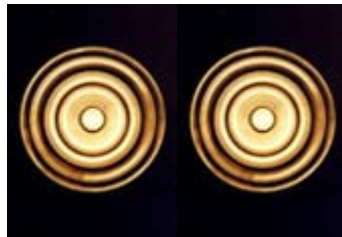

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Only!4!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!4-for YOUR Private Eyes. A structural analysis of <http://www.jodi.org>



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Up to now there have only been a few method-based interpretations of Net art. As far as I know, an aesthetic theories for interpreting artistic and non-artistic Web sites does not yet exist. Spontaneous interpretations and wild analyses predominate, which lead to perplexity when dealing with works of this new medium. Art history would have best equipped to deal with it. Art historians have developed numerous methods for interpreting pictures in the past and still play a rather important role today regarding interdisciplinary iconology. Its greatest strength is its ability to understand a work of art in its historic existence and to embed aesthetic formulations in the context of when the work was created. The temporal distance plays the crucial role for historic research and reconstruction. People want to learn about and better understand something that is foreign and fascinates them. Understanding the unknown, something that has become something different or others is a recurrent motif for the interpretation and mediation of art. But there is also an enormous foreignness in a contemporary Web site like www.jodi.org that is definitely comparable with a 12th century stained glass window. When visiting www.jodi.org the observer is confronted with the same feeling of foreignness and incomprehension that he or she feels standing in front of the glass window of the chancel in St. Denis cathedral.

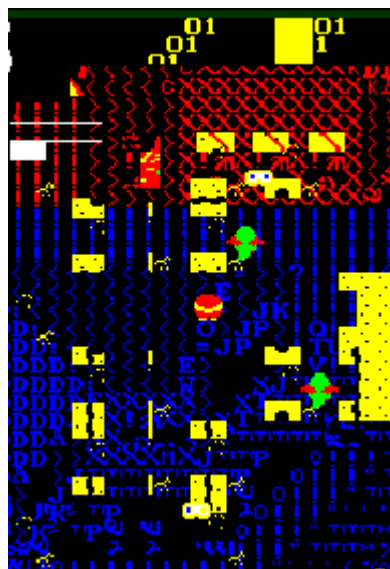
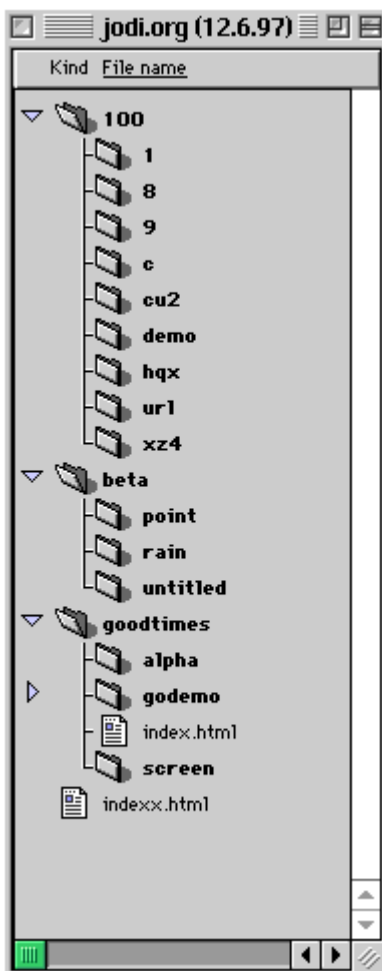


fig. 1: Glass window, St. Denis Jodi: %20demo.dcr
12th century

Certain parts of an Internet-based work of art can be easily seen and acknowledged. That is not the problem. Merely acknowledging something you see has nothing to do with the aesthetic experience,¹ yet other parts require a specific knowledge to be understood. If that knowledge exists, it can expand on what is being seen and modify the aesthetic perception. There is no difference - whether it is an artistic Web site or a Gothic glass window. Aesthetic experiences usually exist in a continuous spectrum of personal conversions and limitations that can range from a cursory glance to very encoded, subversive insider knowledge that is only available to a select few.

However, the difficulties in interpreting a JODI work already starts with the question of what "a" JODI work and what "two" JODI works are. The question of the unity of a work and how it differs from another, second work must first be clarified. This is the first step in interpreting every work. The domain name jodi.org plays an important author function in this context.² It reliably attributes the work to Dirk Paesmans and Joan Heemskerk and functions as a kind of signature.³ It authenticates the work. Meanwhile, the jodi.org domain, which was registered with Internic on 8 August 1995, has been differentiated into several subdomains. For example there are <http://oss.jodi.org>, <http://sod.jodi.org>, <http://asdfg.jodi.org> <http://www.jodi.org> and <http://404.jodi.org>. You could consider the subdomains as autonomous works and give them the titles oss, sod, asdfg, 404 and www. However, this distinction is not fine enough, because these are complex work groups and not individual works. One or several complex, largely independent and autonomous works are hidden behind every sub-domain. On the other hand, some directories contain extensive subdirectories, in other words the directories themselves consist of a group of several works. I want to use an example from 16 July 1997 to demonstrate this. On that day the subdirectory structure of www.jodi.org/ was as follows:



From the first page %20Location (../indexx.html) the user can jump to %20Options with a single click (www.jodi.org/100/index.html). For all intents and purposes, this was the large index page where the trip through the Jodi labyrinth began. The user had a choice from thirteen different links in an image map here. This early on, there were already 13 different possibilities to reflect the work in the aesthetic experience of the work. Depending on which portion of the %20Options image map the user clicked with the mouse, he or she would jump to another work complex or another "exhibition room."

