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Geert Lovink (by way of Pit Schultz <pit {AT} contrib.de>) on Sun, 17 Aug 1997 00:50:29 +0200 (MET DST)

<nettime> WorkSpace Manifesto

- *To*: nettime-l {AT} Desk.nl
- *Subject*: <nettime> WorkSpace Manifesto
- *From*: Geert Lovink <geert {AT} xs4all.nl> (by way of Pit Schultz <pit {AT} contrib.de>)
- *Date*: Sun, 17 Aug 1997 00:25:51 +0200
- *Sender*: owner-nettime-l {AT} Desk.nl

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note: This text was written for the presentation of WorkSpace in the
Documenta Halle in Kassel/Germany which took place on August 14, 1997 as a
part of the 100 days program. We heard only two days in advance that the
free slot would be available for us. The only text about Hybrid Workspace
was written by a number of people, in a great hurry, just before the
final deadline of the Documenta X shortguide, in May. For this improvised
presentation, for the first time we looked into the growing audio,
video and text archive of the WorkSpace project. We also thought it would
be necessary to also have more theoretical text, a first attempt to
reflect on the work we are doing here in Kassel. In the second part, the
tactical media network presented their work. Special guest was the
Colombian videomaker Silvia Mehija. You can see the lecture in real video:
http://www.mediaweb-tv.com/english/dx/gaeste_frame.html
+ more audio stuff: http://www.icf.de/RIS
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First Analysis of the temporary WorkSpaces
By Pit Schultz and Geert Lovink

For the Hybrid WorkSpace presentation
100 days program, Documenta X, Kassel
'50 days, 120 guests', August 14, 1997

*how to write a manifesto* -- a document type description

Classical modernism brought us a new textual format for the multipurpose
use in the alien environment of technical media. The manifesto was
introduced by several avantgardist artist groups at the beginning of this
century as a document type to mediate an emphatic moment of urgency, the
utopia of the radical new.

Today, the manifesto returns as a useful form of electronic discourse that
locates itself into the heart of cybernetic power. It does not just
articulate a hierarchical voice from above, representing the wishes of
others. It does not just promote the project of one predominant world
model, it even cannot be taken seriously in every detailed claim it may
make. In the main, the digital manifesto is a highly efficient form of
communication which provides a frame of immediacy and presence for those
formulating it.

The digital manifesto no longer makes the distinction between endless
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interpretations and the decisive logic of punctual statements, it
articulates a profound, and often artificial subjectivity without
reclaiming absolute power in the real world. It creates an ambigious
mode between visibility and virtuality which makes it useless to serious
forms of executing power by virtue of its very absence. Paradoxically, only
through the fact of its powerlessness and marginality the digital manifesto
can claim to speak in the name of superhuman forces.

The digital manifesto, as found in countless instances on the electronic
networks, is not rewriting the human command-line-interface as it is known
from before the War. In the times of the Nets, after deconstruction is
over, the manifesto is a node which attracts other texts, including audio
and video, and plays with the viral potential of being able to get
forwarded, redistributed, quoted and translated.

The digital manifesto functions as a media genre which speculates with
maximum attention and possible media exposure. It mimics the gesture of
broadcasting in the times of democratised xerox publicity. By definition
the digital manifesto has a strong message. It claims an imaginative
totality, a possible future, a virtual territory, knowing that it exists
amongst a multiplicity of other manifestoes, which all put into concrete
practice the passion for polemics and rethorics of public imagination: "I
had a dream" (in Martin luther King's famous opening words). You may find
the digital manifesto all over the net refering to its outside, and
refering to each other just by the fact that they express a will to be
heard, to be heard about an extreme form to see the world.

The digital manifesto is the opposite of the self-referential
contemplation from within the system. It breaks through the chains of
endless interpretation of existing textuals material. It is stating the
obvious, claiming the impossible, and deserving the full field of
pragmatic possiblities to the limit where they become truly speculative.
Next to the document types such as the pamphlet, the declaration, the
statement, the sermmon, the agenda, the charter or the petition, and in
distinction to the essay, the article, the report, or other lengthy textes,
the digital manifesto performs a compression which deals with the need for
shortening, cutting and selecting from the media streams. From the very
beginning it anticipates broadcasting and what it can do to a text. "Keep
it short, my attention span is limited." (J. Sjerpstra) The typical form of
the digital manifesto is a long list of paragraphs, which functions like as
a crystal, where one paragraph can reflect all others. The potential character
of this text type is not hidden or embedded in a set of characters and
narrations like in a novel, or allegory. In a digital manifesto the need
for far more possibilities meets the desire to touch the level of the real
and serves a popular info-vehicle in the struggle for attention.

