Clone the Party!
An e-mail exchange between Beusch/Cassani and Heimo Ranzenbacher
on the subject of the TNC Network

What the people of Linz still refer to as the heavens is what we in TNC circles call the Skypage.

HR: Our perception of western culture is increasingly characterized by the terms intangible, processual, systemic and unconfined to a specific locality; art which strives in its conceptualization to be culturally relevant is subject to this perception. New Art has become, to a certain extent, a form of organization on the basis of this cultural perception and whose central concepts it radicalizes. How do you describe your attitude as artists faced with this new set of cultural conditions?

B/C: Our answer to the current cultural environment has been to set up and expand the TNC Network. The booming cyberradio Radio TNC has emerged out of the media-fiction Great Web Crash which we launched online almost two years ago. In the meantime, this, in turn, has generated largely autonomous spin-offs such as the CyberMemorial or the Headcheese Affair. Right now, the TNC Connection is active as initiator of Web Shows and global network events [Crash Party, Clone Party]. At the same time, we have taken advantage of opportunities to function as consultants — for example, setting up a cyberchannel in a Paris suburb's cable network — and we have also carried out production assignments in Europe and the US.

HR: Could this field of activity with which you as artists are involved perhaps be described as "configuration art" — by which I mean to distinguish it from "communication art" which, roughly speaking, addresses the telematic environment in order to treat it as its subject, positioning itself outside of this environment — namely, in the traditional field of art identified by art projects and works of art? Your work, on the other hand, seems rather to be based upon the fundamental process of its implementation into the telematic environment — with, necessarily, systemic mutual interaction — and ultimately results in the configuration of additional, new possibilities which have been opened up in this way. Art itself seems to be the project; and, derived from this "project: Art," art projects emerge in a new environment, the formation of which they have helped to bring about.

B/C: We much prefer the term "networking," understood in its most comprehensive sense as a configuring activity in the telematic environment. A highly dynamic network like the TNC Connection does not come about on its own. Once cultural phenomena have condensed into a setting charged with tension [the Web Crash], what subsequently occurs is a link-up of the know-how and infrastructure made available by a wide array of individuals and sub-networks

— from the internationally recruited guest crew; to the French news channel France Info, the trend-conscious Berlin station Radio Fritz, the Ars Electronica Center, and the Paris Technology Museum, to name just a few; all the way to HotWired. Depending upon the nature of each TNC event, sectors of this core-network are activated and new elements are added. For example, the link-up of the various user sub-networks is what provided the decisive kick for the Crash Party and enabled it to go beyond the level of hip online spectacle to become a culturally relevant event. Now, we are fulfilling our responsibility within the TNC production and communications network by making sure that the process which has been unleashed develops further as quickly as the Headcheese Sample gets moldy. ... We continue to coordinate most of these activities: functioning as catalysts and hosts providing stimulus for events like the Clone Party, and, outfitted with a data-snorkel, still taking the plunge into the whirlpool of intangible production — the Shift-key fully depressed. Multitasking is a matter of course in a network-linked production process.

HR: Does your understanding of your role correspond at all with the generally held image of the artistic profession?

B/C: "Vous n'êtes pas des organisateurs, vous êtes des artistes, merde alors!" ["You're not organizers, damn it, you're artists."] This was one curator's commentary in 1992 on our activities, which thus did not conform at all to the usual preconceptions. It is clear that the projects and events which we have initiated and which are based upon the radical new structures of power and responsibility inherent in network-linked systems can no longer be subsumed by traditional conceptions of a work of art and its author. This is just as discernible in our goal [the set-up and expansion of the TNC Connection] as it is in the various functions that we are carrying out thereby. In place of the authority of an author over a work, there emerges what we often describe with the term "shared process and data management."

HR: You can be counted among the handful of individuals who are employing radio as a prestructured — and, as a consequence, structuring — network. What does radio mean for you in general and in connection with strategies specific to TNC.

