68/B,¹ while its web address www.artpool.hu (fig. 10.1) appeared in 1995,² where it still resides online today. While the postal address provided send and receive coordinates within the international correspondence art network, the web address provided an upload and retrieval location on the internet. Correspondence art—a term preferred by Galántai to 'mail art'³—is more often described as a "precursor to art and activism on the Internet"⁴ than the implied claim of displacement or remediation between the two is explored. As such, we will ask here how far artpool.hu as a 'virtual' presence extends or detracts from

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- 1 György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay, eds., *Artpool: The Experimental Art Archive of East-Central Europe*, (Budapest: Artpool, 2013), 38. Artpool's name had changed to Artpool Art Research Center in 1992 when it physically moved to a new home at Budapest VI. Liszt Ferenc tér 10., and where it operated until 2020 as a publicly accessible artist-run organization, *Artpool*, 122.
 - 2 Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 207.
 - 3 Kata Bodor, "'... I would like to be connected to the time I'm in...': Interview with György Galántai," in *Parastamps: Four Decades of Artistamps, from Fluxus to the Internet*, exhibition catalog (Budapest: Szépművészeti Múzeum, 2007), 84–100, <https://artpool.hu/Artistamp/text/Galántai.html>.
 - 4 Annmarie Chandler and Norie Neumark, *At a Distance: Precursors to Art and Activism on the Internet* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2006).

Artpool's realization as an 'active archive'.⁵ Is it more or less a digital index of physical artefacts, or has the hypertextual, hypermedia web influenced Artpool's exploration of networked art practice in other ways?

Figure 10.1: "Welcome to Artpool."



Screenshot of <https://www.artpool.hu/>

To assess this, we will explore Artpool's pre-internet activity, principally through examining the remediation strategies at work in *Radio Artpool* (1983–87), in contrast to the later web adaptations of offline works *UNI/vers(:)* (1988/1997), and *Networker Bridge* (1994/1997). Following this transition from offline to online networked art practice, we will consider the *Ray Johnson Web Site* (1997), an online exhibition held in parallel to its offline counterpart *Correspondence Art of Ray Johnson* at Ernst Museum, Budapest (1997). Taking a media archaeological approach to excavating these mediatic layers and “historical conditions”⁶ can help us understand artpool.hu's contribution to networked art practice from the contemporary perspective of digital—and

5 György Galántai, “Active Archive,” (1979–2003), in Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 15. https://artpool.hu/archives_active.html.

6 Jussi Parikka, *Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses*, 2nd ed. (New York: Peter Lang, 2020), xv. Parikka's description “archaeological layer” changes to “historical conditions” between the first and second editions.

now post-digital—culture. Given the relative longevity of artpool.hu, it may also help us understand something about “how we ended up in this digital culture and [perhaps] find alternative ways of thinking about [it].”⁷ In 2020, over forty years since its founding as an apartment-institution in state socialist Hungary, Artpool became part of KEMKI, the Central European Research Institute of Art History at the Museum of Fine Arts, changing its coordinates to 1135 Budapest, Szabolcs u. 33., D. ép. As artpool.hu remains its web address, for the moment at least, our analysis and evaluation of its influence on Artpool’s mission and possible future as an ‘active archive’ seems timelier than ever.

** /* artpool, the ‘active archive’ and the 100-year plan */ **

Also in 1979, Galántai set out Artpool’s aims:

1. To collect material for the museum of artistic inventions scheduled to open in 2079.
2. To inspire the founding of the museum.
3. To fill the gap, for the time being, with spaces available periodically.
4. To operate as part of the museum when it is established (according to the original plans).⁸

Galántai’s prescient manifesto was fulfilled in 2015, sixty-four years ahead of schedule, when Artpool Art Research Center became part of the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest. Apparently diverging from both a historical avant-garde impulse to destroy or negate museums⁹ and a neo-avant-gardist predilection for pseudo institutions,¹⁰ Galántai aimed to redraw the criteria of institu-

7 CCCB Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona, “Interview with Jussi Parikka,” *I+C+i. Our Life Online*, February 24, 2012, video, 11:20, <https://www.cccb.org/en/multimedia/videos/interview-with-jussi-parikka-i/211694>.

8 *Galántai: Életmunkák = Galántai: Lifeworks 1968–1993*, exhibition catalog, ed. György Galántai and Júlia Klaniczay (Budapest: Artpool; Enciklopédia, 1996), 244.

9 Example here include Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, “The Manifesto of Futurism,” *Le Figaro* (February 20, 1909) https://www.societyforasianart.org/sites/default/files/manifes_to_futurista.pdf.

10 We are thinking here in particular of Marcel Duchamp, Marcel Broodthaers and Robert Filliou’s work featured in A.A. Bronson and Peggy Gale, *Museums by Artists* (Toronto:

tional canons, especially in Hungary, to recognize and include experimental 'artistic inventions'. As such, Artpool's collection policy differed from conventional museum practice, at least until now, in being an 'active archive', which "does not only collect material already existing 'out there' but [...] also generates the very material to be archived."¹¹ This methodology differentiates Artpool as "a living institution that can be interpreted as an organic and open artwork or an activist art practice,"¹² but also reveals it as an institution nonetheless.