representation - media - image

Nowadays, if you are working in the field of the new media, you are very
squarely confronted with the institutional power of the image. The multi
media are out there, but apparently some media are more equal then
others... Those which work with an interface of visual representation are
also those which are the most appealing to consumers, advisors, media
theorists, and museum curators. Optical media have traditionally a
predominant role in the process of constructing the truth and representing
the invisible. When it comes to reflexion about reality, our Western language
is full of terms which privileges the visual above all other senses when
speaking about the truth. The direct way of exersizing power over people's
dreams and visions is by controling the sphere of images. This plays a
crucial role not only in religion and advertisement but all fields which
need the services of representation of power through visualisation as a form
of celebrating and mediating its legitimacy. In the new media industry which
is specialized in the development of *interfaces* most of the work goes into
the production of demos (see Peter Lunenfeld in nettime). Finally it needs

a surface to cover the emptiness of the final products with a shiny
glamourous aura.
The aim being to produce media products that succesfuly suggest content,
context, and communication. To produce a psycho-physical stimulus through
visual information is a skill that has been learned from the various
avant-gardes by putting their experiments into the commercial context -
without taking the social, political and idealistic world models of
modernism, of course. This format speculates with the investments made by
the users, like their craze on the stock market, the investments into
an 'economy of ideas', and the simulated empty products snatching away the
peoples' attention/money without satifying their desires. As long as a
product is in demo mode it produces wishes by reiterating the promise of
the tremendous potentials of the full version always to come.

The problems of media design have not yet been properly discussed. Some
tend to see this 'artisan' practice more in its classical terms, where
design is the final phase of the production process. In the information
business, however, design plays the role of architecture, since it
structures activities and organises knowledge and memory. Navigational
design determines the modes of orientation and in the best case predics
all possible moves and interpretations by the users. The best interface
is the one which becomes invisible. Electronic images are bringing you to
the other sphere behind the screen, they are stimulating the imagination,
they are trying to mediate between programmers and users, they are pretending
to give technology a human face and are helping to reorganise business and
workflows. Electronic images are fulfilling an initiative role in the
first encounter with the realm of new media, they are mediating today
the sphere of [to-morrow's] dream time, the mythological nomos, the realm
of the uncouncious.

The aesthetics of total dispersion of the televised image do not break
through the screen of the representational paradigm. The celebration of
optical media exchanging the role of painting does not say much about the
average media users which even probably wish they could see real paintings
again. It is the the play with the modes of visibility and invisibility,
the aggregates of mediation between possible modes of representation
expanded from the flat tableaux of the computer screen, to different
frames of code and transformation, which can easily circumvent central
authorities of quality control just by finding new combinations, or
creating new hybrids and different intensities. On the carrier of digital
media, such very private mixes introduce for a while the pure joy of doing
it yourself. Before the old institutions or commercial enterprises move in,
other fields for tactical use are already there.

hybrid

Hybridity has many names, many faces. One of these is the merger we are
witnessing between video-technology and the Internet. But the much-vaunted
wedding of TV and Web may well never happen. The cult of the interface
culminates in its current brief to unifify all media under one big
browser. The most recent manifestation of this idea is the 'setup box',
the 'network computer' and the attempt to reinvent Television on the
Internet in the so called 'Push Media'. During the phase of the
war of standards we see a diversity of interrim media, a variety of
sub-standards, incompatibilities and central giant media which try
to include and swallow up small media.

On the technical level hybrid systems are very often the pragmatic way of
resistance, and an attempt at finding the best possible solution aside
from the one which consist of dominating the market by including different
or older systems. This quite resembles the status quo prevailing in pop
culture, where hybridity as cultural policy works against 'apartheid' and
the sweet promises of a totality which is hidden behind the concept of the
'Gesamtkunstwerk'. Hybridity as postmodern condition is not a strategy but

a starting point [- or a benchmark]. There is a certain threshold
where the dirtyfication, mixing and opening of systems gets rejected. The
double face of hybridisation needs both a critique in the context of the
expansion of global capital and an analysis of its possiblities of
emancipation at the micro-level. On the dangerous road which leads to
becoming a Media-Gesamtkunstwerk the concept of hybridity looses
contact to subjects and serves as a model of sophisticated organisation
and domination.

