SUBJECT: XCHANGE

FROM: RASA SMITE <RASA@PARKS.LV>
DATE: SAT, 24 OCT 1998, 17:15:50 + 0300

PICTURING THE EVERYDAY "LIFE" OF NET.RADIO: IRC CHAT AT #XCHANGE

This chat is only a picture—a part of one particular net.radio night in early spring, 1998. The Xchange network is an attempt (only) to create a platform for "collaborative communication" in the field of net.audio. It started, and is still based on, the notion of "picturing" audio content, not so much on producing it... (The content is created by the contributors). But there are many more people, radios, and ideas on this globe—a huge variety of types of communication and of collaborative work, each going in different directions and moving towards the discovery of new and undefined spaces... Just as varied are the people involved, their different communities, and the way they are growing, developing and then splitting again. Altogether this is defining an environment... for acoustic space. The acoustic dimension is a powerful tool in the organization of it. At the moment, the following question is emerging: How to develop multidimensional and free-flowing space, within which you can communicate and develop space for a multiplicity of ideas while still keeping it as undefined and open as possible...

Subject: Avoiding heat death on the Internet
From: Phil Agre <pagre@weber.ucsd.edu> (by way of Pit Schultz)
Date: Sat, 14 Jun 1997 13:09:05 +0200

Much of what people are doing on the Internet is great. But much is not. Here is a common dysfunctional pattern: some people decide to "start a discussion group." So they create a mailing list, put a bunch of people on it, and say "okay, let's have a discussion." Maybe they'll send out something interesting to "get discussion started." Several things proceed to happen:

* Since nobody really knows what the list is for,

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the direction it takes will often be heavily influenced by the first two messages that go out on it—that is, the initial discussion starter and the first issue that someone raises in response. The harder these first two people try to "start discussion" by being stimulating and controversial, the more powerfully they will set the agenda for the list. People will react to those initial points, and other people will react to those points, and the whole discussion will be sucked into one of fifteen standard conversations that everybody in that world has had before.

* This initial explosion of messages will cause many people to panic and say "help! you're flooding my mailbox! get me off this list!"

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* Notwithstanding the excessively narrow focus of the initial discussion, the people on the list will come up with five different ideas about what the list is supposed to be for—without it ever occurring to them that alternative ideas exist. They then start grouching at one another for abusing the list. Or even worse, they start scowling inwardly at one another for abusing the list without ever raising the issue—or not raising it until they're full of anger and resentment about it.

Nobody can decide when to take a branch of the discussion "off-line" to private messages. This problem is especially bad on those systems which do not have a concept of a "thread" (roughly, a series of messages with the

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same Subject line), so that people can choose not to receive any more messages on a given thread. But of course, most mail-readers on the Internet (as opposed to Usenet or the Well, for example) have no such concept.

* After an initial burst of discussion, the list falls into something resembling heat death. The level of traffic goes down, and nobody is sure what to do next. Everybody was just reacting to other people's messages anyway, so zero traffic becomes a stable pattern.

* The next step, after a couple months of silence, is for someone to post a political action alert to the list—whereupon a batch of people

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will try to get themselves off. But of course they did not save the automatically generated message that explained how to do this, and the intervening silence has removed any sense of concern for the well-being of the list, so they do it by sending messages to the whole list. This, of course, causes other people to do the same thing, whereupon someone tries to prevent this effect from snowballing by sending out a help-ful, constructive message like "hey, you idiots! didn't your mama teach you anything? why don't you just unsubscribe by sending a mes-sage to <greeblex@blort.snort.com>?"

Internet discussion groups can work well despite these dynamics, but only in special cir-

cumstances. For example, it helps if the community on the list has a steady stream of external events to react to. Since the list operates in a mostly reactive mode, they'll always have something to talk about. The sustained level of traffic might be high, but then people will leave the list until it settles down to a level that suits the people who remain behind. Another scheme that works well is to have a list which is oriented almost exclusively to one-shot announcements—but then that's not a discussion list anymore.

The point is, Internet discussion lists do not work very well. Often the problem, in my experience, is that people are being lazy: trying to

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XCHANGE-OPEN CHANNEL: co-broadcast experiments in the net
Raitis Smits

X-Open Channel started its co-broadcast experiments in the beginning of 1998. It soon developed into a platform for live streaming experiments in the net—exploring the feedback mechanism and possibilities for collaboration.
Every Tuesday night during net.radio OZOne live sessions the so called "open channel" is announced. It means that everyone can join in the live session with his/her RealAudio live stream. There are several possibilities for co-streaming. (You can find more about "What and How to broadcast via the Net"—texts by Borut Savski—in the net.audio magazine Acoustic.Space, or on the web <http://www.radiostudent.si/mzx/netcasting.html>.)
The simplest one is to mix your sound source with another (one or more) RealAudio live stream. In this case each of the participants is doing one part of this live session (for example, one is streaming voice, another background music). There one can listen to two (or more) different streams—the final one with all transmissions mixed together or each "input"—and live stream separately.

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set up a discussion list in order to avoid the hard work of building a community, agreeing on purposes and goals, establishing a structure and timetable, and so on. Often they rationalize this laziness by appealing to the libertarian ethos of the net: structure means constraint means domination. Lots of people believe that, but it's not true. It's not even true if you're a lib-ertarian: structure imposed from the outside may imply constraint and domination, but structure agreed from within a group through a legitimate consensus-building process should not. In my experience, though, lots of people who tend toward libertarian sentiments just talk about the virtues of association without actual-ly learning how to cooperate and build things

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Another interesting experience of co-streaming is creating the loop. Each broadcaster takes another's live stream, re-encodes it, and sends it on for the next participant. In this loop, sound input is going around and coming back with a little delay (5-10 seconds) creating multiply sound layers. If sound keeps travelling around, the stream gets more and more noisy, and finally turns into one continuous noise (depending, also, on the amount of participants). Another way of using the loop-connection is to cut down the feedback—for example, it can be used for remote interviews and discussions, news exchange, etc.

