



The Network – a challenge in New Media

by Wilfried Agricola de Cologne

“*The Network*” is the abbreviation for [NewMediaArtProjectNetwork]||cologne, an experimental project environment for art and new media developed, created, curated and directed by Wilfred Agricola de Cologne (AdC), a multidisciplinary media artist, New Media curator and media art activist from Cologne/Germany.

Starting on 1 January 2000 as his big life experiment, he uses the Internet as a tool, as an art medium in its complexity and a platform for creating a new type of art, based on communicating - a big challenge in many concerns, also because its purpose is merely non-commercial, it does not require a membership, registration or password.

“*The Network*” represents a hybrid, simultaneously a media art project, a manifestation of philosophical ideas around the themes” memory” and “identity”, a research and curatorial project, a composition of dynamic social contexts in progress, a virtual and physical network on different levels, but also a multi-dimensional event environment organised completely online, however, not institutionally structured or associated, but realised in form of an independent art project. AdC himself is acting as a hybrid of different identities, not just as an artist, but also as the programmer, multimedia developer, curator, director in different functions and other virtual and physical instances of different kind, one might even say, he is representing “*the Network*” himself, re-creating himself continuously, he exists through others.

What is now manifesting itself as “*The Network*”, was not planned like that. It developed from a small cell through exploring the Internet for what is Internet specific in terms of art. One can divide the evolutionary processes abbreviated in three phases, which, however, did not follow one after another in a linear way, but non-linear sometimes parallel, at the same time or temporarily displaced.

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The 1st phase started in 2000, when *A Virtual Memorial – Memorial Project Environments against the Forgetting and for Humanity* (AVM), was launched online, not more than just a raw construction of ideas, not really structured yet, but in this way a fertile soil for exploring, experimenting, and learning by doing.

Based on the artist's very personal views, perceptions and philosophical ideas about human memory, humanity and a positive globalization, focussing on how people coming from most different cultural, religious, social, political or ethnic backgrounds deal with memory and the essential questions of life, AVM grew rapidly as a multi-media online context in quite a short time and became the framework for numerous subordinated theme related projects exploring Internet specific participatory, collaborative and networking aspects by inviting artists for participating and collaborating - just to mention a few project titles: "*Memorial for the Victims of Terror*"(2001), "*Violence Online Festival*" (2002), "*Rainforest Memorial* (2003) "*Women: Memory of Repression in Argentina*" (2004) "*://selfportrait – a show for Peace*" (2006). The ancient idea of the finished and completed art project, was replaced by the new type that was ongoing, to be updated and extended this way and changing continuously, offering the visitors or users permanently new reasons to revisit the online environment again and again, resulting a kind of community on a voluntary basis. In these terms, the ideas behind AVM became the fundament of all activities within "*The Network*", how different they may be.

Based on all those experiences promising perspectives for the future, the 2nd phase (starting in autumn 2000) is marked by AdC's specific method of working on different project ideas and their realisation, and thematic and technological aspects at the same time.

The idea of a virtual museum was actually not really new, *JavaMuseum – Forum for Internet Technology in Contemporary art* – gave this idea its specific structures dedicated to the needs of a new art genre (Internet based art). The social aspects got a new dimension in form of curating, ie. taking another type of responsibility. AdC's curating is not reduced to just selecting art works, contents and artists, collecting links and posting them online, but he curates also virtual space, that space, that is visible on a user's computer monitor i.e. he designs/ programs specific visual contexts or interfaces for each new project realisation. Curating becomes this way an expression of a new type of artworking. JavaMuseum realised since 2001 besides some global competitions, more than 20 showcases of "netart in a global context" and hosts this way a comprehensive collection of works (1000) from the high time of netart (2000-2004). JavaMuseum stands for a wide range of projects followed in sequence.

