



## University of Dundee

### THE THING Hamburg

Sollfrank, Cornelia; Puffert, Rahel ; Chevalier, Michel

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BOOKS

VOL 20 NO 1 BOOK SENIOR EDITORS LANFRANCO ACETI, SUSANNE JASCHKO,  
JULIAN STALLABRASS / BOOK EDITOR BILL BALASKAS

The Leonardo Electronic Almanac is proud to announce the publication of its first LEA book, titled "Red Art: New Utopias in Data Capitalism." The publication investigates the relevance of socialist utopianism to the current dispositions of New Media Art, through the contributions of renowned and emerging academic researchers, critical theorists, curators and artists.



# RED ART

New Utopias in Data Capitalism

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#### LEA PUBLISHING & SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

##### Editor in Chief

Lanfranco Aceti [lanfranco.aceti@leoalmanac.org](mailto:lanfranco.aceti@leoalmanac.org)

##### Co-Editor

Özden Şahin [ozden.sahin@leoalmanac.org](mailto:ozden.sahin@leoalmanac.org)

##### Managing Editor

John Francescutti [john.francescutti@leoalmanac.org](mailto:john.francescutti@leoalmanac.org)

##### Editorial Manager

Çağlar Çetin [caglar.cetin@leoalmanac.org](mailto:caglar.cetin@leoalmanac.org)

##### Art Director

Deniz Cem Öndüğü [deniz.onduygu@leoalmanac.org](mailto:deniz.onduygu@leoalmanac.org)

##### Editorial Board

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##### Editorial Address

Leonardo Electronic Almanac

Sabancı University, Orhanlı – Tuzla, 34956

Istanbul, Turkey

##### Email

[info@leoalmanac.org](mailto:info@leoalmanac.org)

##### Web

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LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC BOOK, VOLUME 20 ISSUE 1

# Red Art: New Utopias in Data Capitalism

BOOK SENIOR EDITORS

**LANFRANCO ACETI, SUSANNE JASCHKO, JULIAN STALLABRASS**

BOOK EDITOR

**BILL BALASKAS**

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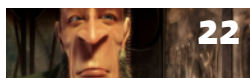
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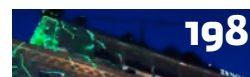
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# Commonist Red Art: Blood, Bones, Utopia and Kittens

**Does Red Art exist? And if so, who creates it and where can we find it?** This special issue of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac addresses these questions and collates a series of perspectives and visual essays that analyze the role, if any, that Red Art plays in the contemporary art world.

Red Art, these are two simple words that can generate complex discussions and verbal feuds since they align the artist to a vision of the world that is 'Red' or 'Communist.'

Nevertheless, even if the two little words when placed together are controversial and filled with *animus*, they are necessary, if not indispensable, to understand contemporary aesthetic issues that are affecting art and how art operates in the context of social versus political power relations within an increasingly technological and socially-mediated world.

Red Art could be translated – within the contemporary hierarchical structures – as the art of the powerless versus the art of the powerful, as the art of the masses versus the art of the few, as the art of the young versus the old, as the art of the technological democrats versus the technological conservatives, as the art of the poor versus the art of the rich... Or it could be described as the art of the revolutionary versus the status quo. In the multitude of the various possible definitions, one appears to stand out for contemporary art and it is the definition of art as bottom-up participation versus art as top-down

prepackaged aesthetic knowledge. And yet, what does Red Art stand for and can it be only restricted to Communist Art?

The contemporary meaning of Red Art is different from what it may have been for example in Italy in the 1970s, since so much has changed in terms of politics, ideology and technology. It is no longer possible to directly identify Red Art with Communist Art (as the art of the ex Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or of its satellite states and globalized Communist political parties which were and continue to be present in the West – albeit inedulcorated forms) nor as the art of the left, but there is a need to analyze the complexity of the diversification and otherization of multiple geopolitical perspectives. <sup>1</sup>

If today's Red Art has to redefine its structures and constructs it becomes necessary to understand who is encompassed within the label of Red Artists and what their common characteristics are. Red Artists – if we wanted to use this category – and their aesthetic production cannot be reduced to the word 'Communist,' borrowing passé ideological constructs. An alternative to the impasse and the ideological collapse of communism is the redefinition of Red Art as the art of the commons: **Commonist Art.** <sup>2</sup> If Red Art were to be defined as the art of the commons, Commonist Art, thereby entrenching it clearly within technoutopias and neoliberalist crowd sourcing approaches for collective participation, this would provide a contradictory but functional framework for the realization of

common practices, socially engaged frameworks, short terms goals and 'loose/open' commitments that could be defined in technological terms as *liquid digital utopias* or as a new form of permanent dystopia. <sup>3</sup>

The XXIst century appears to be presenting us, then, with the entrenched digitized construct of the common versus the idea of the Paris Commune of 1871, thereby offering a new interpretation of the social space and an alternative to traditional leftist/neoliberal constructs. The idea of the common – as an open access revolving door, is opposed to the concept of the commune – as a highly regulated and hierarchical structure.