Given the sensibility of the 'active archive', however, we might reasonably expect Galántai to conceive of artpool.hu as more than an index or repository of digitized pre-internet network art, albeit this would be one of its primary functions. Whether realized through analogue, digital, electronic, or physical media, networked art practices materialize *in flux and flow* through text, sound, action, photography, and video, *becoming through transmission* between sending and receiving, writing and reading, encoding and decoding, unfolding and beholding. As an online storage and retrieval platform, moreover, artpool.hu added impetus to Galántai and Klaniczay's ambitions to digitize Artpool's existing collections. However, the question remains as to whether the artistic and curatorial methodologies employed in creating artpool.hu have, after twenty-five years, led to anything more than a repository of *things made digital* also to become a repertoire of *things digitally made*.

** /* mapping material and conceptual dimensions */ **

Entering "site:artpool.hu" into the Google search engine at the time of writing typically returns between about 10–14,000 results, each representing a different webpage written in either English or Hungarian. How to begin then outlining a historical, critical, and philosophical 'sitemap' of artpool.hu to understand its parameters and properties? Artpool itself, of which artpool.hu is an integral part, is *made of information*. It exists to gather and produce documentation through Galántai's ongoing request since 1978 to "please send

Art Metropole, 1983). His *Buda Ray University* aside, Galántai appears serious about his desire to construct Artpool as an actual rather than pseudo-institution.

11 Galántai, "Active Archive."

12 Galántai, "Active Archive."

me information about your activity,”¹³ thus encapsulating the ‘active archive’ methodology. He is, in this respect, one of those artists described by Sarah Cook who has “consistently drawn attention to the occurrence and location of information, most often through interfering with the stages of its processing or mediation via transmission and reception.”¹⁴ The information subsequently generated and exchanged by *networked addressees* underpins Artpool’s ontology as both an artistic-conceptual communication platform and a networked artwork in itself.

Galántai constructs Artpool in this way to question existing forms, paradigms, systems, and structures of knowledge. Influenced by contemporary currents of conceptual and systems art internationally through the late 1960s and early 1970s, he sought to identify “those permanent and simplest elements which would allow me to rebuild everything according to a different logic.”¹⁵ Of his early works, he describes “[breaking down] form into line and blot” so the “steady stream of correlations and cross-references generates the composition” notwithstanding “a certain tension [as] elements get disconnected from one another or come to contradict one another, but somehow the connection remains.”¹⁶ Although describing his approach to painting, printmaking and sculpture, these principles have remained consistent throughout his practice regardless of medium. They certainly extend to his artistic handling of information as material in the context of Artpool and his privileging of ideas over medium.

Galántai analyses concepts, phenomena, and situations to understand dynamic and contingent interactions and interrelations between their constituent elements. Following the computational thinking of John von Neumann, Galántai considers how these elements are “organized into a system,” the “safety and efficiency” of which is determined by the “quality and quantity of the information that flows through it.”¹⁷ Inspired further by von Neumann’s work on computational architectures, Galántai conceives

13 This request was first printed on the Hungarian-English poster-catalog of his book objects exhibition at Fészek Klub, Budapest, and circulated internationally. *Galántai: Lifeworks*, 120 and 303.

14 Sarah Cook, “Introduction: The Message Is the Medium,” in *Information* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2016), 12.

15 *Galántai: Lifeworks*, 46.

16 *Galántai: Lifeworks*, 46.

17 The quotation is from Artpool’s 2010 webpage, <https://www.artpool.hu/Default2010.html>.

the 'active archive' of Artpool as *a system to process art as information and vice versa* and therefore as an artwork able to function as information technology. This conceptual ambition is abetted and enhanced in practice by the online interface of artpool.hu as a digital materialization of the archival system. artpool.hu extends the function and materiality of the 'active archive' further to incorporate the *digital preservation*, as well as generation, of information.

artpool.hu launched on December 1, 1995, only two years after the NCSA Mosaic browser release. It is one of the few remaining websites in operation since the beginnings of the publicly accessible internet in Hungary. Apparently developing as much organically as by design¹⁸, its mid-1990s aesthetic and material ontology persists until today, offering and currently preserving a twenty-five-year-old HTML interface. Alexander R. Galloway describes HTML as "the interface between legible text and markup tags" which as a "[marker] of difference constitute[s] the artificial distinction between two media and allow[s] media to be remediated into other forms."¹⁹ HTML provides Galántai with both an interactive interface and potential remediation strategies to connect Artpool to the "random galaxy"²⁰ of the web.