I believe there are many more possibilities for live transmission experiments in the net, but these are some basic principles we have experienced during the X-Open Channel live sessions.

information&communication channel | for net.broadcasters
http://xchange.re-lab.net (Xchange) net.audio network
xchange search/webarchive: http://xchange.re-lab.net/a/

SUBJECT: REWIRED COMPILATION

FROM: DAVID HUDSON <DWH@BERLIN.SNAFU.DE>
DATE: MON, 19 OCT 1998 22:45:51 + 0200 (MET DST)

Date: Wed, 7 Jan 1998 11:28:35 -0800
To: rewired@rewired.com
From: andrew sullivan <andrew@eline.com>
Subject: Active Maastricht Screens

>>WHERE is the German zine ?!!
>
>WHO is asking? (for it?)
>
>Micz Flor (micz@metamute.com)

For me, that exchange really sums up a key difference in the way that Euros and Americans tend to view net development; it reminded me of a public post on the

with real, live other people. This spirit of politically noble laziness is dragging down the Internet.

In fact, the people who helped me articulate these phenomena work mostly with kids. Mike Cole <mcole@weber.ucsd.edu> and Olga Vasquez <ovasquez@weber.ucsd.edu> in my old department at UCSD, for example, run after-school computer clubs for kids. They discovered early on that you can't just provide a bunch of computer activities and helpful college students and tell the kids of have fun and learn lots. Instead, you need to provide a structure of some kind that is intrinsically rewarding and offers a sense of where you cur-

Rewired message board by Richard Barbrook, who was quite the item at the time of his post and acting spokesperson for Europe on the state of net.culture. The quote's a bit out of context, since he is addressing a more fundamental difference in approaches to development and not the specific issue of web publishing and net.culture, but I believe that his perspective is one that is unfortunately common and detrimental—at least among the Euros I've known who follow and use the net daily. Comments like the following below by Barbrook do damage precisely because there is no reason that europeans have not taken a more aggressive role in "owning" the net—or at least complaining about reasons that prevent them from doing so. And rather than have some of the more outspoken figures act as driving forces in defining a new direction, we have only the comment that the American way is stupid precisely because so many are moving without thinking first—I could almost sense the academic invoking the myth of Prometheus.

So, while Barbrook and those following his approach to developing a european net identity sit back and think about the best possible scenario, I wonder if he ever stopped to ask himself which scenarios—as dumb as they might be—were defining his options and the forces that may or may not limit them. For those models will be the ones that work, and there's only one way to find out if something works.

http://www.rewired.com/Board/Messages/12.html

Unlike the Californian ideologues, we don't have any easy and simplistic solutions for how the hypermedia industry should be developed. However, the first step towards finding a way forward is to try to understand how really existing capitalism is evolving, rather than relying on the idiocies of neo-classical economic texts. It is better to ask intelligent questions than to give stupid answers!

All the best.
Richard
Hypermedia Research Centre
http://www.hrc.wmin.ac.uk/

I think you should take this even further, however, and address how the net has really transformed an entire segment of the U.S. economy—whether we like it or not. It took years to develop the physical and intellectual infrastructure to make

rently are in a larger picture. So, for example, each computer program comes with an activity sheet—an actual sheet of paper with easy, medium, and hard challenges for using the program. Also, the kids are constrained in which programs they can use by a floorplan through which they move a game piece (a "creature"): when they do well at one program, they get to move to an adjacent "room" of their choice. Now, some people will say that this is more grown-up domination of kids. I say that kids need friendly, flexible structures to scaffold their development. If you think you can get kids learning real stuff in a totally unstructured environment, you go ahead and do it. Let us know when you succeed. We'll stop by and have a

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this "high-tech" economy work (the way it works), and, in large part, it works on the backs of the freelance community here—perhaps an unfortunate result of the neoclassical "tests" to which Barbrook refers.

I don't think many Europeans get that. That is, how many of the wage-earners in this business do not have jobs, only a brief contract. While this is probably not the direction most of the people on this list would like to see any economy take, I think Europeans gave up on the best known alternative—government having a pretty firm grasp on the economy—when they ratified Maastricht. If Europeans do not see themselves in the bottom of the neoclassical test-tube now, they're in for a rude awakening.

In short, I think one of the reasons that no one, as Micz suggests, is calling for the German zine is that they might just be content with watching the Americans do it where they do it best: on the screen.

Now the French, that's a different story. I'm sure that they are behind XGML!

Andrew Sullivan, eLine |
330 Townsend St. #220 | REWIRED
San Francisco, CA 94107 | "AA For The Web"
415.543.0760 fax -0761 | http://www.rewired.com
http://www.eline.com |

The Rewired List was started in December 1997 so that a relatively manageable group could speak informally about the issues brought up by the online zine, Rewired (<http://www.rewired.com>). As it turns out, because the approximately forty subscribers are more or less evenly divided between Europeans and U.S. Americans, conversation more often centers on cultural and political comparisons and contrasts between the two continents. eLine Productions in San Francisco runs the list, and Berlin-based David Hudson moderates.

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look, and ten bucks says that you're actually training the kids to obey a whole range of hidden control trips while pretending to be free and spontaneous.

Margaret Riel <mriel@weber.ucsd.edu> has done similar things on a larger scale over the Internet with networks of teachers across the globe. They don't just connect the kids by e-mail to scientists at the South Pole: first they set up a whole elaborate curriculum, covering several topics from math to science to literature, so that the children have read and written and talked and listened about the South Pole for weeks, comparing notes with one another as they hit the library and type in their work. All

SUBJECT: RHIZOME

FROM: RACHEL GREENE <RACHEL@RHIZOME.ORG>
DATE: FRI, 23 OCT 1998 19:09:05 - 0400

RHIZOME <http://www.rhizome.org>

Each time that technology, subjected to certain cultural imperatives, ceases to be that which we expect of it, then art, always victorious, defends itself by inventing new tools. At the margins of the art world is new media art. Here, art massively disengages itself from mainstream practices in order to find its own space. New media art is a nomadic space, a kind of rupture. All else will not be art.