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The 3rd phase starting sometimes in 2002 parallel to phase 1 & 2, was based on the perception, that the virtual space of Internet gets actually it really meaning when it is confronted with the physical space. One might call it the cross-platform phase, cross-platform in terms of combining the basics of already existing or future project environments, since they showed how closely woven their structures are and how much they complement each other, on the other hand to realise new projects according to those perceptions in an exchange between virtual and physical space. But essential was, AdC had finally become aware that all those projects he had realised until now individually were all standing in a common all encompassing context, i.e a network, *The new Network* to be created by re-structuring anything done before went hand in hand with the new project platform to be developed. *NewMediaFest* was thought to act as a framework for new type of experimenting, see-> *Violence Online Festival* (2002-2004), followed by *[R][F]200x → XP – global networking project* (2004 -2007). Two of its “Memory Channels” dedicated to specific media, video and sonic art, i.e *VideoChannel* – and *SoundLAB*, became soon acting independently combining all perceptions AdC made during the years, resulting in 2006 also the foundation of *CologneOFF – Cologne Online Film Festival*, a new type of mobile film and video festival taking place simultaneously online and in physical space in cooperation with partner festivals.

From the beginning, AdC’s activities were addressed to an and the audience, all project environments became social contexts. After *The Network* had entered the discussion as an idea, new service platforms for participating artists and curators and users in general, were created: see -> *JIP – JavaMuseum Interview Project* (2006), *VIP – VideoChannel Interview Project* (2007), *AND - Artists Network Database* (2006) – central place for organising the 1400 biographies of the participating artists and curators -, and *netEX – networked experience* - a publishing platform for announcements and calls (2005).

Long before experts were considering a WEB 2.0, AdC was already working on his he personal Web 2.0 as a kind of open system. He sees his multi-faceted work on *The Network* as his specific type of artworking, where he can develop his abilities to the full.

While the success of *The Network* is manifesting itself visually online to each visitor, the site statistics show how many came: 500 000 hits in 2000, and more than 8 million hits during the past 12 months (Mai 2007-April 2008).

Certainly, some of the incorporated project environments can be considered as completed, *The Network* as such as a dynamic work in progress, however is ongoing with an open end.



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The Network ~

[NewMediaArtProjectNetwork]:||cologne – experimental platform for art and New Media
<http://www.nmartproject.net/>

NetEX - networked experience (2005-)

<http://netex.nmartproject.net/>

netMAX – publishing environments (2007 -)

<http://max.nmartproject.net>

AND – Artists Network Database (2006 -)

<http://and.nmartproject.net>

A Virtual Memorial – memorial project environments (2000 -)

<http://www.a-virtual-memorial.org/>

Memorial for the Victims of Terror (2001-)

<http://terror.a-virtual-memorial.org>

Memorial for the Victims of Aids (2001-)

<http://aids.a-virtual-memorial.org>

Tsunami Memorial (2004 -)

<http://tsunami.a-virtual-memorial.org>

Family Portrait (2001-2005)

<http://familyportrait.engad.org/>

Women: Memory of Repression in Argentina (2004-)

<http://argentina.engad.org>

://selfportrait - a show for Bethlehem (2006-)

<http://self.engad.org>

Cinematheque – streaming media project environments (2001 -)

<http://cinematheque.le-musee-divisioniste.org/>

JavaMuseum - Forum for Internet Technology in Contemporary Art (2001 -)

<http://www.javamuseum.org/>

JIP - JavaMuseum Interview Project (2006 -)

<http://jip.javamuseum.org/>



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NewMediaFest – festival project environments (2002 -)
<http://www.newmediafest.org/>

Violence Online Festival (2002-)
<http://violence.newmediafest.org/>

[R][R][F] 200X - global networking project (2004-2007)
<http://rrf200x.newmediafest.org/>

IMPACT event series project (2005)
<http://impact.newmediafest.org/>

VideoChannel – video project environments (2004 -)
<http://videochannel.newmediafest.org/>

VIP – VideoChannel Projectenvironments (2006-)
<http://vip.newmediafest.org>

SoundLAB - sonic art project environments (2004 -)
<http://soundlab.newmediafest.org/>

SIP – SoundLAB – Interview Project (2006-)
<http://sip.newmediafest.org>

CologneOFF - Cologne Online Film Festival (2006 -)
<http://coff.newmediafest.org/>

Agricola de Cologne site (2000-)
<http://www.agricola-de-cologne.de/>

Agricola de Cologne Moving Picture Collection (2001-)
<http://movingpictures.agricola-de-cologne.de/>