In principle, you can interpret the organisational form of www.jodi.org as a comprehensive collection of works that are presented at this domain in an auctorial fashion. The directory of the first sublevel defines the main groups of the presentation. Metaphorically you could interpret them as either "exhibition rooms" or work complexes. All this is a question of the structure of the work and not its experience. In contrast, the aesthetical experience of the work of Jodi deviates in an almost complementary manner from the physical and material work structure. The work is first noted in a browser on the computer monitor once there is a concrete aesthetic experience through a concrete historic observer/user at a concrete location at a concrete time. The logical-hierarchical organisation of the work is a specific aesthetic or non-aesthetic experience that is decided by coincidences, whims and contingencies .

From the structure of the subdirectories, the visitor can easily recognise that 100 is a larger work complex made up of 9 individual subdirectories or works, which contain works such as 1, 8, 9, c, cu, demo, hqx, url or xz4. In principle, one (beta) work consists of three autonomous works: point, rain and untitled. Good times is a formal and aesthetically very homogenous and uniform work, in which the individual sections such as alpha, godemo and screen embody individual aspects of one single work rather than being different independent works. This work complex will surely be judged as being the most homogeneous in content and formality from the observer's perspective.

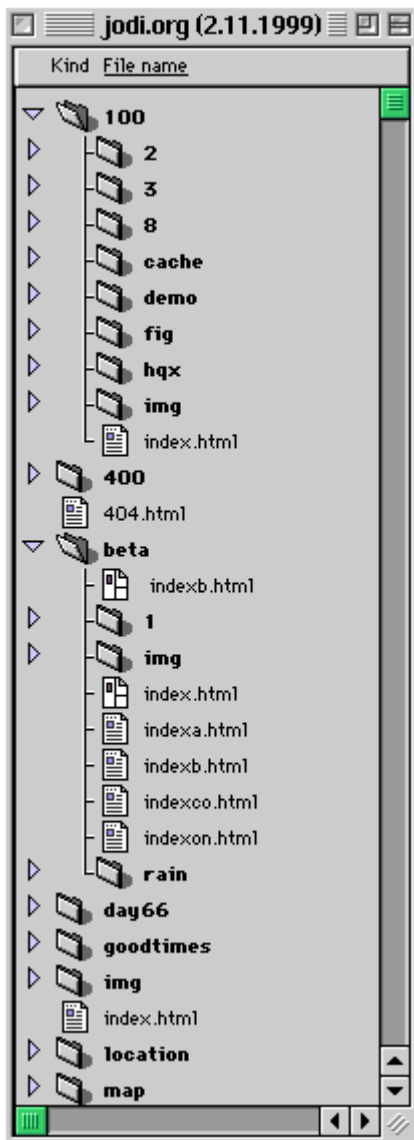


Fig. 2b

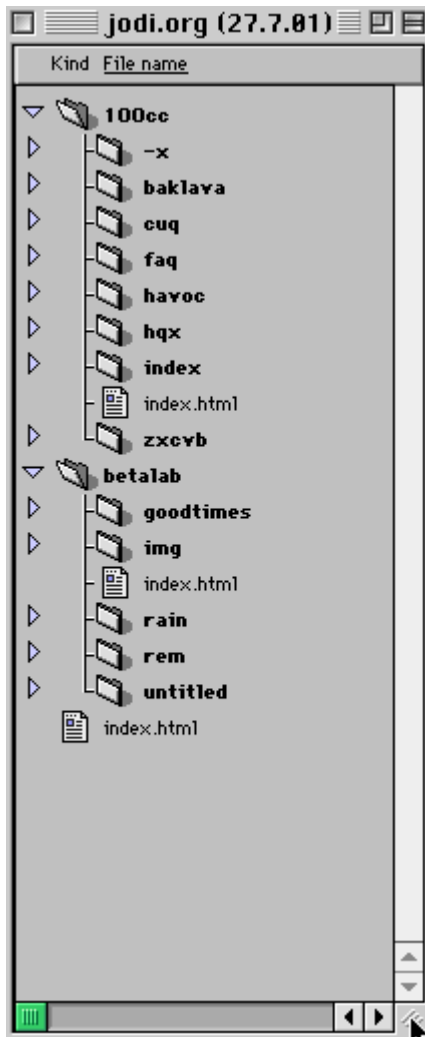
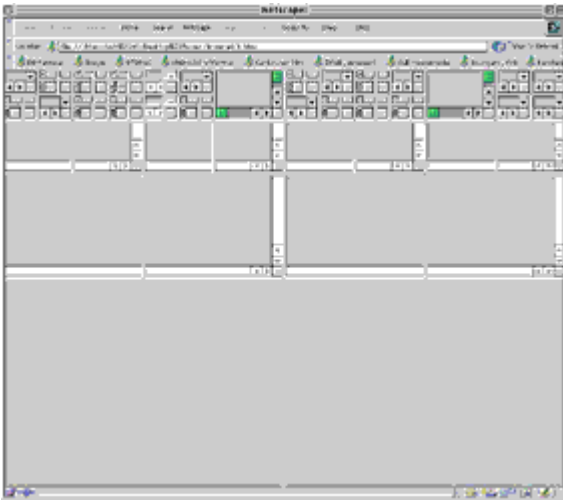