Artpool's engagement with networked art practices evolved side by side, moreover, with developing *electronic* communications technologies such as telephone,²¹ fax,²² and videophone,²³ particularly in the 1980s and '90s. These transmissions enabled a hybrid space, neither 'here' nor 'there', of looped interaction, dialogue and feedback, temporarily collapsing the space-time distance between send and receive coordinates to create a liminal space of allegorical immediacy. artpool.hu emerges in the wake of this 'virtualization'²⁴

18 An apparently retrospective site map only appeared in 2021, <https://artpool.hu/sitemap.html>.

19 Alexander R. Galloway, "Flusseriana," *Culture and Communication*, October 28, 2015, <http://cultureandcommunication.org/galloway/flusseriana>.

20 György Galántai's virtual lecture at "Internet.galaxis," Museum of Ethnography, 2000, artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/veletlen/naplo/0420.html>.

21 Artpool, "Budapest—Bécs—Berlin telefonkoncert," *Aktuális Levél* 4 (April 1983): 9–13, <https://artpool.hu/Al/alo4/telefonkoncert.html>.

22 "Budapest Session of the Decentralized World Wide Networker Congress, Artpool, August 4–26, 1992," artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/events/Congress92/01.html>.

23 "Danube Connection, Artpool (Hungary)—Zeronet (Austria), September 4–10, 1993," artpool.hu, https://artpool.hu/1993/930908_me.html.

24 We agree with Alexander R. Galloway's reading that 'virtualization has nothing to do with 'virtual reality' or with computers per se [is] not because it is cybernetic or phan-

of networked art practice as part of a broader “culture [which] wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation [...],”²⁵ reflected by growing interest in telecommunications and telepresence. That said, the avowedly opaque HTML interface of artpool.hu speaks of itself as a modernist artwork “acknowledging the condition of its own mediation”²⁶ as an apparatus of hypermediacy instead of the transparent immediacy of immersive media such as virtual reality.

** /*
radio artpool: sounding the network */ **

You should go to Budapest. Budapest is such a beautiful city and so fucking cheap by our western standards.

The food is so fucking good, you gotta go to Italy.

Igen, igen, igen, igen, ee-gen, igen, ee-gen, igen ...²⁷

Artpool's early networking activities include their 'Art Tours' to Italy in 1979 and across Western and Central Europe in 1982. Galántai and Klaniczay visited artists they knew from previous contact through the correspondence art network to exchange and create information and documentation. With the 'active archive' as, to borrow Seth Siegelau's phrase, a “system of documentation,”²⁸ they made audio recordings throughout the 1982 art tour as a way to generate and collect “material to be archived.”²⁹ The resulting networker field recordings capture a range of social conversations, meetings and events ranging from hanging out with a couple of Monty Cantsins³⁰ and other artists in a

tasmagorical but because of the way in which it thrusts the actuality of specific situations into a newfound flux of indistinction.” Alexander R. Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 58.

25 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 5.

26 Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 58.

27 Excerpts from conversations on *Radio Artpool*, no. 5, 1982, <https://artpool.hu/sound/radio/5.html>.

28 Seth Siegelau, *January 5–31*, exhibition catalog (New York: Seth Siegelau, 1969).

29 Galántai, “Active Archive.”

30 “Monty Cantsin,” from *Seven by Nine Squares*, thing.de, accessed March 11, 2021, https://www.thing.de/projekte/7:9%23/cantsin_02.html.

Kassel *Biergarten* on June 18 during Documenta 7 to ambient evening recordings from a gondola and at an exhibition by Dieter Roth on July 27 during the Venice Biennale. The Kassel recording conveys the impression of networkers meeting face to face, possibly for the first time, enjoying social contact, cultural mobility, internationalized experience and exchange.

As Galántai was only able to buy a video camera in 1988, courtesy of winning a DAAD Scholarship,³¹ audio tape recording would have been an obvious way, beyond photography, to document and later reproduce events from the art tours. The recordings became edition no. 5 of *Radio Artpool*, a series of eight audio cassettes curated and compiled mainly by Galántai³² between 1983 and 1987, and presumably exchanged with other networkers through the post or in person. *Radio Artpool* remediated live music, concert and radio performances, field and studio recordings, exhibition events, telecommunications projects, conversations, poetry, and journeys as 'pseudo-radio', 'cassette-radio' or 'radio-work'. It documented relatively contemporaneous work and events of the 1980s but also featured, albeit infrequently, recordings from as early as 1972.

Radio Artpool responds to the challenge of distributing and exchanging information and documentation about contemporary artistic practice across the borders of state-socialist Hungary. While state censorship was undoubtedly significant in this respect, the cassette culture of self-publishing and distribution of experimental music was already emerging across Western and Eastern Europe and beyond by the launch of *Radio Artpool* in 1983. Particularly appropriate for 'difficult' art forms ranging from sound poetry to industrial music, home taping for recording and reproduction enabled a new channel of independent cultural production whose reach could be as global as the postal system. Overall, *Radio Artpool* was primarily a samizdat strategy of contextualizing Hungarian artists' work within the contemporary international sphere, circumventing access to radio waves through mailed or otherwise exchanged audio cassettes.