RHIZOME maps this territory by publishing and indexing a wide range of art discourse. Started in early 1996 as an experiment in democratic, community-driven discussion, RHIZOME is proud to be an organization on the underbelly of the American art media. Reaching thousands of people every week (artists, academics, students, housewives and the heartbroken), RHIZOME is a channel for critical writing, chatter, email art, and also the self-promotional emails that may eventually provide important groundwork for new media art history. Publishing these sometimes banal, sometimes personal, sometimes critical rivulets of data, one might consider RHIZOME the pre-eminent tabloid publication of the new media art community.

Modeled on the form of the "rhizome"—a nonhierarchical, living network without center—RHIZOME's charter is to be part community center, part art magazine. While RHIZOME is explicitly interested in developing a critical vocabulary to discuss new media art, and in issues relating to technology, culture, and politics, it is intent on addressing these topics in ways understandable to those who don't read Lacanian diagrams or speak English as a first language. RHIZOME is user-powered; it is a bottom-up, free media where the users are the authors are the readers. We develop new forms and map new spaces. The RHIZOME robot sends email, filters and indexes texts, archives information...and replicates itself into the next millennium. Subscribe to RHIZOME for a look at the current state of new media art.

of this structure means that everybody knows where they are going, everybody is ready for what happens next, and the whole activity has a natural point of closure.

What the Internet needs is a vocabulary of structures for e-mail discussion lists. Nobody should bother creating a list until they have a good reason for it that everybody has signed onto. This will mean doing some consultation, building consensus, and accepting that communities take time to grow. It will also mean having a definite goal and structure for the list, including a statement of the conditions under which the list will have achieved its purpose and be shut down. Of course, nobody should

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Alex Galloway <alex@rhizome.org>
Rachel Greene <rachel@rhizome.org>
Mark Tribe <mark@rhizome.org>

————————————————————————————————————

Subject: Syndicate [the Nettime mix]
From: Erik Kluitenberg <epk@xs4all.nl>
Date: {}

Date: Fri, 1 Mar 1996
From: abroeck@v2.nl (Andreas Broeckmann)
Subject: V2_East / Syndicate Newsletter 96/02

INTRODUCTION

This is the second Syndicate Newsletter. In the first sections there is some information about how the list/network is taking shape. Some people have submitted information for distribution through this channel, and we want to invite everybody to do the same—either by posting stuff directly to <syndicate@aec.at> or for inclusion in the next newsletter (no later than end March 96, but earlier if a lot of material comes in) to <abroeck@v2.nl>. Any information that is of interest to the media art community in East and West Europe, from the dates of your forthcoming events to strategies for winning sponsors and grants, is welcome. Also, the submission of your own FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) would be useful. The V2_EAST WEBSITE where all this and more information will be collected for reference is under construction. Please, invite other people who might be interested in the Syndicate to subscribe to the list.

Best wishes, and see you soon, Andreas Broeckmann
(V2_East)

———————————————————————————-

Date: Tue, 5 Aug 1997
From: kitblake <kitblake@v2.nl>
Subject: Syndicate: Deep Europe Visa Department

force people to run their lists this way. But it would be most excellent if decent standards could be established within which people can create software to support such things. Sure, plenty of companies sell conferencing systems to organizations whose people are required to do things together. But that doesn't mean that those people actually go through the social processes needed to use the systems at all productively, and it certainly doesn't mean that the benefits of those systems become widespread on the Internet.

A lot of the problem, then, has to do with technical standards and the like. But the problem is also cultural. Many people have lost, or never

DEEP EUROPE VISA DEPARTMENT

Intro: The Syndicate convened again at Documenta X in Kassel. Its members form a distributed community, initiated two years ago as a network of people who stay in touch through an internet mailing list. They share a common interest in media cultural developments in Eastern Europe, and the loose goal of the Syndicate is to further cross-pollination and synergy/support between East and West.

It's interesting when you meet somebody whose words you know but whose face you've never seen. In "normal" encounters, you see someone, sense their personality, and perhaps probe their thinking. In a distributed community, you already know their thoughts, so when finally face to face you explore the person. It makes for a social scene.

VISA DEPARTMENT

On Saturday we produced an event, the deep europe Visa Department. The name, deep europe, was invented for this workshop in the Hybrid WorkSpace at documenta X ("dX"), and must be taken with a grain of salt. But most of the participants are from the East, and that is another Europe. It's across the BORDER, and residents on the other side are not E.U. citizens. They must apply for a visa to visit. For Germany, for instance, the application costs 50DM, for England 100DM. And you may not get it. You have to wait. You have to answer questions. "Do you have any transmittable diseases?" "How much money are you bringing?" "What is this organization that's inviting you?"

It's a different world. When you're sitting at your dining table, and you hear the bra-a-a-t of a Kalishnikov on the other side of the wall, well, you "sort of" get used to it. As Edi Muka said, like you "sort of" get used to a rollercoaster ride. Obviously, living in an environment like that means your media addresses certain issues, and those projects are the focus of the Syndicate.

Preparation for the deep europe Visa Department integrated with the other activities. Flyers were made and spread around Documenta. They invited everybody to a performance and party on Saturday night, and to come apply for a visa to deep europe between 2 and 6. A deep europe logo was created, taking a cue from the dX "d", integrating it with an "e", and adding an accent, an Eastern inverted caret character. This was used in documents, stamps, signs, and badges.
Forms were created. They were written in Albanian only, with no translation; they

learned, the skills for working together. Although the 1960s counterculture is out of fashion now, it put a *lot* of effort into learning how to build community, how to organize and empower people, how to run things democratically, how to fight fair, and how to be a powerful human being without having to exercise power over other people. In my opinion, the net needs these skills badly. And so does the rest of the world. People who believe in liberty ensure an authoritarian world unless they teach people how to organize themselves through their own efforts, and the problem of using the net productively might be an occasion to rediscover this.

