DEAD MEDIA PROJECT

More media archaeology – not sure why it has taken me so long to come across the Dead Media Project.

This is how Bruce Sterling and Richard Kadrey put it in their modest proposal

Think of it this way. How long will it be before the much-touted World Wide Web interface is itself a dead medium? And what will become of all those billions of thoughts, words, images and expressions poured onto the Internet? Won’t they vanish just like the vile lacquered smoke from a burning pile of junked Victrolas? As a net.person, doesn’t this stark realization fill you with a certain deep misgiving, a peculiarly postmodern remorse, an almost Heian Japanese sense of the pathos of lost things? If it doesn’t, why doesn’t it? It ought to.

Speaking of dead media and mono no aware – what about those little poems that Lady Murasaki used to write and stick inside cleft sticks? To be carried by foot-messager to the bamboo-shrouded estate of some lucky admirer after a night’s erotic tryst? That was a medium. That medium was very alive once, a mainstay of one of the most artistically advanced cultures on

earth. And isn’t it dead? What are we doing today that is the functional equivalent of the cleft sticks of Murasaki Shikibu, the world’s first novelist? If we ignore her historical experience, how will we learn from our own?

Listen to the following, all you digital hipsters. This is Jaqueline Goddard speaking in January 1995. Jacqueline was born in 1911, and she was one of the 20th century’s great icons of bohemian femininity. Man Ray photographed her in Paris in 1930, and if we can manage it without being sued by the Juliet Man Ray Trust, we’re gonna put brother Man Ray’s knock-you-down-and-stomp-you- gorgeous image of Jacqueline up on our vaporware Website someday. She may be the patron saint of this effort.

Jacqueline testifies: “After a day of work, the artists wanted to get away from their studios, and get away from what they were creating. They all met in the cafes to argue about this and that, to discuss their work, politics and philosophy…. We went to the bar of La Coupole. Bob, the barman, was a terrible nice chap… As there was no telephone in those days everybody used him to leave messages. At the Dome we also had a little

place behind the door for messages. The telephone was the death of Montparnasse.”

“The telephone was the death of Montparnasse.” Mull that Surrealist testimony over a little while, all you cafe-society modemites …