In addition to the 'Art Tour' of 1982, the series also documented significant events such as the *Telefonmusik. Wien-Budapest-Berlin* concert on April 15, 1983, organized by Robert Adrian and Helmut Mark for BLIX in Vienna, Rainald Schumacher in Berlin, and János Vető and Artpool in Budapest. Featured on *Radio Artpool 3*, the *Telefön konzert* is worth analyzing further to understand the

31 Calántai: *Lifeworks*, 95.

32 László Lugosi and Attila Grandpierre were the exceptions, compiling editions no. 2 and no. 7.

multiple stages or layers of artistic and curatorial remediation at work in *Radio Artpool* and its emergence from the material conditions of the international context surrounding state-socialist Hungary in the 1980s. We take remediation as defined by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin as “the formal logic by which new media refashion prior media forms” and which “[a]long with immediacy and hypermediacy [...] is one of the three traits of [their] genealogy of new media.”³³ As a concept, remediation has evolved from understanding ‘new’ media as either a container³⁴ or improvement³⁵ of ‘old’ media through to Bolter and Grusin’s counter-determinist, non-linear idea of refashioning, repurposing and recycling.

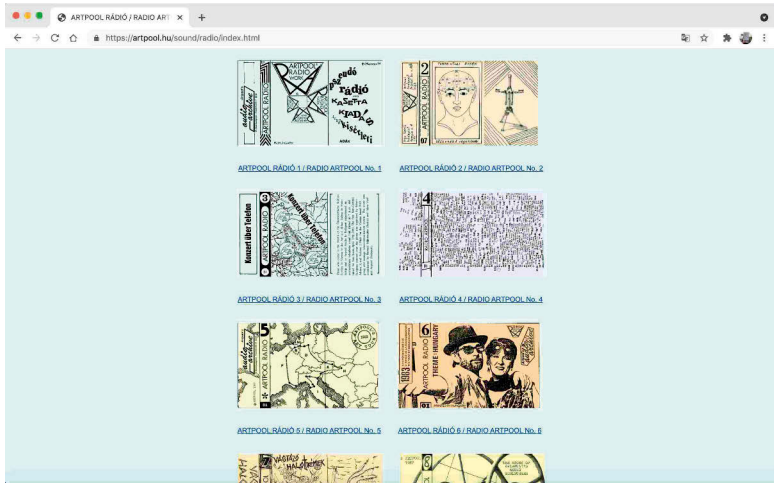
In the *Telefon konzert*, live music is first remediated by narrowband telephonic transmission and then, secondly, as a tape recording of that transmission documented on audio cassette. The event is then conceptually remediated as ‘radio’, insofar as it reaches listeners through the post or personal exchange or, since its digitization in 2011, through the navigable interface of artpool.hu. (fig. 10.2) In this way, remediation here encompasses live performance, analogue transmission, tape recording, cassette design, production and distribution, digitization, upload and stream. In this process, the network of addressees proliferates from active participants in the initial live exchange to those geographically and historically redistributed and displaced as increasingly passive, albeit interested and engaged, listeners. No longer dialing the intended listener ahead of transmission, the broadcast now rests, stored on a server, waiting to enact a future event once discovered by a new user. The digital interface of artpool.hu appears to collapse production, distribution and reception into the same instance, navigable through the web browser. The liveness of most *Radio Artpool* recordings aesthetically retains a sense of broadcasting from Artpool’s geographical or historical coordinates to the user’s contemporary moment of reception.

33 Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 273.

34 Marshall McLuhan, “The Medium Is the Message,” in *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994).

35 Paul Levinson, “Survival of the Media Fit,” in *The Soft Edge: A Natural History and Future of the Information Revolution* (London: Routledge, 2001).

Figure 10.2: Radio Artpool's website, 2011.



Screenshot of <https://artpool.hu/sound/radio/index.html>

/* digitization, adaptation, remediation and the 'web-museum'*/

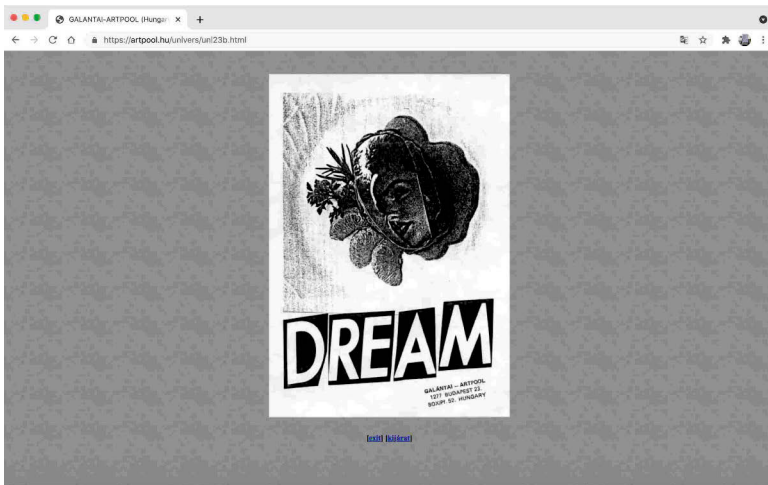
` /* UNI/vers(;) */ `
` /* Net-`
`worker Bridge */ `

As a digitization project, artpool.hu focuses mainly on curatorial projects instigated by Galántai to generate material for the 'active archive', often hyperlinked to other resources on the web. Recent rethinking of the relationship between the 'digital' and the 'analogue', particularly by Galloway,³⁶ leads us to clarify that we mean 'digitization' here in its most commonly accepted sense of converting analogue data into digital form, typically for archival purposes. By 'digital form', we mean an encoded instantiation available for storage, reproduction and transmission by digital means and media—the web as an example—as distinct from the unilaterally 'analogue' instantiation of the irreducibly 'real' object artefact.