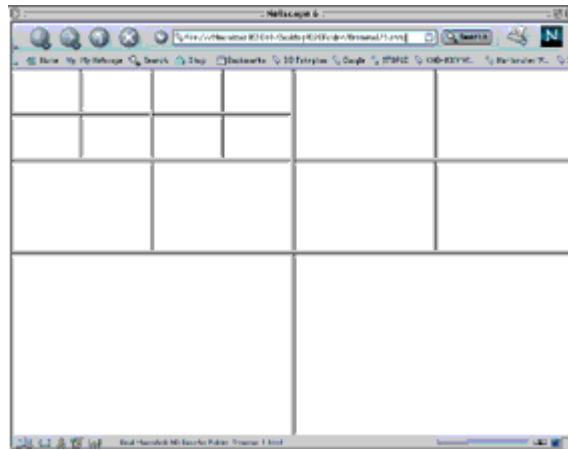
Fig. 2c

If you compare the site in the state that it was in back in December 1999 to its appearance at the end of July 2001, at first glance it appears that the site has been completely reorganised. Many of the works have disappeared completely from the site, while others have been merely given new directory names. The two most important junctions (%20Options and %20Map), from the standpoint of their function as the organisational backbone of the site, are still there, but they now exist in an entirely new form or structure. %20Options has become %Directory, and %20Map is now Baklava-

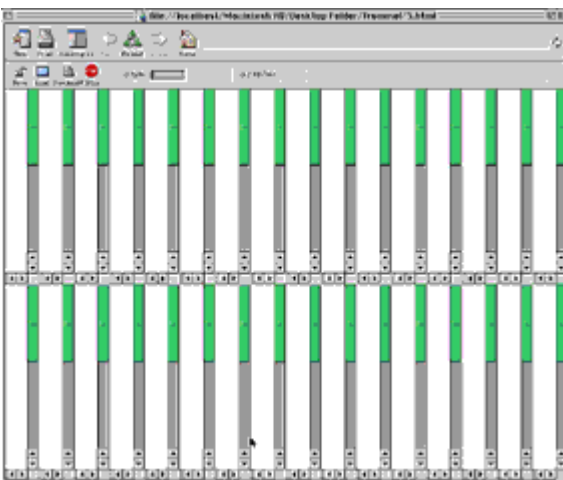
In principle, all of the Internet-based works are based on the difference between code and surface. The source code represents a kind of notation or musical score that is interpreted by the computer when a page is called up by a specific browser such as Netscape, Internet Explorer or Opera. Like a virtual conductor or a symphony orchestra, the browser performs the score and displays it on the surface of the monitor. What we see is only the surface of a specific interpretation. The difference in the interpretations can only be seen when you compare the page in different browsers. Since most people view net art using their favourite browser, a small experimental test series like the one described here can be very helpful. There is a simple, yet astounding work by Oliver Frommel from 1996. It has a more or less different appearance and more or less different performance depending on which browser is used to view it.