B/C: In the last 10 years, during which we have produced channels disseminating music, culture and information, radio, like all conventional media, has been subjected to a gigantic process of change. While we were completing the first fully digital production for Radio France in 1989, one of the technicians showed up with an impressive set of sunglasses, which he proceeded to successively don in an effort to protect his eyes from the pernicious effects of the flickering video monitor. During the coffee breaks, we discussed the subject of his red, watery eyes at epic length, and hardly said a word about the newly-acquired state-of-the-art hard-disk recording system. Although the video screen quality was really rather primitive, this theatrical performance with sunglasses sent a signal which said, above all: "What can I possibly do to avoid seeing things change?" At this time, we were playing the uncomfortable role of the iconoclasts, attacking the status quo and confronting radio — that is to say, our production partner — with the pattern of change going on before its very eyes. And we took advantage of this situation to propagate forms of work which were appropriate to changed conditions of production, meaning that we did away with the rigid partitions separating technician, author, director and producer which had been based upon top-down media-thinking. Nor were we faced by no resistance when we first went on the air in the Austrian Broadcasting Corporation channel with our Macintosh that we brought from Paris, or integrated public broadcasting stations into network events and introduced them to the concepts of network-linked production processes. The fact that this was first time that their programs were being presented live on the Internet — through the cyberradio channels of

Radio TNC — most pointedly brought these new realities into confrontation with their conception of themselves which was a relic left over from another age. Of course, for a long time, Radio TNC was one of the very few platforms on which radio — with its techno-aesthetic possibilities, its historically relative nature, its material constraints and limitations — was linked up to the Internet in a consistent fashion and in all conceivable combinations. The experience we gained during this process has been made available to others in a study commissioned by the French Ministry of Communications which we completed in late 1996.

HR: Your strategies have the effect of opening up or dissolving the unidirectional relationship between the transmitter and the receiver, in favor of a dynamic process which basically does away with controlling intervention. Is radio becoming archaic as an information-generating medium as a result of this linkage to technologies which permit it to process information?

B/C: "How come my Fiat doesn't have an Internet link-up!?" was what one desperate listener quite properly asked during the Crash Party. Luckily, the radio was there to make up for Fiat's regrettable technological deficiency. The TNC Party Channel, which will once again perform an important function in the Clone Party, was broadcast during the Crash Party via Internet and satellite as well as standard radio wave transmission [on the frequencies of Radio Fritz]. The link-up of this existing, "pre-structured" sub-network to the TNC network — for example, at the Crash Party — had the quite tangible effect of keeping the Fiat driver posted during his trip about the latest developments on the various online party floors and providing him with a feed via cellular phone into the global party loop. In other words, the link-up of radio and Internet in an appropriately configured setting offers a high innovation potential in the sphere of interplay known as a Fiat — push and pull.

HR: The latest project to come out of TNC networking is the Clone Party, which you have announced as a refinement of and an expansion upon the production pattern developed in the Crash Party. Why "clone"? After all, doesn't cloning refer to the production of an heir, in the vocabulary of information, a next-generation spin-off. Crash Party was based upon a fiction, both in the sense of a story as well as of an assumption, of a cognitive model which, during the course of its design for the purpose of exploration of possibilities, simultaneously generated its own form of practice. The crash of a web site with direct consequences for its users [by means of the dissolution of the borders between man and machine] and a rescue effort assuming multimedia proportions with derivative effects in "real life" ... You have, as it were, given practical application to the principle upon which Umberto Eco's novel Foucault's Pendulum was based: the successive implementation of the real by the fictive. The Clone Party, on the other hand, seems to manage without fiction.

B/C: The setting for the Crash Party was a mix of carefully measured dosages of cyberclichés, techno-catastrophism and TNC goodies. The storyline of the Great Web Crash and its victims disappearing into virtual oblivion had tremendous appeal both to an 11-year-old nerd as well as to a media activist of a more mature age, triggered inputs and turned the Crash Party into an immersive-participatory network event. The setting of the Clone Party, on the other hand, proceeds from a "cognitive model which, during the course of its design for the purpose of exploration of [genetic engineering] possibilities, generates its own form of practice": Ian Wilmuts epoch-making success with Dolly ... On September 11, 1997, when we will squeeze into our blue-genes and link up in a global network to dance the Body Sampling Step in celebration of the upcoming cloning of a human being, the interpenetration of fiction and reality will have already brewed up such a high-proof cocktail that we random-generated beings will have our heads spinning long before the hangover sets in ...

HR: The buzz as indication of cybergenesis kicking in among the sons of man ...