36 Galloway, Laruelle.

artpool.hu draws on digitization as the basis of artistic and curatorial adaptation or remediation and as an interactive interface through which new, potential addressees can enter the (net)work. The *Artpool Web-Museum*³⁷ includes, for example, Guillermo Deisler's *UNI/vers(;)*, a 1988 "anthology of visual and experimental poetry,"³⁸ exhibited both physically at Artpool Art Research Center and as a 'web adaptation'³⁹ on artpool.hu during Artpool's *Year of the Network* in 1997. (fig. 10.3) The web adaptation mirrors the interactive nature of the physical bookwork whose pages the reader could assemble in different ways. By comparison, the online user navigates the work through a random sequence of pages by clicking on image maps created from each page's digitization.

Figure 10.3: *Artpool Web-Museum: Guillermo Deisler's "UNI/vers(;)"*, 1997.



Screenshot of <https://artpool.hu/univers/uni23b.html>

As a respectful than aggressive remediation,⁴⁰ the electronic version “justifies itself by granting access to the older media [so that] the viewer stands in

37 “Artpool Web-Museum,” 2008, artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/onlineshow.html>.

38 Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 214.

39 “UNI/vers(;),” 1997, artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/univers/uni.html>.

40 Jay David Bolter, “Aggressive Remediation: Radically Reforming Old Media,” 2021, <https://vimeo.com/groups/427030/videos/28190549>.

the same relationship to the content as she would if she were confronting the original medium.”⁴¹ Such an adaptation effectively preserves both the content and manner of reading the work. A default approach, by comparison, could be to simply scan and reproduce the pages either individually or in a linear PDF.⁴² It seems anomalous at the same time that the remediation renders the interactive adaptation monochrome, resembling a scanned photocopy in terms of its aesthetic character and quality. The respectful remediation otherwise preserves the work’s non-linear and interactive navigability without wear or damage caused by physical browsing. Achieving this by preserving both the performative manner of engaging with the work as well as its content makes the web-adaptation arguably the ‘ideal’ copy.⁴³

Other works in the *Artpool Web-Museum* similarly explore how the interactive interface offers digital preservation through remediation. As with Deisler’s *UNI/vers(,)*, the remediation of Galántai’s 1994 *Networker Bridge* from bookwork to interactive webpage is more or less respectful to its source instantiation, while taking the opportunity to ‘improve’ the original by adding hyperlinked sound to its text and graphics. (fig. 10.4) The work comprises a ‘virtual’ pack of sixty-four tarot cards derived from an eight-page A5 bookwork made “in homage to the networker friends of Artpool.”⁴⁴ Four ‘virtual’ cards are laid out face down in a row horizontally across the top of the browser window. Beneath the row of four cards are sixty-four hyperlinked names of artists in two columns. When individually clicked, one of the four cards turn face up to reveal a graphic artwork by that artist. The initial impression is that the card appears in a random column, but on closer inspection it clearly appears in the same place each time.

Sound is a significant additional element not available to the viewer in the bookwork instantiation. The turning of each card triggers a specific MP3

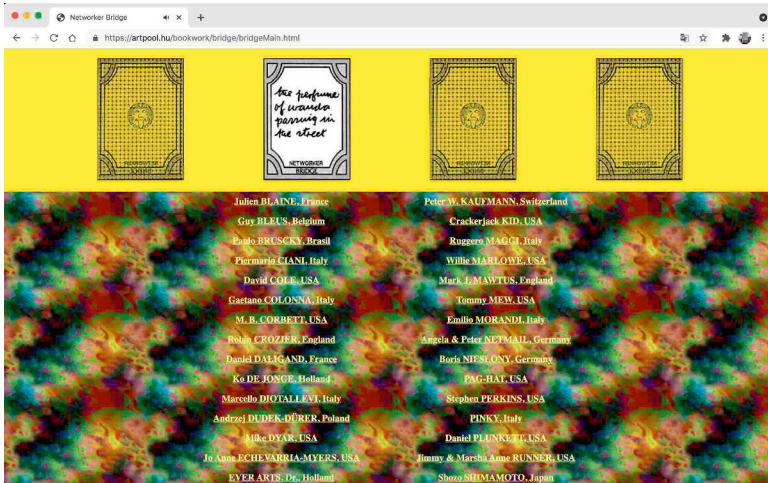
41 Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 45.