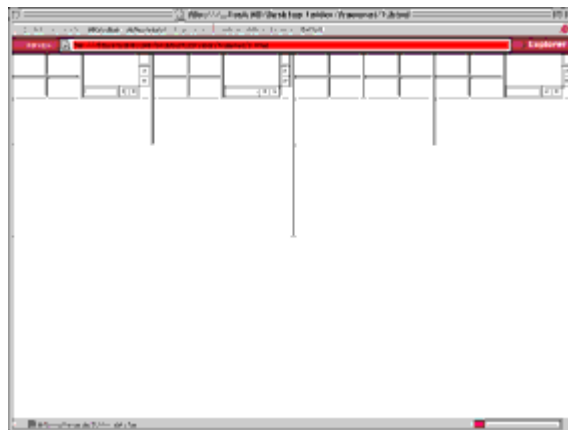
Netscape 4.77



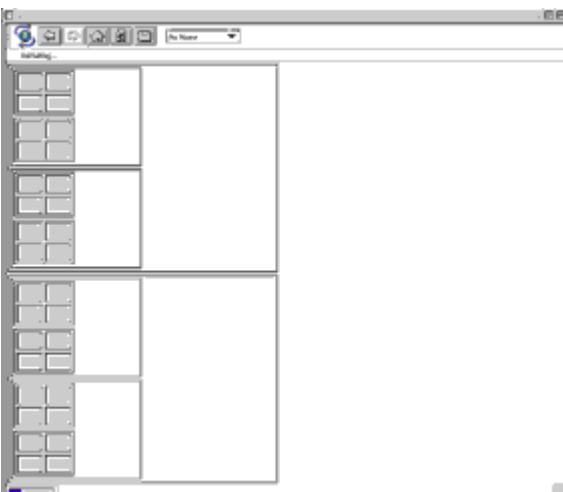
Netscape 6.1



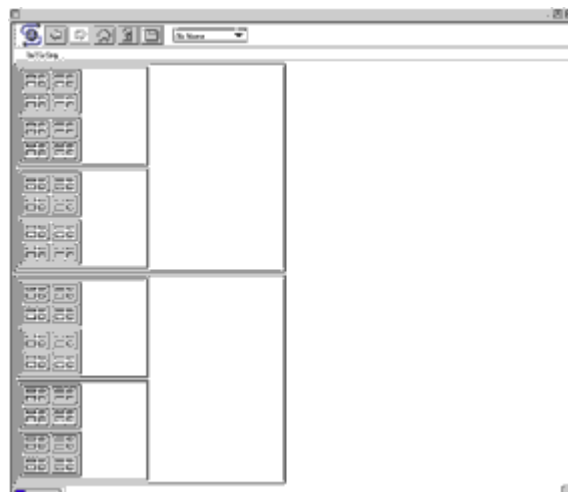
Opera 5



Internet Explorer 5



Mosaic 3.1



Mosaic 3.2

Fig. 3: Different browsers display a work designed by Oliver Frommel in 1996

For these reasons, I feel it is a good idea to differentiate about the aesthetic interpretation of Web sites, which was introduced in the mid-1980s by the Chilean biologists Francisco Varela and Humberto Maturana in neuro-biological discussions to explain the phenomenon of living organisms. It deals with the difference between the organisation and the structure of a system. Both ideas are complementary concepts. The differentiation is necessary, especially in the analysis of the dynamic or social systems. The organisation of a system describes the essential relationships that define the system as members of its class and lend it a specific, unmistakable identity. Francisco Varela already pointed out this necessity back in 1984:

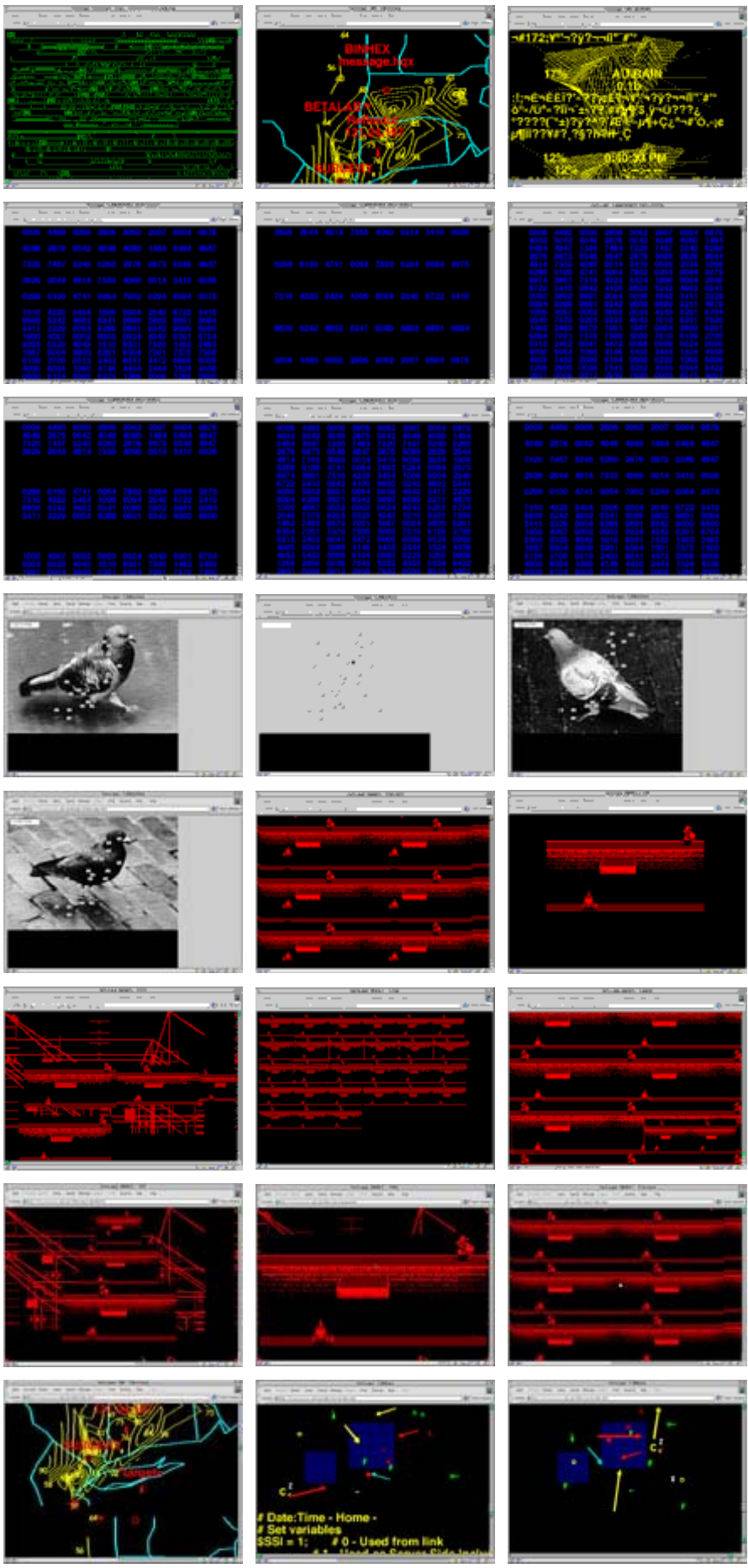
"In der Tat hat jedes System, wenn es erst einmal durch ein bestimmtes Kriterium unterschieden worden ist, zwei komplementäre Aspekte: seine Organisation, die durch die notwendigen Relationen bestimmt ist, die das System definieren; und seine Struktur, die durch die tatsächlichen Relationen zwischen den Komponenten des Systems gebildet wird und das System als solches vervollständigen. Daher bleibt - ex definitio - die Organisation des Systems, wenn es seine Identität ohne Zerfall aufrecht erhält, völlig unverändert; Strukturen jedoch können sich laufend verändern, vorausgesetzt, sie genügen den durch die Organisation gesetzten Rahmenbedingungen."⁴ (Actually every system has two complementary aspects-when distinguished through specific criteria, its organisation: which is defined through the necessary relationships, and its structure which is defined by the relationship between the systems actual components which complete the system. Thus the system remains indefinitely constant, providing that its identity doesn't change. Structures can however constantly change, providing they fill the requirements of the organisation.)