B/C: It must have been precisely this feeling of giddiness that overcame Gerfried Stocker as he opened the first CyberMemorial at the Ars Electronica Festival 96. In a solemn ceremony in the Radio TNC online studio, he was to have cut the virtual ribbon with a crisp click of the mouse while pronouncing those words which have long since become legendary: "Love, Peace and Radio TNC — Cyberimmortality for Everybody!" Indeed, in the face of this uplifting perspective which has proved so intoxicating for us sons of man, Gerfried Stocker inadvertently sliced through the ceremonial ribbon during the trial run ...

HR: The Clone Party is being announced by online flyer; it will feature live videos and tele-DJs; the TNC Wavemaster will provide for plenty of offbeat cybertainment, etc. What significance does dealing with elements of popular culture have for you?

B/C: In the Internet, with its pronounced hyper-transcultural nature, it is senseless to purvey highly concentrated images of identity evoking strictly demarcated cultural sectors. For us, the prime consideration as far as this is concerned is not dealing with elements, but rather the issue of presence in culturally relevant spaces, in which eclectic, complex code-ensembles design their identities themselves and are undergoing permanent change.

HR: In what way do you see an analogy between Dolly, the product of the genetic engineer's art, the projected successful cloning of a human being, and network-linked existences? In the cyborg? I'm not referring here to the fictional being; but rather to one that is closer to our reality — that is a hybrid of human being and machine, but only insofar as it is represented by the increasing obsolescence of certain dichotomies such as man/woman, nature/culture owing to its special technological nature. A phenomenological being.

B/C: "What the people of Linz still refer to as the heavens is what we in TNC circles call the Skypage. And the Linz Skypage is blue again today for the first time in ages; and the sun that is projected upon it is shining again ..." The lines of tension which we are building into the Clone Party setting [also] converge in the cyborg. A conceptual pairing of burning interest to us in this regard is jest/seriousness. This is suitable, for instance, in order to determine the human portion of the hybrid we've just referred to. Illustrated in the exclusive TNC Cyborg Test: If the above statement can still make you laugh, you're not a cyborg yet ...

HR: The sensation surrounding Dolly is not only a scientifically but also a culturally determined one. In Japan, for example, experimentation with genetic engineering has far fewer ethical implications than, say, a heart transplant. What is your position on the issue of genetic engineering and the culture-specific views expressed pro and con, or of ambivalent attitudes in such questions, in light of all globalizing trends? Have your views been taken into account in the Clone Party?

B/C: The Clone Party is a distributed, global event. Each participant represents his or her own culture-specific point of view — there will be ample access possibilities and channels of communication [the TNC party studio at the Ars Electronica Festival, the long online lead-in, the "private" party floors, etc.]. At the Crash Party in London, the anniversary of the Great Web Crash was celebrated, as expected, by imbibing liquid refreshment in pubs, whereas the partygoers in Osaka — as is apparently customary at Japanese birthday parties — served up red-colored Sekihan rice which they sent out to the party community in the form of steaming GIFs ...

HR: You have announced in the Internet that "Interface" will be the Clone Party's theme. Interface is being addressed as a possibility/form of organization of the sensory perception of a process which has been initiated and takes place unconfined to a specific locality, and reaches its culmination on the spot. Could this be a way of describing the FleshFactor which the Ars Electronica Festival 97 has taken as its theme — in the sense of the experience of the individual as the interface in the relationship of technology and its cultural manifestations? This would also imply that on-the-spot experiences become the essential factor in the subsequent process — the "global party loop" ... and bring about online experiences.

B/C: Each partygoer is a junction and an interface in a highly complex techno-social event and mediates his or her subjective experiences to others as an individual in a network-linked experiential sphere. The perception of the event as a whole — splintered and, of necessity, never more than a partial impression — immediately encouraged the Crash partygoers to make use of all available interconnected channels in order to exchange information and impressions. Whether you were at HotWired in San Francisco dancing to Beta Lounge's DJ kicks, or alone in your apartment with a six-pack of beer taking part in a CU-SeeMe-Chat, or in the Berlin real-world venue sitting with others in front of a terminal uploading video files to the FTP server — there were as many ways to party in this network-linked format as there were participants. Or, as an inveterate IRC user formulated it: "The entire evening, I did exactly what I do every other evening: chatting. But during the Crash Party, for the first time in my life, I felt in the tips of my fingers what it means to be an active part of a global Internet event."

