

## Introducing Lynn Hershman Leeson

### Life Squared

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Life Squared, built on an island in the online world Second Life, is an archaeology of an artwork made by Lynn Hershman Leeson and Eleanor Coppola in 1972. In the Dante Hotel in San Francisco Lynn created an installation of artifacts, traces and remnants, posing questions of who had been there and what had happened. Aftermath and trace. The implication of site and event.

In 2005 Stanford University Special Collections acquired the artist's archive. Among the 90 odd boxes was what was left of the installation — a handful of texts, photos, artifacts. Lynn didn't want them to sit in the Special Collections in the library and molder. She wanted to animate her archive.

This was music to my ears. And so, for me, began the project Life Squared. In 2005 a team from SHL and my lab in Stanford Archaeology Center, Metamedia, worked with Lynn to reanimate the fragmentary remains of this event, experience, and performance as a facility and encounter in the online world Second Life. A new Dante Hotel.

I said Lynn's aspiration to animate her archive was music to my ears. Precisely because I am an archaeologist, fascinated by what's left of the past, its presence with us now, and what we do with it. An aside: you might think that archaeologists discover the past. they don't. They work on what remains. Archaeology is another kind of memory practice, where past is translated into present. We are all archaeologists now.

Life Squared addresses questions of how to treat archaeological or archival sources as the basis for the reconstruction, replication, or simulation of an "original" experience and event: questions of how we might revisit the "presence" of an experience or event.

One site where such work happens is the museum or archive. With Henry Lowood, colleague at Stanford, I see us moving into a new archival era. Because we live in Silicon Valley we thought this should be called Archive 3.0.

Let me explain.

Consider three cognate terms: archive – architecture – archaeology.

The prefix "*arche*" (found in archive and architecture and archaeology) is Greek for beginning, origin, foundation, source, first principle, central location and origin of power, authority, sovereignty. It represents a starting point or founding act in both an ontological sense ("this is whence it began") and a nomological sense ("this is whence it derives its authority"). Archives are all about narratives of origin, identity and belonging, and the politics of ownership, organization, access and use.

Archive 1.0 — bureaucracy in the early state – temple and palace archives – inscription as an instrument of management.

Archive 2.0 — mechanization and digitization of archival databases, with an aim of fast, easy and open access based upon efficient dendritic classification and retrieval, associated also with statistical analysis performed upon the data.

Archive 3.0 — new prosthetic architectures for the production and sharing of archival resources – the animated archive.

What is involved in bringing archives alive? What are signs of this shift?

Remix, rich engagement, co-creative regeneration.

These are to be seen in the reterritorialization of information resources associated with a variety of web 1.0 and web 2.0 initiatives like Wikipedia and Flickr, with new institutional efforts of libraries and museums to diversify and reach out to users with vast information resources and intelligent customizable search facilities. Clear in the vast and growing heritage industry, one of the largest global economic sectors today, is a reemphasis on personal affective engagement with cultural memory. There is a recognition of the importance of developing rich modes of engagement with archival, historical and cultural resources. New interfaces involve processes of recollection, regeneration, reworking, remixing in sophisticated visualizations and customized interactive and participatory experiences.

Life Squared, for me, raises the broad questions of *performance* and record, and their relationship to the kind of experiences offered in our contemporary mixed realities.

Rather than static depositories, archives have always been active engagements with the past. Let me illustrate this with some remarks about architecture.

Virtual worlds are all about peopled spaces — architectures. This was one of the attractions of a 3d online world for our experiment in archival practice 3.0.

Think of the corridor, with doors opening off into rooms of equal size. As in the Dante Hotel. Such an architecture is a technology of arrangement and ordering. As a storage facility or magazine, it was invented by the Near Eastern temple bureaucracies of 5000 years past. To walk the corridors was to inspect the collections and supplies of the state and to mobilize the documentary apparatuses of seals and tallies, impressions in clay. Such an architecture and apparatus is a prosthetic memory device.

The corridor of the Dante Hotel built in Second Life and referencing events and experiences in another Dante Hotel in the San Francisco of 1972 poses a question: What if a building could remember? What if a corridor spoke of traces somehow retained within its fabric?

In a sense the temple magazine does just this. Its form relates to its function. And we are constantly using our archaeological imagination to piece together the past. To pull together the remnants of lives past. Building and rebuilding scenarios, telling and retelling stories of what happened on the basis of what gets left over, as trace or memory. Like in Life Squared.

Such archival practices are intimately about architecture and place, or rather, in Bernard Tschumi's term, place-event. Think of this forensically: at a scene of crime anything could be relevant, as a trace or vestige of the event, the crime that happened there. This suspicious attitude towards site is part of what I see as a broad archaeological sensibility we all now share. An anxiety about the presence, and absence, of the past. We seek sense in chaotic remnants, seeking a signal in the noise, a figure emergent from ground. And it is profoundly about materialities — moldering ruin, and, not least, the decay of the self.

Documentation is at the heart of this archaeological sensibility. How to document what went on, who we are, where we come from. These energies are at the core of Lynn's work.

Distinguish document from record. Documentation is as much about performance as it is about media and information. Walking corridors, locking and unlocking doors, marking check lists,

reporting lost and found, checking in new arrivals, and so much more. We see all of this in Life Squared.

Archival systems struggle to manage disorder, to build order. In this they are part of the utopia that was, and still is, the *cosmopolis*, the city, as polis (people and urban fabric), body politic, rooted in the cosmos. This is something to think about in any design of a virtual world. We deliberately avoided a mimetic architecture for Life Squared — trying to make the virtual look like it was. The Dante Hotel of 2005 is a testament to reanimation *and* decay. It is a kind of reanimated ruin, simulacrum of a ruin — an exact copy of an original that could never have existed. Archives have always been such mixed realities, hybrids of past and present. What we were and what we could be, what they recorded and we remember, realities and hopes, materialities and immaterialities, presences and absences.

A crucial point is that memory and archival practices are as much about managing loss and discard in different kinds of selective fidelity as they are about curating as much of what remains as possible. A living past is as much about what has gone as what remains.

Archive 3.0 is a new landscape of opportunity for designing rich, engaging and co-creative memory practices. Think of the remains of the past as both traces and vestiges. By vestige I mean a track or footprint, the past present in its absence, in the void left by its weight. Negative space. Vestiges require an *ichnography* — the inscription of footprints, tracing out. By trace I mean decayed or partial remnant, a tangible bit of the past that is over and done, but present here with us now. Traces require *archaeology* — efforts to pull together, to reassemble and so regenerate what has gone; though it will never be the same. Archive 3.0 is not a zero-sum scenario of replacing the analog media of the Hershman archive, the boxes in Special Collections, with a virtual reconstruction of the Dante Hotel in Second Life. Sometimes the old technologies of fast access to information through carefully structured metadata are what we need and want for an affective engagement. Sometimes it is better to rummage through boxes in the attic. A fabulous photorealistic 3D model of a house in Pompeii may fail to transcend the superficial detail of beautifully rendered surfaces, fail to capture the life of a place. Ichnography and archaeology present us with design decisions and suggest a wealth of possibility beyond the kinds of tools currently offered as means of record. Ichnography and archaeology — these are knowledge practices, memory practices, matters of design, of arranging materials, of managing the manifold of curation and loss, of choreographing engagement, of supplying archival tools and systems, of building architectures that build upon the entropic loss of everything we hope to be.

Life Squared.