The organisation of a system can therefore be understood as an extended and outlasting order, which results in its relative autonomy and specific identity while the structure of a system describes its actual condition for a specific observer at a specific time or during a specific period. The structure as the actual, real embodiment of the organisation can always change. Certain parts can be exchanged without affecting the necessary organisation of the system, and that is the case with Jodi's Web site. The specific structure of www.jodi.org changes sporadically, but the fundamental organisation remains the same. (Fig.2)

In the case of an HTML Web site, which basic elements constitute the necessary relationships that define the system as a member of its class and lend it its unmistakable identity? What are the unchangeable organisation and its changeable structures in the Jodi Web site? One could argue that the things that characterise it as a member of the Web site class is its unchangeable domain name (jodi.org), its unique IP address and the fact that HTML protocol is used to code the entire work. The domain name and the source code are the two main factors that identify it as a member of the class of Web sites on the World Wide Web.

How can we now talk about the structure of www.jodi.org? Structure is the result of observations at a specific location at a specific period of time. The actual structure that is observed depends on the specific perspective of the observer when he or she visits the work and the embedded conditions and opportunities involved. This includes the entire material conditions of the performance such as what browser, monitor, and computer is used and the modem speed of the observer's connection,⁵ as well as the cognitive constructions such as the selectivity, fragmentation, deletion, supplementation, distortion and postponement of the perceptive interpretation.⁶ We differentiate between at least three kind of structures that can be observed together in a Web site: viewing structures, link structures and file structures. All three lead the recipient to observe different things.

The so-called viewing structures are the actually reception process of a work that occurs when a viewer clicks through different Web sites. It is always subjective, selective and contingent. The structure of what the viewer sees is always different and probably occurs differently every time. It is not only a spatial but also a temporal structure. A successive sequence of views and images as well as the associated aesthetic or non-aesthetic experience constitute in the viewing structure.



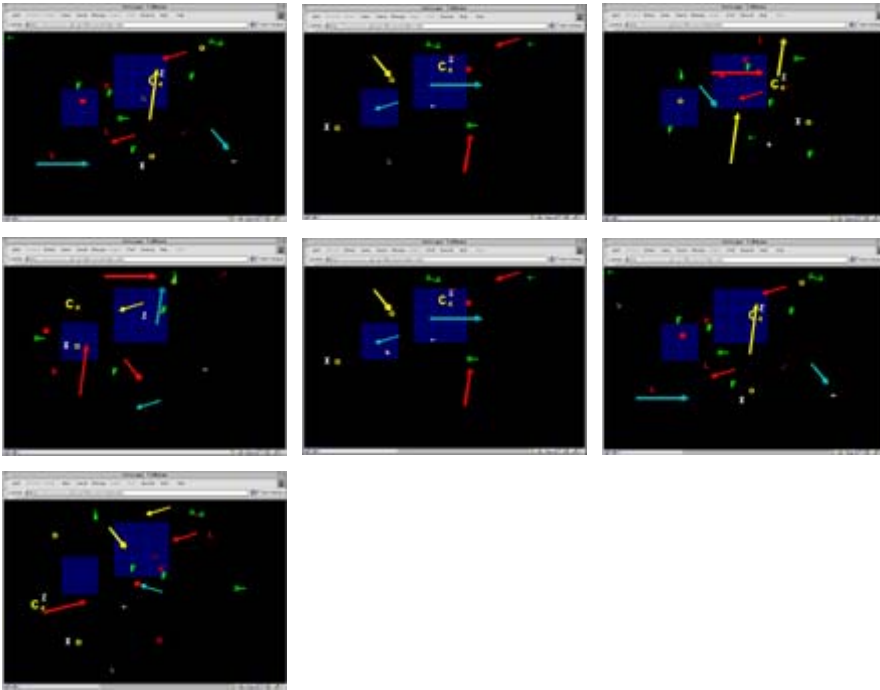


Fig. 4: The viewing progression of an observer

The viewing structure is a random or predetermined sequence of individual pages. There are basically two kinds of pages on the Jodi Web site. They either expire automatically such as the %20Location work sequence, which utilises the refresh tag, or pages that the visitor can haphazardly click through when he or she has happened upon an active hyperlink in his or her search. The viewer can only view a single page at a specific time, and this is set up by a temporal structure of clicks and displayed pages. The temporal structure of the viewing structure consists of a sequence of loading processes that create a very specific and concrete viewing progression that is limited to interactions between the right hand, the view and the Web page's loading time. The structure of the viewing progression can be logged using a type of eye tracking system in the browser's history file .