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asked the usual questions. Erasers and potatoes were carved into stamps, and various colored ticket books were found. From the dX participant nametags, badges for officials were made by overlaying a laserprint with a window cut out so the photo would show through. Of course, the deep europe logo was on the badge, and in a technofascist typeface was the word "Absardze": this is Latvian, and it's a new, thus obscure word, which means "guard" or "control." Throughout the event, hardly anybody, even from the deep europe group, knew what it meant. Which means it was perfect.

A soundtrack was put together. Rasa Smite (<http://ozone.parks.lv/Xchange>) pulled a bunch of audio off the net, including some military song from Edi Muka's video-performance project, a sort of Donnau anthem, and this became the basis for the mix. Analog noise was filtered in, to mimic a bad sound system. This manic march was played—loud—during the proceedings. At various intervals an announcement was woven in. This was usually in some unintelligible East European language. A series of barked commands in Albanian, or Serbian instructions that may or may not apply to you. Once in a while some English, "Please be patient," and eventually a longer one, "May we have your attention please. If your visa permits entrance for more than one day, you may be required to take a blood test." This one bit of understandable information then faded away, "Blood tests are conduc...." The manic march paraded on. Throughout Saturday afternoon it looped continuously.

At the entrance to the event, Alexandar Davic and Michiel van der Haagen set up a video surveillance camera—one of those CU-SeeMe eyeballs, it stared down the crowd. Also present was a microphone to pick up the crowd's mutterings. The signal was displayed on a monitor near the door, with a distracted Absardze sitting there not watching it. Other material was shot with a HandyCam, and this will be combined with, naturally, the manic march for a soundtrack, into an event compilation.

The walls surrounding the entrance made a kind of banked curve the visitors had to follow, lined with tables, forms, and officials. One Absardze in supershades managed the door, letting people in two by two. The process applicants had to follow was typical mind-mushing bureaucracy. Little translation was provided, and forms had to be filled out correctly. Iliyana Nedkova: "Oh, you have a yellow ticket? You have to go to that table over there and get a green one." And fill out a form. Marjan Kokot: "Green ticket? Here's the form." In a language few people can read. One Absardze was sitting at his desk looking bored, reading a magazine, a

CLOSED sign in front of him. At another point Lisa Haskel brought in these giant bratwursts, and the Absardzes stood around munching, ignoring the crowd. Forms were stamped and double stamped, sometimes with a coffeebreak in between. The march looped on.

The amazing thing was the queue that formed. It started growing just before the opening, and in a short time went all the way down the block. Some people were in line for over half an hour. It started to rain, and they stood there under umbrellas. All this to get a worthless piece of paper with a potato stamp on it.

For the most part, the audience liked it. They got it. They followed the procedures, and left with a visa to deep europe. Even distant foreigners, like Japanese with little English and nothing else, took it seriously and seriously enjoyed it. You may not know the language, but you recognize the bureaucracy.

There were some negatives. One older German man, certainly around since the war, listened to chainsmoking Branka Davic's explanation, and when he realized it was a visa application, threw it in her face.

At five before six Absardze Andreas Broeckmann went out and announced to the crowd that the Visa Department would close in five minutes. At six the doors slammed shut, and twenty minutes later there were still a dozen people in a queue to nowhere.

ENTERING DEEP EUROPE

That evening, Hybrid WorkSpace hosted a performance/party. Heading the bill were the Instituut voor Betaalbare Waanzin (Institute for Affordable Lunacy). Their performance merged into a visceral mastermix, blending Latino dance tracks into Rotterdam GabberHouse. "This is the music our children listen to!" Thump, thump, thump, thump.... Ongoing video flickered on the walls, and the bar was fully stocked. It was a good party.

Visitors streamed in, clutching their visas. There were a few Absardze badges floating around, but no guards, no border, no control. Welcome to deep europe.

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People folded their visas, and put them in a pocket.

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Date: Thu, 21 Aug 1997
From: Aleksandar and Branka Davic <spiridon@eunet.yu>
Subject: Syndicate: BELGRADE / HAPPY BIRTHDAY MR. PRESIDENT

YESTERDAY, on August 20, Belgrade students organized an action in order to give a "stafeta" [a statuelike stick traditionally given by Yugoslav youths to Tito on his birthday] to President Slobodan Milosevic on his 56th birthday. Of course, the action has been inspired by the same ritual from past decades, when on May 25 the whole country celebrated Tito's birthday. There was also one more "joke"— "stafeta" started at 15:05 (the official time of Tito's death)

POLICE forces stopped the students, violently as usual, and three students were beaten.

"Happy" Birthday Mr. President!!!!!!

branka

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From: Vuk Cosic <vuk@kud-fp.si>
Date: Wed, 12 Nov 1997
Subject: Syndicate: the cosic test

INTRODUCTION

In Dessau there was a Syndicate meeting, the tenth or so since the Next 5 Minutes 2 conference in (January 1996, Amsterdam), and there was talk of practical things...

Actually, there were two meetings. Near the end of the first, Tapio Makela mentioned a classical ambition—how about a Syndicate website? (It would give useful info and pointers to further sources regarding euro funding, various art and media houses/meetings/conferences, plus a possible text zone to satisfy the need for theory and debate...I presume)?