42 Cf. Guillermo Deisler’s *UNI/vers(,)*, published online at Monoskop, https://monoskop.org/images/b/b3/Univers_2_1988.pdf or at Fondazione Bonotto <http://www.fondazionebonotto.org/en/collection/fluxus/deislerguillermo/catalogue/8067.html>.

43 Conscious of coincidentally appropriating the title of English post-punk band Wire’s 1985 album, “The Ideal Copy,” we are instead thinking of Galántai’s “ideal web-site,” as illustrated by hyperlinking to Endre Tót’s page (<https://artpool.hu/Tot/Default.html>) from in György Galántai’s virtual lecture at “Internet.galaxis,” Museum of Ethnography, 2000, [artpool.hu, https://artpool.hu/veletlen/naplo/0420.html#id](https://artpool.hu/veletlen/naplo/0420.html#id).

44 Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 503.

Figure 10.4: “Networker Bridge” at Artpool’s website, 1997.



Screenshot of <https://artpool.hu/bookwork/bridge/bridgeMain.html>

audio loop of sound art, the relationship of which to the particular artist or image, however, is unclear. The viewer can trigger four MP3 loops at once, one for each column, allowing different combinations of layered loops. Although *Networker Bridge*'s temporal interactivity when remediated as a webpage marks a clear difference from its earlier instantiation as a bookwork, its shared title and content indicate the remediation retains and acknowledges the primary importance of the source work.

Such fidelity between initial and remediated instantiations of an artwork is less evident in the creation of *Networker Bridge* as a physical bookwork in the first instance. Galántai made this earlier version in 1994 by recycling and repurposing material from *Networker Post* (1992–94), a photocopied edition in 100 copies of 100 stamp sheets created by 100 artists as part of the 1992 *Decentralized Networker Congress*. This type of remediation emerges from the (neo-)avant-garde tradition of collage, copy art, and appropriation as a generative artistic strategy of making something new from existing material. As an archival method, digitization becomes an intermediary to preservation, whereas (neo-)avant-garde artistic techniques such as cut-up and collage act to reconfigure existing material more freely and aggressively. Digitization is

a form of preservation that archives itself as a method wrapped around its object.

In contrast, cut-up and collage intervene within the work, leading to its transformation and reconfiguration. In this sense, the interactivity of artpool.hu still essentially enhances the ‘active archive’ by preserving its existing collection—albeit according to a new remediated order—rather than generating new material to be archived. The transformation and remediation of work in the process of its digital preservation recall Galántai’s interest and working method in atomizing the whole to then reintegrate its elements within a new assemblage according to a different logic. The approaches taken to *UNI/vers()*, and *Networker Bridge* also provide insight into Galántai’s thinking about how to liberate aesthetic experience from the bounds of the physical object in his ‘museum of artistic inventions’.

** /* please add to and return: artpool’s ray johnson website */ **

Of the twenty-nine projects in the *Artpool Web-Museum*,⁴⁵ one of the most significant to test online remediation is the web-adaptation of the *Correspondence Art of Ray Johnson* exhibition online at artpool.hu and offline at Ernst Museum, Budapest in 1997. Conceptually curated across online and offline spaces at once, the exhibition focused on Johnson’s practice particularly through his correspondence with Artpool from 1982 until he died in 1995. Johnson is invariably credited as instrumental in forming correspondence art as a distinct art practice and form at the turn of the 1950s and the ’60s.⁴⁶ At this time, he began circulating drawings, collages, and prints through the postal system instructing correspondents to “Please send to ...” or “Please add to and return ...,”⁴⁷ thus encouraging chance, unpredictability and, distributed, networked authorship into his work.

45 “Artpool Web-Museum,” artpool.hu, 2008, <https://artpool.hu/onlineshow.html>.

46 Ken Friedman, “The Early Days of Mail Art: An Historical Overview,” in *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology*, ed. Chuck Welch (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 3–16.

47 “Glossary,” *Ray Johnson Estate*, accessed March 12, 2021, <http://www.rayjohnsonestate.com/glossary/>.

Johnson's first mailing to Artpool came in 1982 following Galántai's concerted efforts to establish correspondence since 1979.⁴⁸ Rather than forwarding Johnson's mailing to Wally Darnell in Saudi Arabia as requested, Galántai intervened by photocopying and redistributing it across Artpool's correspondence network for addition and modification and only then returned to Johnson. Thus began Galántai's *Buda Ray University* in response to Johnson's *Buddha University*, itself a reincarnation of *The New York Correspondance [sic] School* to establish Artpool's coordinates in Johnson's network. As a "visual communication network project,"⁴⁹ the *Buda Ray University* resulted in work by 580 artists responding to Ray Johnson's five letters to Artpool between 1982 and 1988. This work formed one of eight sections of the exhibition, exhibited physically in Ernst Museum, with the same material digitized and exhibited on artpool.hu. The other sections included archival and bibliographic material, original artworks by Johnson and others, including "memorial works made after his death, correspondance [sic] from Artpool archives and across the network, and the Artpool Ray Johnson website and links to other online material."⁵⁰

The *Ray Johnson Website* digitally preserves, reorders and disseminates the project beyond the duration of the physical exhibition and provides a resource for further research on Johnson's practice. Galántai considered the website "a work for the internet"⁵¹ combining "the sensation of a walk in a museum with leafing through a catalog or studying a book."⁵² Of particular importance was situating the exhibition within the hypermedia and hyperlinked context of the web to facilitate the "discovery of all other sites related to Ray Johnson in the world."⁵³ Freed from the physical museum's spatial and temporal boundaries, the user experiences a much less linear, spatially predicated drift through the exhibition archive. Signifying chains of association and connection transpire through the user's browsing choices both within and beyond the online coordinates of artpool.hu, circumventing a degree of institutional curatorial authority.