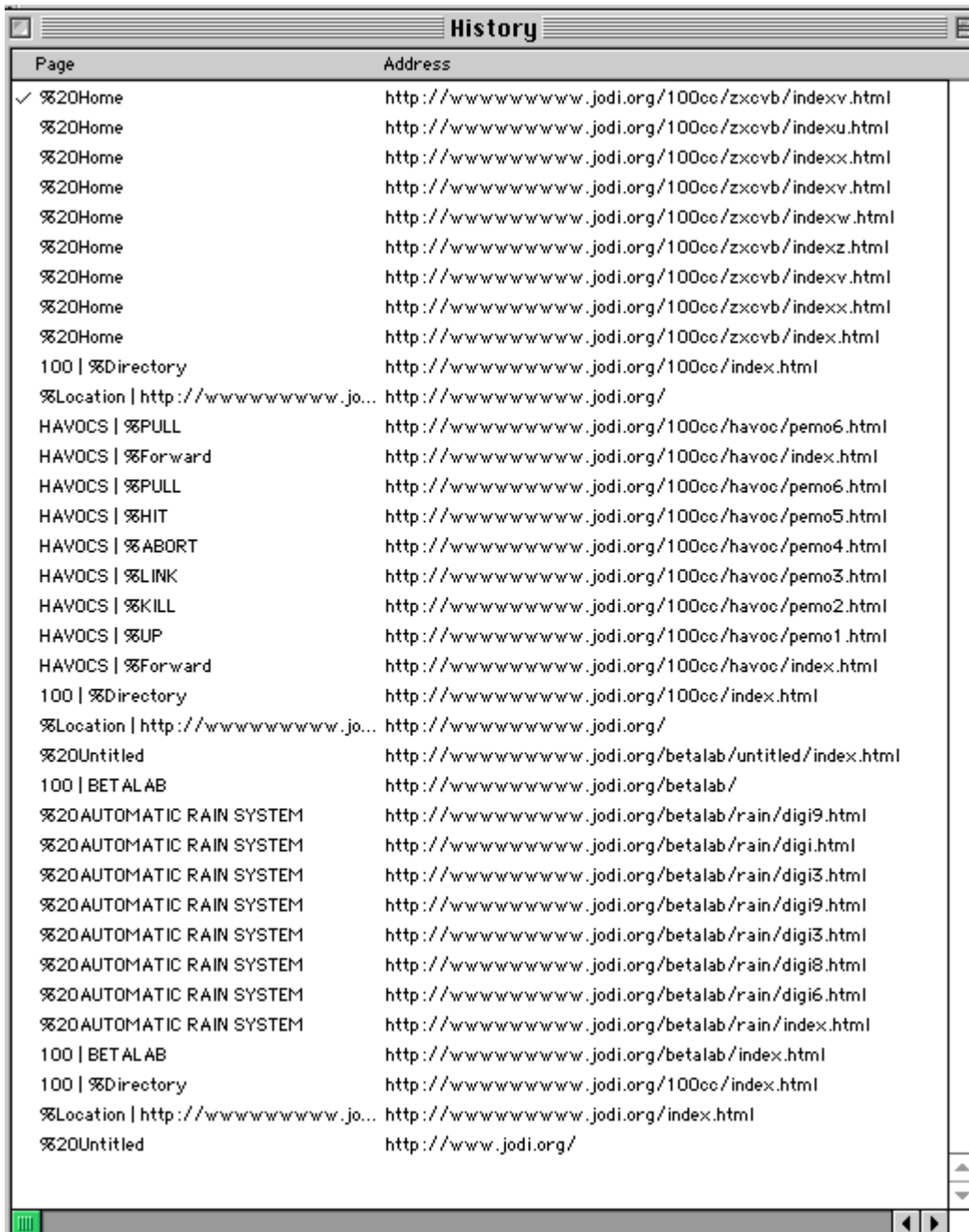


Fig. 5: History file of the viewing progression from Fig. 4

On the other hand, you can differentiate between at least three different substructures in the link structure on Jodi's Web site: internal, external and fake links. The www.jodi.org system is almost completely self-contained. Almost all of the links send the visitor into a loop that goes nowhere or to other work complexes in other folders in the same system. The structure of internal links can only be reconstructed with great difficulty and an enormous amount time researching the individual documents. It sometimes overlaps with the file structure, but it extends beyond the structure in such a way that some files contain internal, external or bad links. Only one file contains external links that lead the visitor outside the Jodi system - <http://www.jodi.org/map/> (Status: 2 November 1999) or <http://www.jodi.org/baklava/> (Status: August 2 2001). This file is an image map that contains references of all of JODI's friends or kindred spirits.