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Well, in homage to the immortal Turing test aimed at recognizing a specific kind of intelligence, I have decided to engage in a similar "Cosic test" of activism. Here follows a short description of the test:

COSIC TEST

The Cosic Test is aimed at deeper understanding of group motivation, and is structured in such a way as to enable a singular researcher to perform it alone, although assistance can ensure more accurate and fast measuring. This methodologically complex epistemological strategy consists of two main parts: (a) I talk, and (b) I wait.

(a) In the "I talk" part, the task of the researcher is to offer a profiled collaborative project to a group of declared activists, with the invitation to meet outside of the conference hall after the given meeting and talk of direct action. It is important that the project offered is of maximum usefulness to the goals declared at the meeting.

(b) In the "I wait" part, the researcher has to go out after the meeting and stand there for about fifteen minutes until every meeting-participant has left not only the conference hall, but also the lobby.

DESSAU RESULTS

One person approached me in the hall and about seventy passed me by. After analyzing the profile of the enlisted collaborator, it became clear that this person is the K.I.E.Z. technician and is not subscribed to the list. Therefore he was not acknowledged as relevant to the analysis.

   bingo
   vuk

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Date: Mon, 27 Apr 1998
From: Tapio Makela <tapio@projekt.net>
Subject: Syndicate: report fragment 1 from Stockholm

Dear Syndicated,

I am writing this brief and partial report from Stockholm, "The Shaking Hands and Making Conflicts" event; Andreas Broeckmann and others will continue. The

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event itself was very problematic, but I think it will prove to be very useful for thinking about the future of Syndicate...and how to react to neonationalist appropriations of specific cultural initiatives. (Wow, that language sounds like a strategy of war almost.)

Most of the event felt like a national performance of Sweden's role in the post Cold War Baltic-Belarus-Ukraine as the generous uncle Dala. (Replace Uncle Sam with Uncle Dala, Dala as Dala horse, the national symbol of Swedish traditional culture). Instead of having had interesting thoughts in the main program, it was about shaking rhetorics.

To put it simply: Looking at the surface, the event was a stage for old-fashioned politics and politicians to present the rhetoric of change without any concrete notion of what they mean by "power needs culture," "democracy," "diversity," etc. Whenever they were caught on their transparent and clumsy reasoning, they would say, like Marita Ulvskog, the Swedish Minister of Culture, that they said so to provoke, to make conflict. She used a quote from Machiavelli to rationalize cultural diversity...which was promptly criticized by Igor Markovic.

A recipe: Use democracy to claim there exists a homogenous "we", and encourage conflict to create a ready place for dissent, a place which is not discussed, but to which the dissent is dumped, sealed and packaged as a medal that the politicians can wear as signs of "tolerance."

The backdrop of the event is perhaps not so much cultural as it is economical and political. Sweden wants to launch a Partnership in Culture in the Baltic region, Belarus and Ukraine. The event was to promote "freedom of expression, cultural diversity, democracy, and common security in the Baltic region..." Why this combination of countries, this combination of goals? Does this event have anything to do with the fact that these countries are former Soviet areas that used to be "within the missile range"? Or with the fact that Swedish companies, especially telecom companies, are trying to gain big shares of markets in these countries? Isn't it a proven fact that social and cultural work paves way for favorable decisions in other fields? This critique does not mean that setting up programs that support cultural initiatives that rise from local needs and ideas, or that collaboration across borders would not be a high priority. that was what I thought this event would promote. The "audience" or the "guests," me included, were witnesses of this play, our names in the list of participants signs of our assumed agreement with the given agenda. This event will be one point in the curriculum vitae of the Swedish nation.

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After World War II, the U.S. launched a program called the Marshall Plan, which was to establish economical, educational, and cultural activity in those areas that were "insecure" or under Communist influence. USIS (United States Information Service) centers in Sofia and Helsinki are examples, as are the Fulbright programs (which btw have been decreased in areas that are these days concerned stable). My question would be, whether this kind of thinking is the basis for the Swedish Partnership of Culture? The other Nordic Countries (Finland, Denmark, Norway, [Iceland less]) have similar economic and political interests in the Baltic region. On the other hand...this is most likely recognized in the Baltic region, and perhaps it is a good moment to utilize the willingness of the Nordic countries to invest into the cultural sector as well.

Partnership for Culture is like a Dala plan for culture, and at the same time a Trojan horse, a Dala horse, where a cultural carrier is not innocent but bears in its belly the geopolitical and economical interests of Sweden. The internet, an infotech, also act as such a Trojan horse. The organizers of the conference are making the assumption that the Baltic region needs "A mailing list for intellectuals." Either they imagine that there are only a few people who qualify, or they do not know anything about mailing lists, how they are formed, and how they can become useless... But, I don't want to say that their initiative should not also be reacted to in a positive way. Ando Keskkula and Sirje Helme from Tallinn are crafting a conference as a follow up—and I think you can set different terms for the interaction.

Igor Markovic was the best vocal critic and commentator during the event, and I look forward to reading his views of it. We witnessed terribly badly formulated speeches by the Swedish politicians, institutional self-praise by David Elliott from the Moderna Museet Stockholm, badly prepared sentences from the former curator of Documenta, Catherine David... (Igor, others, please continue from here...) and—to my mind dictatorial—moderation by Swedish Journalist Mika Larsson. (Btw, if she works on the future events in this series, I won't even want to get further emails about them!).

It was not only Larsson's way of suppressing voices and differences of opinion but the way the event was staged that got to me. I felt that it lacked respect for the visitors from Belarus and the Ukraine and the Baltic countries: if they were the subject of discussion, why then weren't they placed center stage? In this, Fargfabriken bears responsibility for the curatorial discourse, and perhaps for the overproduced TV talk show style of the event. In order to establish a dialogic space, the first con-

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dition is to respect the partners in this dialogue as equals, as subjects with their own voice, and to provide the space for them to express it. I felt this was deeply lacking, and, as such, the event cannot be a starting point for forming a network based on trust or crisscrossing shared interests.

