

Gunther Reisinger

## Closeness vs. Dislocation Contextualizing Net-Based Art

Conference of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research.  
at Ars Electronica 2007

In the 1990s the field of media art was extended to include the genre of net-based art. Exploratory and seminal, it critically sounds out and traverses the boundaries of the medium and of the very concept of art itself—and has nevertheless often been declared obsolete.

In 2005 the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research. in Linz took upon itself the task of integrating this relatively young variety of media art into scholarly art research with the aim of developing specific ways to describe the works in this genre, combining existing theoretical approaches and sources for this purpose.

In the course of discussions based on three methodical approaches, the conference “Closeness vs. Dislocation—Contextualizing Net-Based Art” will attempt to put net-based art into a necessarily interdisciplinary context within the field of media art research, examining the issues of archiving and re-presentation of this art form as part of our “digital cultural heritage.”

In addition to critically incorporating the constitution of the medium of the Internet into media history and looking at what ramifications it may have for the processes of artistic creation (Ted Nelson, Lev Manovich, Marc Ries), art historical convergences and referentiality between net-based and traditional art forms will be explicitly addressed (Julian Stallabrass, Verena Kuni, Charlie Gere). The presentation of the archiving and documentation project *netzpioniere.at* (Gunther Reisinger, Dieter Daniels) will then create a connection between the theoretical basis and the restoration and archiving efforts, thus closing the event with a symbiosis of applied and basic research.

The division of the conference content into three topic areas is modeled on the structure of the research project at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research.<sup>1</sup> The project creates a link between source-critical methodological questions in art scholarship and the technological media category “net.art” as artistic case study:

### The Medial Constitution of Internet. Media-Philosophical Settings

Based on a philosophical approach to media and art, we will look at former and current applications of the medium of Internet and their repercussions on artistic forms of expression, including the formation of communities and the phenomenological adaptations during the last two decades, illuminating the artistic issues raised by the often underestimated technological and social constitution of the medium of Internet.

Following Vannevar Bush’s *Memex* (1945) and before Douglas Engelbart’s *Augment* (1968) or Tim Berners-Lee’s *HTML* (1989), Ted Nelson already laid one of the cornerstones of the present World-WideWeb as hypertextual network with his *Xanadu*<sup>2</sup> system in 1960. In 1965 Nelson published the term “hypertext.” The formation of artistic communities, explored here from an explicitly media-philosophical viewpoint while applying media-archeological methodology to manifestations of the information aesthetic, will then lead us to a contemplation of the present state of affairs.

### Art with(out) History? References, Art-Historical Classifications and Definitions

By undertaking a critical appraisal of art historical approaches to net-based art forms, we will try to derive a reworked methodological access to the nearly 20-year history of artistic works on the Internet. The different approaches to this young genre of media art will be discussed from various perspectives within art scholarship in order to derive the necessary adaptation of art scholarship and especially art historical methodology.

The panel will relate the parallel development of technological history and the art-historical avant-garde toward a participatory form of art and culture to the history of net.art. By looking back as well as forward, productive future prospects can be developed in relation to current necessities and the future outlook for an analysis of web-based artworks that is firmly grounded in art history.

### Applied Media Sciences: The Net Pioneers Project

By consolidating our findings on the medial constitution of the artistic use of the Internet (Part I) and on adapting traditional art historical approaches to possible classifications and a new way of describing net.art (Part II), we will develop a methodological symbiosis by discussing the concrete issues of restoring, archiving and documenting Internet-based works in their own artistic medium.

The media utility of the artistic work, archiving and documentation in the digital online medium brings up many theoretical questions with respect to how to effect a valid re-edition of earlier net.art. The research project *netzpioniere.at* will be presented, which is attempting to answer these questions over a period of three years.

Translated from German by Jennifer Taylor-Gaida

- 1 "Werk, Abbild und Quelle. Kunsthistorische Aspekte der Archivierung, Dokumentation und Re-präsentation netzkünstlerischer Arbeiten." Research project at the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research. under the direction of Gunther Reisinger. <http://media.lbg.ac.at/de/content.php?iMenuID=30>.
- 2 Project Xanadu, <http://xanadu.com>

**Organizer:** Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research., Linz

**Concept:** Gunther Reisinger | Dieter Daniels (Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research.)

#### Participants:

Ted Nelson, Visiting Professor of Multimedia, University of Southampton (UK)  
Lev Manovich, Visual Arts Department, University of California, San Diego (USA)  
Marc Ries, Media Theory and Aesthetics, HGB Leipzig (D) and MultiMediaArt, FH Salzburg (A)  
Verena Kuni, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität Frankfurt am Main, Institut für Kunstpädagogik, Frankfurt/Main (D)  
Julian Stallabrass, Courtauld Institute of Art, London (UK)  
Charlie Gere, Director of Research, Institute for Cultural Research Lancaster University (UK)  
Gunther Reisinger, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research. Linz (A)  
Dieter Daniels, Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research. Linz (A)  
*Moderated by:* Dieter Daniels