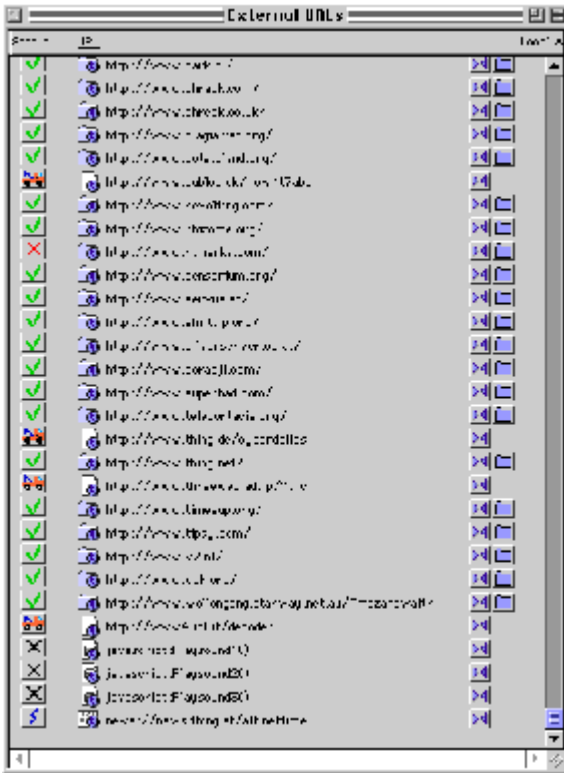
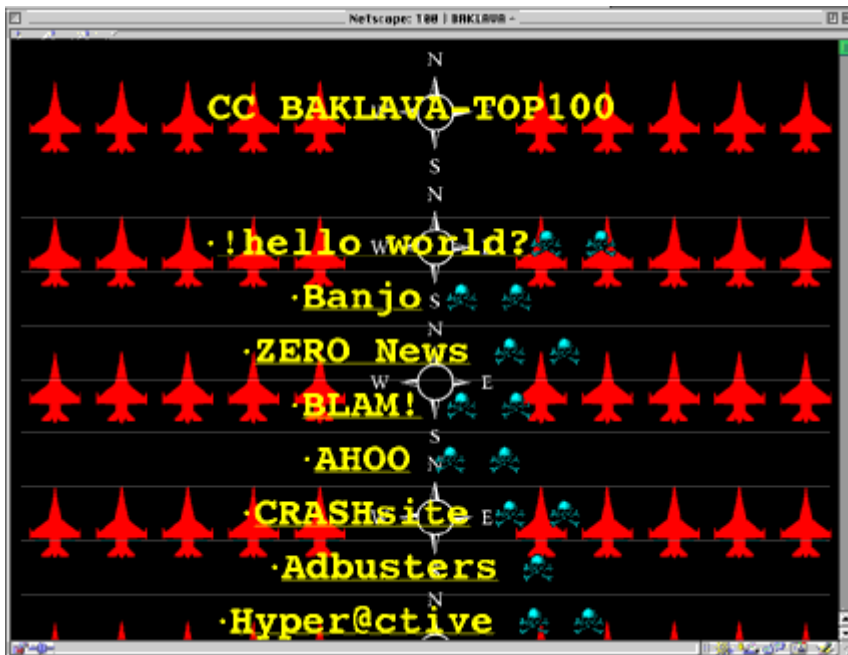


Fig. 6: above: %20Map below: A list of external links at JODI

The baklava/index.html file adopted the function of external links on 2 August 2001:



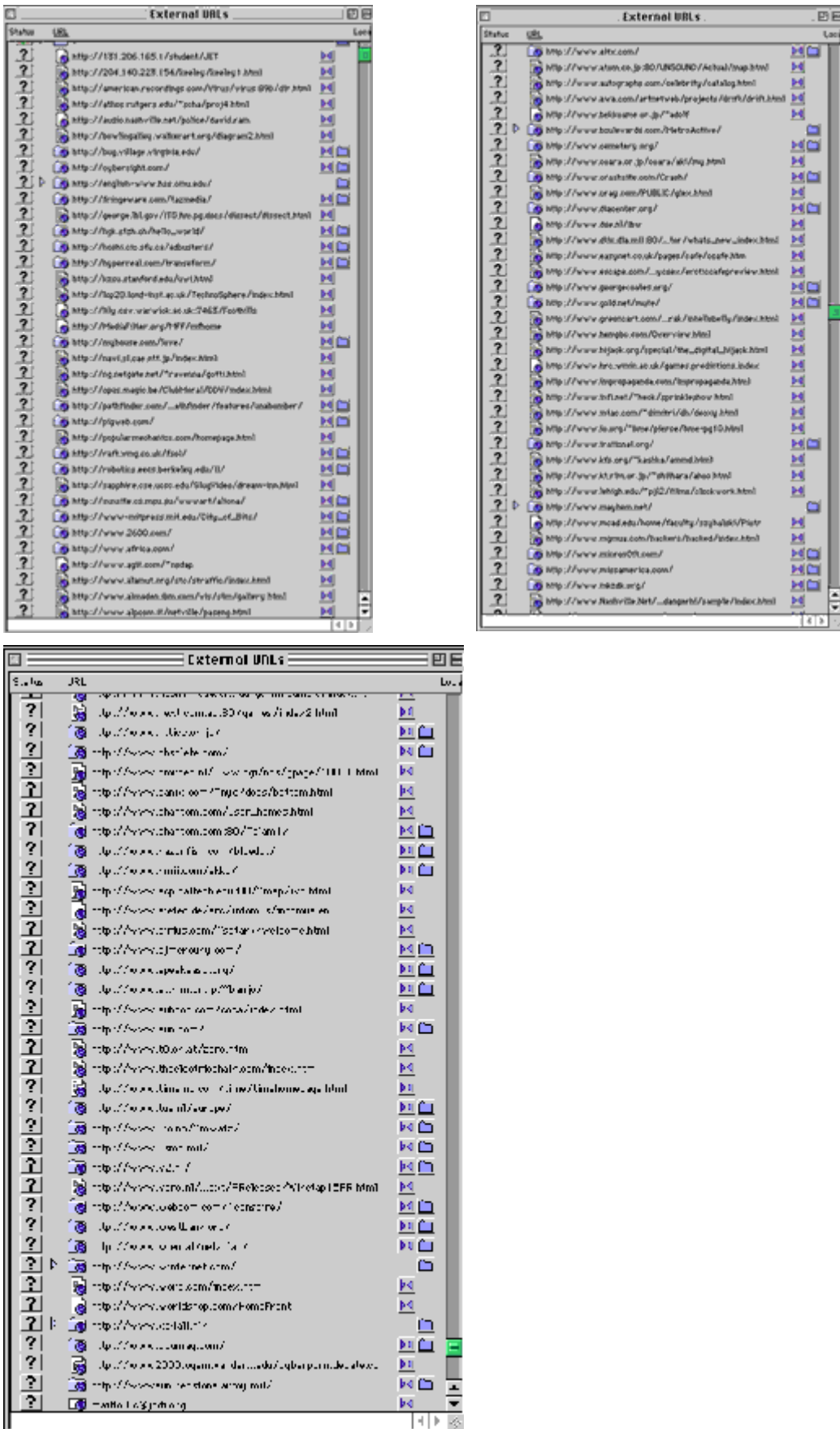


Fig. 7: Jodi: Baklava (above) an alphabetical listing of external URLs

When you enter an incorrect URL (and this happens a lot because they both are constantly changing their pages) or type in the wrong URL, you will soon see the page www.jodi.org/404.html. The source code for this page is:

```

<HTML>
<HEAD>
<META HTTP-EQUIV="Refresh" CONTENT="1; URL=http://404.jodi.org/index.html"> <TITLE>%20Wrong</TITLE>
</HEAD>
<BODY BGCOLOR="#000000" TEXT="#FFFFFF" VLINK="#000000" LINK="#000000" ALINK="#000000">
</BODY>
</HTML>

```

Thanks to the refresh tag, this page soon takes you to a new sub-domain, <http://404.jodi.org>. Here you will start playing a new game with Jodi - the game of 404.jodi.org.

In comparison, the file structure pertains to the physical, in other words the complete and actual status of the work at a given time period. It must be stressed that it is a structure in the above-mentioned sense and not an organisation, since the site's appearance and the manner depends on the hardware and software that is used as well as the concrete status of the site at the moment it is displayed or reviewed..

The interpretation here represents the initial preparatory work on an aesthetic theory of the interpretation of net art. The interpretation in this text can be seen as the development of a foundation for the necessary interpretation of the structure and organisation of an artistic Web site. In the classic sense of art history one would refer to it as a composition analysis, and in semiotics it would be referred to as a syntactic interpretation. The next step is to expand this work to include a semantic interpretation that explicitly deals with the question of how sense and meaning in the process of aesthetic or non-aesthetic experience in the cognitive system of an observer form how it affects, changes, irritates and thereby reconstructs the systematisation experience. We will tackle this subject later.⁷

Annotations:

¹ Theodor W. Adorno: *Ästhetische Theorie*. (Aesthetic Theory). V. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Eds.). Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp 1974, p. 514, as well as Max Imdahl's "Unterscheidung zwischen identifizierendem und sehendem Sehen" (Differentiating between 'reacknowledging watching' and 'seeing watching').

² see the function of the author, especially Michel Foucault's "Was ist ein Autor?" (What is an Author?) in "Schriften zur Literatur". Frankfurt/M.: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag 1988, pp. 7-31.

³ See also Bettina Lockemann: *Wilder Westen (Wild West). Überlegungen zur Netzkunst an der Schwelle zur Institutionalisierung (Thoughts about Net Art at the Threshold of Institutionalization)*; unpublished manuscript of an art.net.dortmund lecture, 18-19. May 2001

⁴ Varela, Francisco: *Two Principles for Self - Organization*; in Ulrich, Hans /Probst, Gilbert J. B. (Eds.): *Self - Organisation and Management of Social Systems. Insights, Doubts, and Questions*. Berlin 1984, S. 25

⁵ For more details see Hans Dieter Huber: "Materialität und Immaterialität der Netzkunst" (Materialism and Immaterialism in net art); kritische Berichte, Zeitschrift für Kunst- und Kulturwissenschaften, Sonderheft Netzkunst, Vol. 26, 1998, Book 1, pp. 39-53

⁶ Nelson Goodman spoke about the five basic possibilities to make a world: composition and decomposition, weighting, ordering, deletion and supplementation, deformation in *Ways of Worldmaking*, Hassocks/Sussex 1978, pp. 7-17.

⁷ The text "Selektivität und Blindheit" (Selectivity and Blindness) is the first general attempt in that direction. It represents the creation and processing of the importance of images; in Klaus Rehkemper, Klaus Sachs-Hombach (Ed.). *Bildsemantik. Interdisziplinäre Forschungen zur Semantik bildhafter Darstellungsformen* (Image semantics:

interdisciplinary research in the semantics of pictorial forms of expression). Magdeburg: Scriptorum Verlag 2000, pp. 248-252. (the online version is available from <http://www.hgb-leipzig.de/artnine/huber/aufsaeetze/bildsemantik.html>)



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