My fingers and wrists are in poor shape for writing...and I need to take care of Polar Circuit applications (which have been really nice—thanks everyone who has sent one!), so I end my reporting here. The main entry point to understand Syndicate's role in the Stockholm event can be read from the manifesto that Andreas drafted based on the proposals of the whole family present in Stockholm. Melentie performed this text-in-action with brilliant style (he should be awarded with a viking helmet for fulfilling the role so well). It offers several proposals for any country that wants to reach cultural supremacy in the region of the Baltic-Belarus-Ukraine. The text is in the next mail, and I hope that other Stockholm visitors will take up from here and I will rest my case, or simply, fingers.

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Date: Wed, 1 Jul 1998
From: Andreas Broeckmann <abroeck@v2.nl>
Subject: Syndicate: irrelevant statistics

jan 96 jun 98 / 30 months 300 subscribers from 39 countries of which 32 european countries 7 non-european countries

as though it mattered...

[arbitrary selection and unwarranted editing by Eric Kluitenberg <epk@xs4all.nl>]

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Subject: Re: :::recode::: digital distractions
Reply-To: Suzanne Treister <suzyrb@camtech.net.au>

Re: McKenzie, those 2 lines and boredom, well I just got given a new art CD-ROM published by Cambridge Darkroom in the UK (fax 0015-44-1223-312188) whose theme was actually boredom and I guess it lived up to its name. Send off for it and let me know what you think. It's only the 2nd group art CD to come out of the UK as far as I know and as with the first ("On a Clear Day," available from John Paul Bichard <johnny@ultralux.demon.co.uk>) most of the artists were new to the medium and were selected on the basis of previous work in other media.
This seems to me quite different from the way things work in Australia. Games-wise I recently got Riven and I'm really bored with it. Don't even send me any hints, I don't want to know.

CDs...Cornerhouse, the one where the lyrics go "sleep on the left side keep the right side free."
Suzy

Subject: Re: :::recode::: digital distractions
Reply-To: McKenzie Wark <mwark@laurel.ocs.mq.edu.au>

Suzy,
that's funny, because i tried to write a book about boredom once, but i got... bored.

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Still have all these notes...

It makes as much sense to give artists money to write a novel as to make multimedia, and about as insulting to all concerned. Of course artists should be able to move into multimedia like anyone else, but you do have to find some way of understanding the medium, technically or conceptually, i think. IMHO and all that.

But have you seen the antirom stuff? That's the best British art-rom i've seen. An anthology disc of Australian work a bit like that might be an interesting idea.

Can anyone explain the appeal of Riven? I don't get it either, so i must be missing something.

_____

"We no longer have roots, we have aerials."
http://www.mcs.mq.edu.au/~mwark

Subject: Re: :::recode::: digital distractions
Reply-To: melinda rackham <melinda@subtle.net>

my passionate love affair with the digital has become a predictable marriage—i often (the confession of an infidel) find other amusements more attractive these days..

......i'd rather shoot em up and at timezone with the attendant full body experience than wrist action with lara on the small screen......

and i'll take relaxing with good ol' fashioned tv and "south park" on a saturday night rather than the frustration of trawling narrow bandwidths searching for new stimuli.

mr
http://www.subtle.net

From: Jun-Ann Lam <alehman@iaccess.com.au>

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"We no longer have roots, we have aerials."
I still have roots but those roots have given me aerials as well as a body.

Subject: :::recode::: Re: computer as metaphor
Reply-To: Susan Hansen <shansen@carmen.murdoch.edu.au>

>Well, for a start the computer is now a metaphor for
>how the brain works. Sometimes it's even a metaphor for
>how the body works—i saw a news segment on TV
>recently that compared the workings of the immune system
>to it.[MW]

The computer (singular) is one of the more pervasive metaphors for the (disembodied) brain. I'm sure no one needs reminding of the kinds of dualisms these kind of metaphors draw on.

The immune system is another abstracted system imagined to be lurking within our opaque (yet permeable) skin. More often conceived with the aid of bio-military metaphors (foreign invaders, defense forces...) but the computer offers a less overtly masculine rendering of what remains an ordered and logical system....

>Sooner or later, it'll be the network (if it isn't already).[SM]

Here is a more unsettling metaphor. The network cannot be neatly placed as either mind/body. It is multiple, fragmented, and collaborative—it lacks the sturdy boundaries of the (singular prosthetic) computer.

Not an autonomous domain.

>network time of the body
>network body of/in time
>here at 3am all the euro/northern hemisphere lists have woken up and
>begin to pump blood into the system [LW]
>Not surprisingly interest
>now focuses on DNA imagined as a kind of digital code.[MW]

The human genome project has followed a similar path of imaginings. The initial working aim was to create an enormous physical clone repository for the storage

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and testing of DNA. (Kind of like a big old mainframe stuck in an unwieldy and impermeable body). The current project has moved to a dream of an inscription based system—a comprehensive database accessible from anywhere around the world. But within this projected network of digital codes lies an almost invisible biological determinism—DNA as the master key for predicting/explaining all human attributes/behaviour—a future à la GATTACA.

> So what kind of culture do people
>want to make out of these tools that are available,
>out of these skills that are obviously out there? [MW]

I think you've already answered that one:
>"We no longer have roots, we have aerials."
>http://www.mcs.mq.edu.au/~mwark
> —McKenzie Wark

Culture as a concept (traditionally, at least) depends on there being a "we". And often on there being some kind of shared imagined history (and projected future) of "we". The culture implicit in your signature implies "we" are somewhere in the moment/movement between "roots" and "aerials":

>I still have roots but those roots have given me aerials as well as a
>body.[JL]

What about culture as a network? as
>multiple, fragmented, and collaborative

without clear boundaries [SH]

Subject: :::recode::: imperialism
Reply-To: Jun-Ann Lam <alehman@iaccess.com.au>

It does not seem appropriate to target democracy as a solution to the Indonesian crisis right now. A friend of mine said something very interesting last week, that democracy works on the assumption that everyone is informed/educated. It works for those who can read and write, those who, like Aryati, can think concepts and rights. It works when everyone is willing to do something peacefully. It is a culture

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and a way of doing things. But in the absence of that culture, how does democracy function?

