

## Internet, or a notion beyond nations

„When we talk about [telematics](#) we talk about making far things nearer, about messengers and messages, but especially – and people are not always aware of this – about this most important message which says that we can only understand ourselves if we understand the other.“  
Vilem Flusser, from the essay „Love thy neighbour“, Kunstforum March/April 1992

one year ago, when a happy Michelangelo Pistoletto came to us – he had just been appointed artistic director of the Biennale of Turin – and asked us which ‘host country’ he could invite, we found ourselves confronted with a problem.

today, which country could still be considered as the ‘legitimate cradle’ of ‘its artists’, and which artist would be willing to represent his nation? should we maybe propose a country which is physically in the stars but which does not exist yet in any official document? maybe Palestine? is it the not-yet-countries which offer the best background and the best basis for the *Big Social Game*? or maybe India? in a place where today, like probably nowhere else on the earth, the very old and the ultramodern world, the world of the magical rivers and the world of the magical channels collide? Sanskrit versus JavaScript?

no, because in any case we always end up drawing only the borders of a strictly defined national territory. but what we were looking for was a more flexible and open relational field.

doesn't an art-country or a project-country exist then? a country which can be inhabited, or at least owned by everybody? the only conceptual country of this kind we could think of, *Sozialgrundstück* (social land) by Gottfried Bechtolds, was unfortunately, never realised. so, we came up with the idea, which had been on the tip of our tongues from the start: finding the country we were looking for not on earth but on the net(0)! Considering the [internet](#) as that country and, if possible, inviting projects coming from all its most exciting corners, we suggested this idea to Michelangelo. Having considered it too, he gave an enthusiastic response and asked us if we would be the curators of that host country.



Detail of MIDS map of the Internet World,

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[Click to go to MIDS for the full map](#) [internet hosts](#) in July 1999. the number of the hosts has since changed, but their geopolitical distribution has not (1).

what do artists, who transform the internet, or rather, the possibilities of telematics, into an important "space" of their lives and projects, do? and what don't they do? what kind of projects are those whose ideal/digital support is a dialogical medium? how do real and electronic spaces interact, and how does this relate to the map above?

as with every other new medium, artists not only project their questions/ideas into the new medium, but also, they allow the new medium to ask questions about their intentions and to change them. since the invention of the telephone, when the first real-time telematic wire was stretched, rather than relate to an unresponsive 'work', artists have projected themselves through the medium towards someone who subsequently responds. when a medium is essentially a relational space, the point of view shifts. if art was previously a monologue (work of art), it has now become a dialogue and a polylogue (network). if there the quality of the work was crucial in its relation to anything, here it is the quality of the relation which is important, and how it 'generates' art. networks are a quality of relations.

this transformation from monological works into intersubjective ones has led to problems of presenting and dealing with this kind of art. as the internet is intangible and uncommodifiable, both the real presentation platform outside the computer and the art dealer, without any object to sell, have been made redundant.

this apparent dilemma is very interesting for us, not in terms of the art dealer's 'physical problem', but rather in terms of the artists' existential one. art-presentation and art-trade now have a very different meaning. on the one hand this is due to the medium itself, which as we have already noted, works in a completely different way to monological works, and on the other hand because its intrinsic quality, interactivity, enters social and ethical fields. the notion of the artist as individual, possessor of 'unshareable genius', is transforming and becoming 'condividual'(2), i.e. 'congenially shareable'.

for this reason Michelangelo's invitation was also like a gift from heaven. What better context could we have to give a platform to these net-projects than that of the *big social game*? so, we started looking for people who agreed with us on three apparently banal points: the net is an interactive media, putting a monitor, a keyboard and a mouse on a table is not enough(3), and the most exciting projects are the most contextual.

dialogue/polylogue – physical – social/relational.

our search started from our own project. we found an old mill on Spain's north-west Atlantic coast. we bought it, restored it and turned it into a telematic laboratory, into a company, into a collective association. since then we have been calling it 'mother ship'. all the projects which come out of here are called 'sister ships'. but we also give the same name to every other project or net we are linked to. in this way our little network of little projects is increasingly interconnected with other little networks, which in turn... and all of this creates a big network. we finally arrive at the ocean, which we call internet. we are saying this, because it is important for us to let people know how we carried out our search and what we considered our task as 'curators' to be.