HR: What kind of refinements and expanded features have you worked in since the Crash Party?

B/C: The long online lead-in of the Clone Party is being used to generally refine the interface design, so that each partygoer can become aware of and take advantage of the interface function previously mentioned. There is also the increased sensitization of the TNC guest hosts and DJs to the network-linked space in which they are active. They appear as party agents, as digital doubles, and stimulate the interaction of others. Users have the opportunity to operate and promote their own homepages, so-called "private" online partyfloors [and thus party sub-networks]. Of course, there is also the on-the-spot TNC party channel broadcast via radio and Internet. It functions as an indicator of complexity, scanning the party floors in the Internet and in the real world, engaging the circulating data streams and inputting the live statements of partygoers and party floor operators into the global party loop.

HR: What is emerging is a quasi-fractal picture of a potentially global Clone Party — by means of a core idea out of which a setting forms as a type of branching arrangement, the structure of which reflects the idea and its subsequent processes, at least in their potentiality. Can it be said that the principle of cloning — with all due apologies for the rather audacious mixture of fractals with cloning — has thus also been realized as, so to speak, project- and/or process-immanent and is not simply a mere afterthought?

B/C: Precisely. The slogan "Clone the party!" is, of course, programmatic. If we replace the term "branches" with "sub-networks," then we are describing the very process that we are trying to achieve, for example, with the various online party floors: a series of cloned clone-parties which duplicate the initial setting in its potentiality — but which subsequently diverge from it according to the nature of their contextual character. With each newly linked-up "private" online party floor, with each spontaneously launched home party, the network event reproduces itself horizontally.

HR: The party concept — it carries with it something easy-going, a sense of casualness in the form of a social get-together ...

B/C: A very "heavy" occasion in rather "light" surroundings. For the duration of one long night, the setting of the Clone Party is the scene of a test-run of new perspectives of human existence, and whose objective is to make new network-linked spaces capable of being experienced.

HR: Lately, the voices heard in the discourse surrounding these "new perspectives of human existence" have sounded more like Cassandra's cries prophesying misfortune. Stanislaw Lem, for instance, has spoken of "exformation"; in Fluchtgeschwindigkeit, Paul Virilio has postulated the indivisibility of the aesthetics of perception from the ethics of perception. Are network projects such as Clone Party — particularly on account of their emphasis upon playfulness — celebrations as apologia of the conditions of network-linked existence?

B/C: Since the historic web crash of February 4, 1996, the crashed homepage of cyberradio Radio TNC has become a favorite destination for a great many net-trotters. What better place to contemplate the joys and sorrows of one's own existence in the Internet than amid the pitiful ruins of the most up-to-date communications technology? Where the Clone Party is taking this was announced in the online flyer — an ambiance between "the laughter and the tears" ...

HR: The setting in which the Clone Party takes place is simultaneously the field than [co]determines the course of events. It is the public space of radio and the Internet, the urban as well as the [presumably] private space; spaces permeated by one another and having in common the fact that they can be said to be politicized spaces. They are public in the sense that they are public access places enabling information to be made public, discursive in the sense of the acceptance of authority. At present, we are just as far removed from the utopia of a dialogue-based democracy — as represented by the processual aspect of the Clone Party — as we are from a form of art which asserts [or engenders] its freedom in the sphere of information. Nevertheless, the Clone Party is, in my opinion, a model — freedom attained by means of a setting featuring a dialogic structure within a discursive one. What is your view on this?

B/C: One of the most interesting moments of the Crash Party occurred immediately after a restaging of the web crash, when users were called upon to restore the crashed homepages of our participating partners by uploading Image files from a cache to an FTP directory which had been set up for this purpose. Within minutes, the server was hopelessly overloaded. Of course, the users were not the least bit interested in a reconstruction of the original, rather preferring free-style repair. And they began to totally revamp the designs of the homepages — including those of public broadcasting stations.

HR: This also describes something totally different than is the case with framework- [or matrix-] oriented interactive works of art featuring merely inverse dynamics. With inverse-dynamics systems, all the talk about doing away with the authority of the author over his work is purely rhetorical. The open, offensive dynamics which are initiated here, however, do indeed blur the borders between the creators — and the framework they have set up — and those who have been activated by them.