I am thinking of Vietnam and Cambodia, particularly Cambodia and the misery that can be caused in the name of liberation. Ordinary poor folk don't think in terms of concepts and rights, only in tilling the land, feeding the family, having a better life. And the offspring of these people are in a perfect position to be exploited by those who cry democracy but are really purveyors of power. The mistake the Indo govt made was in not introducing democracy when it could, during the "peaceful" times. The Suharto family got greedy.

Indonesia's main concern now is to provide enough so that Indonesians can eat. It is true that the conditions in Indonesia are appalling. It sickens me to the stomach to think that, after all these years, the wealth of the country lies in the hands of very few.

But apart from the troubles that have been brought to light in the past year in Indonesia, what of the inherent racism against Chinese in that country which, I might add, existed even before they amassed such great fortunes to the detriment of the rest of the country that it is not a surprise that they are so greatly hated/envied. And then there's the explosive mixture of Muslim, Hindu, and Christian cultures. Everyone wants a say and everyone wants their say to be bigger and better. I am thinking of Sikh and Hindu clashes in Northern India, Muslim and Hindu clashes in India. Kashmir...etc. Pakistan and Bangladesh broke away. How does Indonesia break away from itself? Split into 300,000 tiny islands and break Java into three pieces? Then who gets Jakarta?

This racism is only slightly more obvious in Malaysia with biased economic policies designed to benefit one race.

And I still remember the Philippines during the Marcos regime and the complaints from Filipinos living in Malaysia that conditions in the Phil are getting worse, even without the Marcoses. And there is that problem in the southern island, of Muslims wanting to break away from the rest of the Phil. Instead, they cross the sea into Sabah (Malaysia) where they know they will be welcomed by the Malaysian government because they are Muslim.

And Mao Tse-tung and Pol Pot and Mrs. Mao.

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It is so easy to propose solutions—let's bring down the USSR and allow democracy to reign—fat chance—the mafia more like. How many years has it been since that corporation came down? And what is the situation like now?

What is the solution for third world and developing countries? Democracy? I think not. But neither is autocracy. SO what then?

The Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese, French and British (British less so) left these countries in shreds... they colonised, raped [[[I THINK THIS IS PROBABLY AN INTENTIONAL MISSPELLING—I HAVE THEREFORE LEFT IT; CORRECT IT IF YOU DON'T AGREE]]] the benefits and left. Thailand is the only country that was never colonised and its people left proud and with a strong sense of national and cultural identity. [JA]

:::recode:::
is an Australian based email mailing list for critical commentary and debate on contemporary new media, online, and digital culture. It was initiated during the Code Red national event in November 1997. It is a site for discussion and debate as well as providing an outlet for publishing material on line. Its aim is to encourage dialogue amongst practitioners and critics from the Australian and Asia Pacific region. However, subscription and commentary from outside of this region are also welcome.

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Recently we held the second intervention in our new Blast program—<eyebeam><blast>. The project began as a mailing list forum, occurring from February through April 1998. It also includes an offline symposium in New York and a printed book compilation. A series of new forums are now being planned, including <voti><blast> and <iniva><blast>. In each case, Blast "docks" with a particular organization in order to develop a highly specific task. Each project has a clearly articulated goal and procedure, and employs the media best suited to its objectives—often combinations of mailing lists, offline symposia, exhibitions, books, and broadcasts. In this way, Blast operates as a mobile catalyst, developing a network of relationships with institutions and organizations. It operates as an agent of activity, a kind of marker or brand. We refer to the new program as "Blast agencies."

The <eyebeam><blast> forum was dedicated to opportunities for critical artistic practice in the network. We hoped to make a strong assertion of the relevance of artistic practice at this moment in network culture. Our intention was to help challenge artists, critics, curators, and media practitioners to aim for a broader understanding of the network and its conditions; to show the need for progressive critical and articulatory formats, which are historically engaged and actively confronting issues of globalization; to open up productive channels between that microcosm called the "art world" and broader, more engaged fields of cultural practice; and to develop complex cultural articulations rather than simple roundups of net pundits. We worked hard to include voices from, for example, South America, East Asia, and the African diaspora, developing potent, unresolved articulations of local and global relations—confrontations of the network, of history, of cultural identity and the lived reality of the urban.

In closing the <eyebeam><blast> forum, I wrote eleven summaries (accessible at <http://www.blast.org/eyeblast.html>). What I hoped to engage in these closing summaries are the areas of the forum that seemed to become attractors of sorts, concentrations of energy. These summaries register not only multiple voices, perspectives, and positions but are complex registers of the lives of participants as they have interlaced with the discursive-urban space of <blast> over a period of

three months. The summaries constitute a kind of travelogue, a stream of encounters, movements, localisms, dreams, thoughts, ambitions, lived realities. They are necessarily incomplete, and they do not make consistent arguments or draw conclusions. A temporary "regrouping," they represent only one possible journey through the forum.

The list facilitated a strong sense of community, even in just a short period of three months. University classes were built up around it; many articles were written about it; and many participants continued to meet, both online and offline, in different parts of the world. In my own travels I continually encounter those for whom the list was an important source of information, discourse, and community. I find that I deeply miss many of the participants, and eagerly await our next <blast> encounters.

SUBJECT: HET STUK

FROM: PAULINE VAN MOURIK BROEKMAN <PAULINE@META-MUTE.COM> AND JOSEPHINE BOSMA <JESIS@XS4ALL.NL>
DATE: MON, 27 JAN 1997 09:28:29 + 0100

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*(staaltje)een stout stukje: a bold
feat*(aantrekkelijk persoon) male:
hunk, stud. female: piece*(geschrift)
document, article.