except for a few cases, we looked for all the *biggest.net*-projects on the net. we found them, and started getting to know and appreciating them. but our search was not a blind one, it followed the oscillating wires we had stretched over the past 10 years towards other groups and other initiatives. so (almost) all of the invited *biggests* were friends, or friends of friends, or friends of friends of friends...but what might look terribly like favouritism is only a consequence of the host-country: we did not want and we could not show an 'international section' of projects, because we did not have the knowledge, the time, the money or the reason to do it. but since we couldn't, and we didn't even know why we should have had, we believed that the most interesting solution was to use our network as a search engine. our network (like every other one) has its foundation in the real world, this means that it feeds itself mostly on real meetings with real people. such meetings can also take place online, but there are always people sitting on the other side, and what happens between them is first and foremost their relationship.

the search for the biggests looked like one big communication process which was dancing around the flames of the *big social game*, and which had a lot of influence over our decisions at all levels.

for weeks we looked for good projects, which could build information/communication islands deep in the telematic ocean, but, with the exception of what we found and present in the *related* section of this site, we failed. we have no doubt there are several of them also in afghanistan, africa, china, cuba, iraq, iran, ..., ..., ...but our time and our means were limited. but we should not forget that the *topology* of our host-land represents a decentralised landscape made up of autonomous+connected islands. the ocean is everywhere, but not as freely accessible and available as its architecture allows. but the channels are open, so please *let us know* whether your search was more successful or whether you are the ones we were looking for.

the ocean is free! but it is very like our freedom, its existence also depends on the value given to it by others. if nobody calls, nobody can answer, and if free telematic access to others is systematically obstructed and controlled, nobody can make a call, or at least nobody will dare to.

maybe we are intellectually too lazy to realise that I cannot exist without you, and that art cannot exist without the two of us. in the same way our eyes are too lazy to realise that what appears on my monitor is nothing but flashing points of light which feign a 'virtual reality'. the main point is not what we relate to, but the *fact* that we relate.

„lets play to change the world”, the apt and suggestive expression used by Michelangelo at the beginning, also means: lets play to change ourselves.

[calc](#), February 2002, L.A. (Las Aceñas, Asturias)  
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(0) net is not a good word/image to describe what it means. we associate it to a fishing net and we see a regular mesh. but the net is much more similar to something organic, to something living, to a [Jellyfish](#). for this reason we don't like the metaphor of the net and the expression net-art. following the jelly-fish image, we would prefer to introduce the expression "fishual-arts".

(1) we are aware of the spread of the net and of its strong connection with the so-called free markets. for us, the 'commercial and capitalistic aspect' of the net is evident, and at the same time it is evident to us that current 'form' of the net is so ephemeral that forecasts about its future must remain open. we might say that this fact also crucially depends on the influence/commitment of the artists. who better knows how necessary '(aest)hetic principles' are in a 'global society' and can give them the form of a project? [<back](#)

(2) we don't know if this expression exists anywhere else. we invented it at least 10 years ago to underline, in our letters to cultural institutions, that individual awareness is only possible in a context of relations with others, not alone. we did it because every time we wrote asking for funds they answered that first of all they could not support infrastructures, and secondly that they could not support groups. it was not possible for 'pure statutory' reasons. this is why we invented the expressions infrasculpture and conindividual. but of course this neither persuaded them to change their decisions nor statutes. [<back](#)

(3) soon after having accepted to work as curators for biggest we came across a report by Saskia Bos, who at that time was the director of the Berlin Biennale. she stated she didn't want to exhibit 'Internet art' because there were still no artist who had considered the problem of presenting this kind of art. nobody had ever shown more than boring monitors on boring tables. in many cases this is true, but the most exciting nets reflect this interface problem very well. anyway, much depends on what is or is not considered to be art. Harald Szeemann expressed himself much more directly: from his Plateau of Humankind, in Venice, he immediately stated that he didn't think that the net was a suitable medium for art. [<back](#)