

Interview with Agricola de Cologne

By Seth Thompson (Wigged.net)

In March 2006, **Seth Thompson** from Wigged.net made an interview with Agricola de Cologne which was planned to be the basis for the article

RECONFIGURING THE SYSTEM: RTMARK & AGRICOLA DE COLOGNE

By Seth Thompson

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<http://www.wigged.net/html/news/reconfiguring.htm>

Question 1

STH

Since you began creating Internet based work, which project has had the most meaning for you and why?

AdC

For a better understanding it is good to know that all projects I ever realized Internet based (i.e. since 2000) stand in the context of a superordinated whole in form of [NewMediaArtProjectNetwork]:||cologne, a project which is basically a hybrid between and art project, a curatorial and research project, an virtual and physical network and consequently not to be undervaluated, a social context, as well, and it may even take shape of something else which is not thought, yet.

For a non-initiated, the variety of aspects and the diversity of projects realized in this global context may be looking confusing, especially because the social aspect has a complexity of facets in form of collaborating, participating and networking on different levels.

By facing this, it may become obvious, that the projects which seem to be realized individually or even separately, stand in fact, and got a specific meaning in this global and very dynamic social context, and above that potentially in one or more subordinated contexts, in addition.

Not all of the projects have a key function, of course, but they might also not replaced or removed since my working context is based on evolutionary processes, and even the smallest work represents a relevant result of a creative process, and may form the basis for something new.

One psychological condition for this kind of working may be seen in the variety of my personal talents and abilities, whether art or non-art related, which mostly cannot manifest themselves in just one single art work, but many different art works and contexts, and in fact best through the entire networking context of the superordinated whole.

Coming to the point of the question, I think this all encompassing whole has the most meaning, even if there is no real alternative which might have more or less meaning.

The alternative might only be facing single projects, but all of them spotlight only partial aspects and are more or less equally meaningful from my point of view.

This does not exclude, that I would not have one or the other favourite project.

A very special project represents the "Family Portrait" <http://familyportrait.engad.org> which received 2005 the Mosaica Award on the theme " Jews and Diaspora" - www.mosaica.ca.

This Internet based multi-media work is portraying several generations of the Jewish family Partnoy, which had a typical diasporadic course of life.

I met the main protagonist Raquel once via the Internet and during the years we were working together on this project a remarkable intimate relation developed, as it normally happens only among very good friends, but I never met her, nor any other family member ever in person.

Agricola de Cologne Interviews

http://www.agricola-de-cologne.de/blog/?page_id=88

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This project is as Internet specific and as human as it can be, it is far from any anonymity and meaninglessness, but most personal and very touching.

It represents a type of Internet based work which I would wish more projects of that kind would exist, as it is transporting important messages of human existence through the technologized net.

The project was completed especially for the MOSAICA Award, but the substantial exchange with Raquel via the net is still ongoing.

Question 2

STH

How do you measure success with your online projects?

AdC

How does an artist measure success, at all?

For some, only the material component counts, how many works are sold for the best price, to receive the best ranking on the market etc.

For some other artists, success means the realisation of certain visions or utopias, so basically the immaterial counts. And between these extremes many other positions can be found.

The Internet cannot be compared with the physical world, as it is not simply its simulation.

In concern of the situation of an (Internet based working) artist, there does not exist a market, yet (probably it will never exist) and besides some individual exceptions, the material, .i.e. making money directly through the Internet based art working, does not play any relevant role for measuring success. So, success has to be measured differently, then.

For being successful with Internet based art, one has to recognize first, besides the technological and some other aspects, the Internet represents basically a social context through linking, exchanging, communicating with other people, being part of a community, creating an audience, all this produces completely different conditions for an artistic working and for measuring success, chances which are not commercially orientated.

In the physical world, it is basically not the artist himself, who is creating actively the context for his professional success, but mediators like galleries, curators, museums etc. determine mostly the course of an artistic career.

Of course, the Internet is not completely innocent, but there does not exist one clear hierarchic and dogmatic system, but a lot of options asking for communicating, collaborating and networking and what is resulting from this.

How successful, I have been in this concern of creating such social contexts and my specific audience, can be simply proved through the very extended activities themselves, the quantity and quality of the realized projects & collaborating instances and the way how people show their confidence by collaborating during many years, speak for themselves..

The excellent results of the site statistics underline that impressively. In return, the quantity of projects I am realizing is also indicating that what I am doing has to be successful, otherwise, I would do not do it.

This described success again forms the basis for a lot of resulting consequences.

My projects and my person as such do not act just within this gigantic, but anyway limited framework, but through collaborations and networking I am present in many external social contexts, as well.

I am participating in numerous festivals around the globe, where not all, but really many of my projects are presented.

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A participation can be measured already as a certain success, but if a work is participating in countless festivals or was involved in numerous media art exhibitions and the best venues over a longer period, for instance, like some works do, considering success may get another dimension, although this certainly would not automatically indicate also extraordinary quality, but mostly it does, of course.

I am increasingly invited to be presented in smaller or bigger (physical) media art exhibitions, to curate, consult, hold lectures etc and I receive fees for these kind of activities, and this way, I am able to earn my living through my art working not directly via selling, for instance, but indirectly. For me personally, exactly this means probably the most success, while facing how I started once without any money and only a vague (not even artistic) idea. This again gives me the freedom and independence to act the way I do. A privilege and another success in the totality.

Question 3

STH

What do you hope to accomplish with your work?

AdC

"hope" would take for granted, that a conception or plan would exist facing concrete goals or probably even final results. But it does not.

By considering, how I started in 2000 an experiment from point zero, and facing now in 2006 what is currently visible as an intermediate result of all those activities, I initiated during these years, for me it is rather question, what might be the future perspectives based on what I have accomplished already.

The way how I work is following evolutionary processes, the life concept of internal structures rather than strict intellectual concepts, which in the end cannot be realized and do not succeed. It is no way of "l'art pour l'art".

Working this way, means also analysing continuously the field of activity, i.e. the Internet, and adjust and correct positions and perceptions when needed.

What did I accomplish already? What is perceivable? A confusing construction named [NewmediaArtProjectNetwork]:||cologne, a dynamic network including countless projects, artists, curators, institutions and organisations, without them my comprehensive work would not exist.

Its value speaks actually for itself, not only due to its qualitative and quantitative substance. It does not only show what I was able to do, but basically also how all those involved networking instances estimate

what I am doing, otherwise they would not have joint and remained for so long time.

But it may be estimated even higher, as anybody involved is taking part on a volonitarian basis without any direct material benefit, for instance by receiving a fee.

Who ever could have expected something like that, such a strong social context, and above related to art!

While facing this, my position nowadays is profoundly different than at the start, of course, and it is really the question in which direction can this networking construction develop further on. Through the increasing relevance, also the kind of responsibility, I am automatically taking, changes whether I want it or not, and consequently also the structures of the project as a whole and subordinated projects to be realized change.

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Regarding the perspectives, "hope" would be the wrong term again, as it would take for granted I might know now the direction of development which would be the best to be followed. But I still do not.

Hope would produce expectations and consequently pressure, which would have generally rather a counterproductive effect.

In fact, I am glad, that I recognized in time, that any form of institutionalization, i.e. the development into a new direction by covering the project with an ideological, inflexible and dogmatic concept, would destroy the unique informal character of an art project, this superordinated whole of the [NewMediaArtProjectNetwork]:||cologne is representing. By excluding this option, this perception might be also the key for anything following.

So, I would say, let's be surprised what will come next.