48 György Galántai, "The Budapest Story of Ray Johnson," 1997, artpool.hu, https://artpool.hu/Ray/RJ_history.html.

49 Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 59.

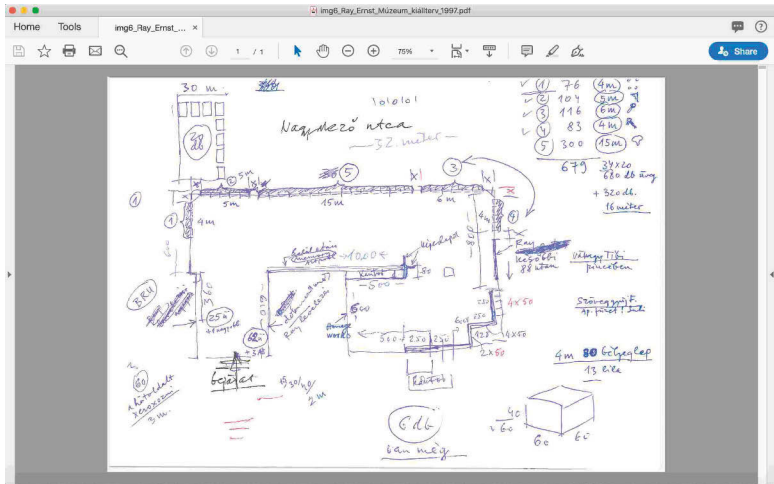
50 Galántai and Klaniczay, *Artpool*, 215.

51 "Artpool's Ray Johnson Web Site," artpool.hu, 1997, https://artpool.hu/Ray/Ray_about.html.

52 "Artpool's Ray Johnson Web Site."

53 "Artpool's Ray Johnson Web Site."

Figure 10.5: György Galántai, “Exhibition Plan for Ray Johnson Memorial Space,” Ernst Museum, Budapest, February 19–March 23, 1997.



Courtesy of György Galántai and Artpool Art Research Center.

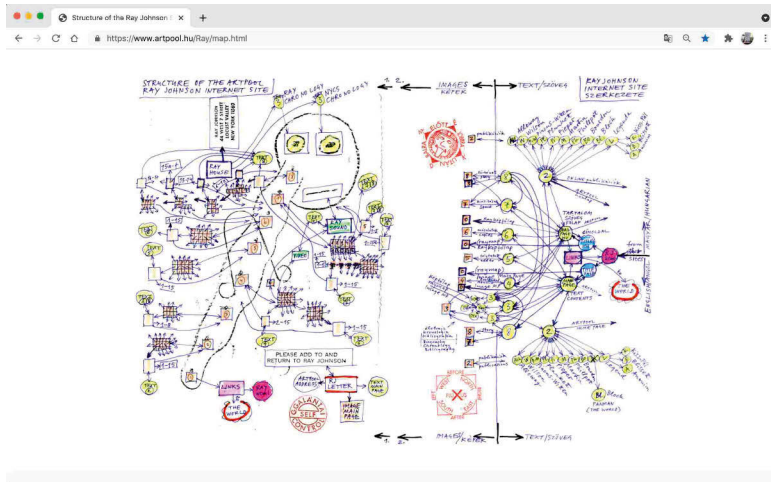
Galántai’s hypertext, *A Garden of Correspondence*, prefaces the online exhibition with his curatorial notes, explaining that “the internet work [as the] representation and demonstration of exchange [...] is an open work.”⁵⁴ Further, to preserve the permanence of the open work is also to “preserve its alterability.”⁵⁵ By alterability, Galántai does not mean material manipulation of artworks, but instead the infinite possibilities of interpretation created through the work of the ‘future artist’ whose task is not to “create so called works, but to construct, cultivate territories that can relate to one another.”⁵⁶ The idea of the website, of the online exhibition or museum as a garden, emphasizes then a place of long-term cultivation of information based on wandering and finding new connections. In short, the *Ray Johnson Website* offers engagement with the exhibition in a parallel networked space and time, integrating the sensibility and methodology of Johnson’s practice itself.

54 György Galántai, “The Garden of Correspondence,” 1997, artpool.hu, https://artpool.hu/Ray/Ray_about.html.

55 Galántai, “Garden.”

56 Galántai, “Garden.”

Figure 10.6: György Galántai, “Structure of the Artpool Ray Johnson Internet Site,” 1997.



