

What is at stake?

The cARTalog project raises some interesting ethical and philosophical questions. What's at stake? Preservation is at stake. . . but preservation of what?

The Information. On the one hand, it is an issue of preserving information accurately and providing it efficiently. Online catalogs allow for this; they make sense in terms of user accessibility, search capabilities, as well as the use of limited library space. While the materiality of the paper card system will be missed by many, change is inevitable. The evolution of the catalog from card to computer is in the service of information and accessibility.

The Artifact. It is also a library's mission to house and preserve historical artifacts, and there are some who regard the decision to discard a catalog as one not to be taken lightly. (See Nicholson Baker, *left*). What information is lost with a discarded paper record? Likewise, to alter historical artifacts also raises ethical questions with respect to preservation issues.

The Idea. Many of cARTalog artists did alter the cards for the sake of art, and this would seem to contradict the preservation of the artifact. But by recreating the artifact-otherwise-discarded, we recycle the artifact while preserving both the idea and memory of the card system. And that, too, is valuable.