B/C: When the DJ in San Francisco samples a Wilmut statement, when we in Linz mix the RealAudio stream from Paris into the Party Channel, when a user in Holland leaves the chat

room — these are all events, each, needless to say, of a completely different nature, but each effecting the course of events in its respective sub-network. However, toutes proportions gardées, due to their link-up to the global party loop, all have consequences upon the course which the event as a whole takes. The question of who where how when what has played a role in the Clone Party setting becoming the Clone Party or the Clone Party network is no longer determinable in a process such as this one characterized by "offensive dynamics." On the other hand, what can be determined — and directly experienced — is the massive parallelism and complexity of a pulsing, network-linked process.

HR: The announced goal of the Clone Party is to make new network-linked spaces capable of being experienced and you have described the Clone Party as a type of intensification of an on-going process — which we previously referred to as "project: Art." How would you characterize your experience in your art project-oriented network-linked activities?

B/C: Events like the Crash Party — occurring at the nexus of online and real-world experiences — impact the awareness of life as lived by a species whose numbers increase by the click of a mouse, for whom network-linked activity has absolutely nothing to do with ordering a pizza by Internet. It is the species of the êtres interconnectés.

Clone Party [September 11, 1997]
To celebrate the upcoming cloning of a human being, partygoers from throughout the world are squeezing into their blue-genes and linking up in a global network to dance the Body Sampling Step. At the same time, the network/radio event "between the laughter and the tears" initiated by Beusch/Cassani is becoming a high-profile presence at numerous network-linked public and private online and real-world venues. Hybridized digital doubles of the party crew [TNC guest hosts, guest DJs, etc.] are actively involved as party agents throughout the network, scanning the various party floors, engaging the circulating data streams and mixing the TNC party channel out of what they encounter. Together with live reports and party news flashes, this is fed on into the flow of the worldwide party loop via Internet, satellite and radio.
http://radiotnc.aec.at/cloneparty/

The Headcheese Affair
In the TNC online studio at Ars Electronica 96, an Italian visitor began passing around a piece of formaggio di porco [headcheese]. The rapidly rotting headcheese sample then set out on a round-the-world odyssey, triggering profound debates on digital cannibalism and cyberreincarnation and, during a TNC/HotWired live show, gathering the net community together into the first global "ecstatic headcheese eating union" ...
http://radiotnc.aec.at/headcheese/
http://www.hotwired.com/talk/poptalk/96/49/index4b.html

The Great Web Crash
On February 4, 1996, the first Web Crash plunged the Internet community into a state of panic. The Internet stayed down for hours; throughout the world, data was being lost by the gigabyte; a flesh-and-blood cyberhost vanished without a trace in the virtual great beyond. Crashologists from around the world have advanced the most audacious theories, but the riddle of this new-fangled technological catastrophe remains unsolved...The Great Web Crash, an interactive media fiction launched in the Internet by Beusch/Cassani in 1995, is the initial setting on which the TNC Connection is based [see the Ars Electronica Festival 96 catalog, pp. 366—375].
http://radiotnc.aec.at/webcrash/

CyberMemorial
For over a year, users have been chiseling their inscriptions into the silicon of the virtual monument commemorating the victims of the Great Web Crash and spreading their message of good news throughout the Internet: "Cyberimmortality for everybody!"
http://radiotnc.aec.at/cybermemorial/

Radio TNC
Radio TNC evolved out of the media fiction of the Great Web Crash. Since February 1996, an international guest crew has taken turns hosting the legendary online microphone of the booming cyberradio. The program has included live DJ mixes, talk shows, straight news flashes, cyberserials and TNC specials [live online and on-the-air at, among other locations, the Ars Electronica Festival 96 and 97 as well as Isea '97 in Chicago].
http://radiotnc.aec.at

The TNC Network
The TNC Connection founded by Beusch/Cassani operates cyberradio Radio TNC, produces offbeat cybertainment [Great Web Crash, Headcheese Affair], global network events [Crash Party, Clone Party] and carries out consulting and production assignments in Europe and the US. Depending upon the demands of each respective TNC event, the core network establishes link-ups with the know-how and/or infrastructure of various available sub-networks [including the Ars Electronica Center; Beta Lounge, San Francisco; Radio Fritz, Berlin; the BBC; music channel Couleur 3; the Technology Museum, Paris; France Info; and HotWired].
http://radiotnc.aec.at

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