Screenshot of <https://artpool.hu/Ray/map.html>

Just as Galántai made drawings of the exhibition design for Ernst Museum (fig. 10.5), he also drew a sitemap for the online exhibition. (fig. 10.6) The sitemap organizes an online exhibition in what Michael Connor has called ‘informatic space’,⁵⁷ non-contiguous with the physical space denoted by the exhibition design for Ernst Museum. The former takes the silhouette of a Ray Johnson drawing as a spatial blueprint, whereas the exhibition design negotiates the pre-existing dimensions of the physical gallery. The left half of the sitemap is designed around one of Johnson’s long-nosed portrait drawings. (fig. 10.7) Johnson takes his predilection for phallic caricature further here, as the nose extrudes diagonally from the face in the top left of the page traversing the page to the bottom right. As with the web design technique employed in *UNI/vers()*, the drawing is rendered as an image map in eight sections, each hyperlinked to a different section of the online exhibition.

57 Michael Connor, “The Rules of the Game, Curating Online Exhibitions, Part 2: Mise-en-scène,” *Rhizome Blog*, April 12, 2021, <https://rhizome.org/editorial/2021/apr/12/the-rules-of-the-game/>.

Figure 10.7: Artpool's "Ray Johnson Space," 1997.



Screenshot of <https://artpool.hu/Ray/raymap.html>

Some sections and material are common to both the online and offline exhibition. Still, the online visitor has the choice to navigate the exhibition from multiple entry points, from where they drift through links and pages, increasingly disorientated and not always able to retrace their steps. The journey is sometimes interrupted by a broken link, leading to ejection from the site or reversed re-entry through the back button. Questions and decisions on which path to take and the experience of coming to the end of a line, remind us that subjective perception, history and biography is partial. No matter how detailed the research, how exhaustive the archiving, gaps in our consciousness always remain, even beyond the comprehension of our Flusserian 'cosmic brain'.⁵⁸

58 "Telematic Society," artpool.hu, 2004, <https://artpool.hu/2004/telematic.html>.

** /* archiving
artpool.hu */ **

Pioneers of late twentieth century networked art practice in so many ways, it is not surprising that Artpool were early adopters of the web. artpool.hu is a unique example of the emergent digital culture of that period and remains intact, predicated by its HTML substrate and interface to this day, over twenty-five years later. Of course, the web is a different place then and now. Then, the possibilities of accessing and sharing information across *cyberspace*, transcending borders and boundaries, felt exceptionally liberating. As a rapidly expanding resource, the web was understandably attractive to Galántai, particularly given his fascination and desire to exchange, process, and redirect information. The web provided untold possibility for a new type of digital samizdat culture and provided a direct channel of artistic communication between the contemporary Hungarian and international neo-avant-garde.

The digitization of *Radio Artpool*, for example, extends a notion of broadcasting across geographical space and historical time through ever-accelerating technological exchanges. This notion of the internet as a channel or medium of communication seems to be of primary importance in the founding and development of artpool.hu. Also, as can be seen from *UNI/vers(:)* and *Networker Bridge*, an interactive interface able to sustain temporal engagement with documented artefacts of networked art as hypermedia, in effect improving while preserving the original. To Galántai, cyberspace appears as a site of abstraction, conceptualization, extrapolation, and speculation: a space of transcendence rather than immanence. His sitemap for the *Ray Johnson Website* and his exhibition design for the *Correspondence Art of Ray Johnson* exhibition at Ernst Museum face different directions from the same point of origin, both drawn on paper. Both are representational, but one will become a work in itself exhibited online as part of the exhibition, while the other remains paratextual in relation to the offline exhibition.

artpool.hu does not intend to replicate the entire physical archive of Artpool Art Research Center. Neither does it account for all of the digitized archival material, as can be seen from the sound⁵⁹ and video⁶⁰ archiving

59 The sound archiving project of Artpool Art Research Center, accessed March 12, 2021, artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/sound/projekt.html>.

60 The video-archiving project of Artpool Art Research Center, accessed March 12, 2021, artpool.hu, <https://artpool.hu/video/projekt.html>.

projects, indexes of which appear on the site nonetheless.⁶¹ The central value of artpool.hu at this point of the transition of the archive to the museum, is as an index for online and offline archival holdings and an online platform to share existing digitized material in the interests of accessibility and research. To do anything else, to become an 'active archive' in a wholly different media landscape where self-archiving and machine learning are ubiquitous conditions of social and cultural production would require reconfiguration and rematerialization of artpool.hu's historical HTML substrate to reset its coordinates within the media present. However, let us remember that as the abacus is as much digital technology as the smartphone, artpool.hu's status as a historical digital artefact of late twentieth century networked art culture may yet become a source for remediation of future networked art practice itself.

61 The list of audio cassettes and videos digitized in the framework of Artpool Art Research Center's sound and video archiving project artpool.hu, accessed March 12, 2021, <https://artpool.hu/sound/index.html> and <https://artpool.hu/video/index.html>.