Neither of us were there when Nettime was born, but we think we are close enough to the source to know its radiation, its personality almost. Nettime can nearly be treated as a character. Its loose form and the firm but loving embrace of its participants give it a different feel than its descendants or copycats. However, there is still something uncomfortable about Nettime, something we will try to get as close as possible to in the following text.

What is most striking about Nettime is its wish for close personal contact. Nettime meetings have in the past been organized under the banner of conferences like

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Next 5 Minutes or Metaforum; a big one that truly shows Nettime's sweet face is the meeting planned for May 97, which will be held in three different cities in former Yugoslavia: Ljubljana, Zagreb, and a seaside resort. Nettime seems to be an island of humanity in the mediated world of the net and its periphery. Anybody can send anything at anytime to the open list. Although for a discussion mailing list this is in itself not unusual, combined with the very personal treatment of its members, it means that Nettime could be a fertile breeding ground for new writing talent, a free space to experiment with styles and ideas for artists or theorists—or, most interestingly, a place for nonwriters in the extreme sense of the word to vent their opinions on highly philosophical matters, a place where professional intellectuals and "illiterate" mediaworkers communicate. But this is precisely where something seems to go wrong.

Nettime has a lot of members. The issues that are written about titillate many minds. Yet only a very small part of its members "open fire," even when the battle is practically in their own backyard. We have heard someone say he is afraid to write. Why is that? Speaking in public is not easy, most of us know that, with the exception of the natural performers. But is that really the only problem? From very different corners, the same remarks about Nettime can be heard over and over again. The texts, the announcements, and the world that seems to be hidden behind them are considered extremely interesting, but there is this enormous threshold fear of reacting. And again, it seems to be associated with these same good texts.

At conferences the way an idea is communicated is a mixture of that of the objective, learned scholar/professional and that of the master speaker, the politician, the salesman. Theories are presented and discussions are initiated in the old-fashioned manner of the college, where knowledge was a clearly shaped object of power, with a beginning and an end and, perhaps, guards flanking its sides. Even the audience seems to submit to these rules of polite respect for an erect manner of speaking that also dominates universities and political meetings. New media are not just effecting old media like books, TV or radio. They also effect institutions. Academies will have to deal with this revolution just as much as television companies will—their heritage needs to be dealt with and transformed. We do not mean to say that what comes out of this heritage, like styles of writing and thinking, is wrong or needs to be dumped; merely that they feel a bit uncomfortable in the context of this list.

Fortunately, Nettime does not pay its contributors for their efforts. This saves us

from endless ploughing through the long, highly abstract, theoretical pieces of the professional macho theorists who like their masturbative seeds to choke the throats of the doubting student, the searching poet, or the wacko artist. Many writers still have these sharp, fast pens, though, which they learned to hold so well during their professional careers. And only the wackos seem to have the (unconscious?) guts to reply to them. Instead of shared trains of thought we often get the safer, but less effective, private mail exchanges, the whispering at the backdoor—all of which take the sting out of the debate. The only way to fight this syndrome without losing the credibility or impact of net.criticism is probably to work with an awareness of how textual critical authority, maybe invisible to its producer, can simultaneously encourage and suppress the introduction of new voices/communications.

However, the metaphor of the academy can also be used in a more positive way. Though invisible, due to the same characteristics that make the net such fertile ground for gender switching etc., the range of ages, professional, and personal experiences of those who subscribe to Nettime is no doubt vast. The email-communicated thinking, feeling, and being that make up Nettime's shared persona touches on the very slippery areas where practice, personal experience, and theory (for want of a better word) intersect. Don't they, in fact, do this in most social interactions? Distinctions made here between these categories are, by necessity, crude. Given that this is what we have to play with, the fact remains that some postings will seem more relevant to some than to others, and for reasons that go beyond simple qualitative criteria.

Some postings that may seem like so much "noise" to "seniors" concerned with their own particular patch of high-theoretical discussion, may link in more directly with the lives and lifestyles of other subscribers. Yet conversely, those self-same subscribers (and we say this from experience) learn much from even the shortest exchange on topics they may not be intimately familiar with. A more personal inflection in otherwise theoretical postings manages to communicate the really valuable experience gleaned from working in an area over a long period of time.

Of course this broadening of discussion can also slide into a situation where... "plus ca change": the "lurkers" feel privileged to listen to the master speakers, not just in the lecture hall as before but in the newly opened private spaces of the gents' loo and the corner of the professors' refectory.

It is a pity that some interesting professional writers whom we know must have an eye and heart for helping to find a solution to this problem are too busy being pro-

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fessional elsewhere. Of course, not everyone has the tireless energy of the few one-man broadcasting houses that push Nettime forward (thanks) so perhaps it would-n't be a bad thing if some others circulating in the technoculture circuit would step down from their pedestal every now and then and be among the crowds again (and not just at the conferences which seem to function like holiday camps for them, and where of course personal exchanges of ideas and inspiration are limited to small groups of people only).

Nettime is a social entity; above all else its energy comes from its community-oriented nature. The above is not meant as a dead-end complaint. It is more a response to a slightly troubling and seemingly contradictory tendency within the discussions of the list that have discouraged certain interesting subscribers to participate. In the long run this may create problems—nobody likes being an unintentional lurker. The network of subscribers is a valuable one for us all, and losing good (but in the world of theory-writing inexperienced) people due to a perceived inaccessibility would be a damn shame. If we are to avoid building with the institutionalized, male-dominated structures of a theoretical discourse that existed within the academy of old—onethat profited from specialisms, narrowing the gaze, and heading for one clear goal—and we want to reflect now, in practice, the diversity of this list, the threads of this tendency might need to be unpicked and rewoven.

SUBJECT: 7-11

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[Edited October 1998.]

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