work

"Networking is notworking." (George Soros) Beyond the ideal of full
employment and the scenario of a jobless economy there are many practical
examples of inventing new forms of work. Whether this takes the form of a
neo-liberal part-time McJob or some activity within state-run
dole-for-work programmes, or some kind of occupation within the
fast-expanding black money economy, or a slave job in a sweat shop in the
"Little Asias" sprouting all over the place, or just a new, formalised
way of neighborhood help, the traditional concept of work is changing
rapidly. And very often it does so by applying information technology.
Also, at the same time, a certain type of "autonomous work" seems to
perstist. It drudges on at the limit of complete exhaustion, working with
the bare achievement of the existential minimum as reward, within settings
endowed with low resources and next-to-no budget. It must be the lure of
some different gratification than money which motivates some people to
work so hard in the non-profit-media. And yet this could become the model
for many more people. Work is still the golden road to self-realisation.
To detach it from the curcuits of capital begs the question on which
economy it should rely. It is all too easy to state that through the rise
of neoliberalism many sectors of the public sphere are being privatised as
well as other resources are getting exploited in an irreversible way,
which also means that there are no ways in turning back the clocks. While
everybody seems to reluctantly agree on the fact that not much money has
been made on the net to date, one keeps betting on a big boom triggered by
the global information networks.

The main issues at stake here are the emergence of new types of jobs in
the service sector and a need for more and lifelong education. Yet, in the
same breath, one oversees the existence of a shadow economy of gifts, a
do-it-yourself culture of producing public content without prospect of
making the big buck. Apart from the small community of net experts which
earn their keep with advisory or journalistic work, or the even smaller
band which finds their little niches in the art world, the vast majority
of small content producers are private individuals which like to publish
what they like for the sake of it. This process of democratisation of the
means of production, as sore and basic as it is, realises a big dream of
many social utopians. The only drawback being that the glory and class
consciousness of the new virtual working class does not seem to come very
much into existence. While we have all possible tools for more media
freedom still in front of us we are often unable to do anything,
hypnotized as we are by the pronouncements about the rise of total
marketization. Avoiding self-exploitaion and burn-out on the one hand,
sell-out and alienation on the other, the exploration of the possible
modes of finding work in the new media is a challenging task
indeed. While the trap of an ascethic ideal as well as the tragedy
of a realised utopia makes you hyper-sensitive against false promises,
you still have to work it out.

space

Different kind of spaces deserve different kinds of action. The media
space is defined by its participants: there's no content without social
context. And there is no way of defining a media space either without

someone accessing it. The problem with spacial metaphors is that they do
not normally include any time model. A combination of a time model with a
social model, with a definition of the modes of access to a set of media
equipment can already be enough to build a model of a small cyberspace. (You
can do that at home, like the radio-amateurs in the 20ies did.) It
could describe the ways a network can dynamically change, the
multipliticity of layers of accessablity, and the diversive ways how to
represent a set of datas. It could emphasize the importance of relying on
mutually agreed-upon standards, not only in the definition of interfaces
between the machines or parts of programs, the software and the hardware,
or different pieces of hardware. These same standards also occur on the
level of social associations, in form or jargons, marks for orientation,
certain conventions of naming and adressing the yet unknown. In this way a
cultural space could evolve, which is completly constructed by the
definitions and interdependencies of the actors which create it through
their actions and decisions. Cyberspace, besides its geographical
extension, is a pure social construction. It has as many dimensions as
there are nodes within it [male or female?] it is more a vectorial space,
or an imaginary one describable by fairly abstract mathematical models
far beyond any three dimensional metaphors.

To bind a cyberspacial social environment to a physical space therefore
may well render the need for a metaphorical architecture obsolete. Through
social contacts (and the attention they bring with it) a more fuzzy
process of forming a hybrid space which combines the real and the virtual
becomes productive. But the connection between the real and the virtual
realm will not go smoothly. It is a never ending story of disruptions,
bugs in the human-to-human communication, conflicting standards and
cultural glitches. The virtual should not become a quasi parallel world,
nor should we return to the tactile solidity of the 'real' cities, the
so-called nature or the social that might have existed once. The temporary
workspaces and gatherings we are organizing do not intend to produce a
concensus. No constructive solutions here. Our aim should be the design of
problems and conflicts, free content, not the synergy of all technical
media.

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