An interview with Wilfried Agricola de Cologne
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Net art is the new form of ultrapop communication tools. Is it the victory of graphic designers versus fine arts researcher/artists, or, in a more strategic view, is it a new current in which signs of the times are more evident?

I am not sure if this question is just an ironic way to describe the current situiation of "netart". In any case, it makes a certain problem visible, as there does not exist a binding definition of "netart". For answering this question seriously , I think netart should be not just measured how it is practiced currently but take also a view on the comparingly short history of art on the net, which is on the other side quite dramatic and not short at all, while facing the rapid development of technology and its continuously changing use also in art since the start of the Internet, but in this historical context also to take a longer view on the art works which belong to this new art genre, and then it would become obvious, that the different phases of technological development cannot compared with eachother. So, indeed the signs of the time are more than evident. But this is only a little part of the truth.

The viral and networking vocations of 'internet based art' represent rather the situationist and relational art of the Dada. This is the most precious value in a not-talkative and violent world. If you agree on this viewpoint, are these two vocations the product of the display (internet, i.e. the eccellence of the public domain) that is able to produce the changement of preference of the artists on relation versus production? Or is this era with all the new software production that widened the preference for tech artworks that are able to communicate..?

I would not reduce "internet based art" just to these two vocations, as I do not think that they are exclusively representative for Internet based art. What you call "viral", I would interpret as specific characteristics of the net, that information, respectively countless copies or clones of it, can be spread in a few seconds in real time to any place on the globe, and this represents indeed a relevant point in the consideration.

 I think artists may have different reasons why they feel a need for networking, and why they choose a form of artworking which has as a result of creating not a final product to be sold on the market. I think both vocations depend on each other and may certainly have an imminent influence on the decision why artists choose the development of a relational art creation, but as I see it there are actually many individual reasons, (and there are quantitatively not too many artists worldwide) to do such a radical step from the general commercialization and de-socialization towards its contrary.
When I became active in the field of Internet based art in 2000, I had no idea what might result from this indeed visionary decision to start this experiment. And as the essence of this experimenting and exploring, consequently (I would said today) the networking aspect came into the foreground which again leads automatically towards a de-materialized field of art. I would say, the Internet had in my personal case a kind of catalyst effect, but if I would have not been ready or willing to follow such a relational (communicating and networking) path, if I would not have seen perspectives in it after I started, I would not have done so, I am sure. The software aspect belongs actually to the spectrum of these two vocations and forms rather a condition than an alternative. In my case, the rapid development of software and technology has a stimulating effect even if I do not try everything just because its new. It challenges me continuously to rethink what I have done, and in the given case to modify, optimize or erase
So, all is connected to each other and depends on each other, and the values - what is more relevant - are changing continuously.

Violence, memory, identity: 3 icons of our times and also hot topics in a very instable era. These icons are underlined by your new media projects and seem to fill the net also in a talkative perspective (blogs, videoblogs, chat). Is internet a place for memory even if to erase and to build a new page is easy and without any guarantee of creation date? Is internet a place to speak of identity if there you maybe 1, no-one or one-hundred-thousand, just to quote the very famous Italian author Pirandello?

For me the Internet represents an ideal memorial space and I use it as such intensively in different concern. It reaches a wide audience which is sharing this memory. But the type of memory posted on the net is one-dimensional and cannot be compared with the complex structures of human memory, for instance,
which is from its structures multi-dimensional. As a memorial space, the Internet is containing just a specific type of memory in form of the information, people post on the net, thus this is strongly subjectively selective, but in its totality also unselective, as everything can be published. It needs a critical brain to separate the subjectively usefull form the useless infoirmation. In fact it does not matter, for how long information is posted on the net and whether it is partially or completely erased now and then , as it would be an utopia and is not the basic goal of the

Internet to preseve all information or knowledge of mankind or document all steps and processes, this would be an illusion all the more, as the majority of world population has no Internet access at all and is not able to share any information; and one aspect has not to be forgotten: one of the main purposes of the Internet is of economical nature. The Internet is a temporary memory for those who have the posibility to use it, and the user is receiving just a snapshot of this memory according certain filters each time he is visting the Internet. Art on the net has the potential to give the Net an additional dimension of memory. How I see it, sometimes it gives, sometimes not.
It is not wrong to face the Internet as a space of identity as well, while memory and identity depend on each other and are sometimes even identical. Although this memory has gigantic dimensions and a really large and continuously increasing quantity of users is surfing through the net, in contrary to what one might expect, there is in fact just one type of identity, the virtual identity, even if this may have most individual expressions.

How many screenings of R R R, your festival, have took place in a physical space? How many people were standing to see and how were the virtual contacts? Which were the more suitable for the media, according to you?

The [R][R][F]200x--->XP project is focussing on global networking the thematical aspect of "memory and identity" and a specific presentation form, i.e. the exchange between virtual and physical space via physical installations. As a project which is entirely Internet based, it contains automatically divers interactive components, and the physical installations were also basically interactive. So, this project has not been screened in the sense of the word, even if it includes potentially also a screening component. The project was presented in most different forms partially or in its totality more than 50 times in physical space between March 2004 and December 2006.
But it would have been frustating if people would have just stood and see instead of taking another position and exploring actively the gigantic project environment.
The virtual contacts were in fact the most prominent ones, as the process of the project development forms a relevant aspect in its realisation, of course , and the installation of the networking structures of this globally operating project were exclusively based on virtual contacts, not to mention the contacts to all the hundreds of artists, curators, institutions and organisations and finally the audience as the most important networking instance, and it does in fact not matter whether there was a physical audience or not, the audience which was exploring this project and communicating was also always virtual. There are no statistics which were counting all the visitors in physical space or all the countless virtual contacts which were necessary to develop and run the project, and the intensive communicating is still lasting. The site statistics of the RRF project makes it however obvious, the project is and was rasing really many online visitors. Also, it really cannot be said which kind of contacts were more suitable, both were very suitable due to or despite of their difference.

De Cologne stands from your present domicile. Agricola stands for what? Nature, the very beginning of the eras? Is identity such a light predicate for the virtual world that you may do not need a true name? Do you have had other names before this?

Agricola de Cologne, does not represent just an artist brand, but it is also and basically my artistic program. Agricola is a real name which is listed in my passport. In fact, Agricola represents the Latin word for the German "Bauer" or English "farmer", but in Renaissance times educated people changed not only in Germany often their family names into a Latin as Latin was the language of the educated people, there exist numerous humanists, philosophers and painters by name of Agricola. At the high school, I learned ancient languages like Latin and Greek, and I have a close connection to the Greek philosophy and the humanism. So, Agricola stands for the humanist and humanitarian ideas behind my artistic work, Cologne is not just the place where I live since 25 years. Founded by the Romans, the city is more than 2000 years old and was during the centuries until these days always an important center for the arts.- Cologne nowadays, stands basically also for the city of the media, it is hosting a very important film industry, most TV stations in Europe are located here and it is an important place for art and media, think of the famous media art academy KHM. So, Cologne is standing for awarness for history and but also the future. - in concern of art and Media. Combine "Agricola and de Cologne!", then you have an artist brand based on a certain program as it is manifesting itself through my art working. Indeed, the brand "Agricola de Cologne" is existing only since the year 2000, before that my name was just Agricola. In fact, it was this virtual existence and the possibility to use the virtual environment of the Internet as the basis for experimental artistic creations which let me survive after the traumatic breakdown before 2000.