The 'semantic' distingo between commons and communes becomes important since both terms are reflections of constructions and terminological frameworks for an understanding of both society and art that is based on 'likes,' actions and commitments for a common or a commune. The commitment, even when disparagingly used to define some of the participants as click-activists and armchair revolutionaries, <sup>4</sup> is partial and leaves the subject able to express other likes often in contradiction with one another: e.g. I like the protests against Berlusconi's government and I like the programs on his private TVs.

I find the idea of the commons (knowledge, art, creativity, health and education) liberating, empowering and revolutionary, if only it was not expressed within its own economic corporative structures, creating further layers of contradiction and operational complexities.

The contradictions of contemporary Red Art and contemporary social interactions may be located in the difference between the interpretations of common and commune – the commune upon which the Italian Communist Party, for example, based its foundations in order to build a new 'church.'

The relationships in the commune of the Italian communists (oxymoronically defined Cattocomunisti or Catholic-communist) rests in faith and in compelled actions, in beliefs so rooted that are as blinding as blinding is the light of God in the painting *The Conversion of Saint Paul on the Road to Damascus* by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.

*[...] and from the leadership an aggressive unwillingness to allow any dissent or deviation. 'That time produced one of the sharpest mental frosts I can remember on the Left,' the historian E. P. Thompson would recall from personal knowledge of the CP... <sup>5</sup>*

It is this blind faith that has generated the martyrs of communism and heretical intellectuals, accusations from which not even Antonio Gramsci was able to escape. The vertical hierarchical structure of the commune and of the Communist Party produced heretics and immolations, but also supported artists, intellectuals, academics and writers that operated consonantly with the party's ideals: people that sang from the same preapproved institutional hymn sheet.

**Stefania:** *This young generation horrifies me. Having been kept for years by this state, as soon as they discover to have two neurons they pack and go to study, to work in the US and London, without giving a damn for who supported them. Oh well, they do not have any civic vocation. When I was young at the occupied faculty of literature, I oozed civic vocation. [...] I have written eleven novels on civic duty and the book on the official history of the Party.*

**Jep Gambardella:** *How many certainties you have, Stefania. I do not know if I envy you or feel a sensation of disgust. [...] Nobody remembers your civic vocation during your University years. Many instead*

*remember, personally, another vocation of yours that was expressed at the time; but was consumed in the bathrooms of the University. You have written the official history of the Party because for years you have been the mistress of the head of the Party. Your eleven novels published by a small publishing house kept by the Party and reviewed by small newspapers close to the Party are irrelevant novels [...] the education of the children that you conduct with sacrifice every minute of your life ... Your children are always without you [...] then you have - to be precise - a butler, a waiter, a cook, a driver that accompanies the boys to school, three babysitters. In short, how and when is your sacrifice manifested? [...] These are your lies and your fragilities.* <sup>6</sup>

To the question, then, if Red Art exists I would have to answer: YES! I have seen Red Art in Italy (as well as abroad), as the Communist Art produced in the name of the party, with party money and for party propaganda, not at all different from the same art produced in the name of right-wing parties with state or corporate money – having both adopted and co-opted the same systems and frameworks of malfeasance shared with sycophantic artists and intellectuals.

In order to understand the misery of this kind of Red Art one would have to look at the Italian aesthetization of failure – which successfully celebrates failure in the *Great Beauty* by Paolo Sorrentino when the character of Stefania, and her ‘oozing civic duty,’ is ripped apart. It is a civic responsibility that is deprived and devoid of any ethics and morals. <sup>7</sup>

This is but one of the multiple meanings of the concept of Red Art – the definition of Red Art as Communist Art, is the one that can only lead to sterile definitions and autocelebratory constructs based on the ‘aesthetic obfuscation of the lack of meaning’ as a

tool for the obscurity of the aesthetic to act as a producer of meaning when the artist producing it is inept at creating meaning. <sup>8</sup> Even more tragically, Red Art leads to the molding of the artist as spokesperson of the party and to the reduction of the artwork, whenever successful, to advertising and propaganda.

Commonist Art, founded on the whim of the ‘like’ and ‘trend,’ on the common that springs from the aggregation around an image, a phrase, a meme or a video, is able to construct something different, a convergence of opinions and actions that can be counted and weighed and that cannot be taken for granted. Could this be a Gramscian utopia of re-construction and re-fashioning of aesthetics according to ‘lower commons’ instead of high and rich ‘exclusivity,’ which as such is unattainable and can only be celebrated through diamond skulls and gold toilets?

Commonist Art – the art that emerges from a common – is a celebration of a personal judgment, partially knowledgeable and mostly instinctive, perhaps manipulated – since every ‘other’ opinion is either manipulated by the media or the result of international lobby’s conspiracies or it can be no more than a reinforcement of the society of the simulacra. Conversely, it may also be that the image and its dissemination online is the representation of a personal diffidence towards systems of hierarchical power and endorsement that can only support ‘their own images and meanings’ in opposition to images that are consumed and exhausted through infinite possibilities of interpretation and re-dissemination. <sup>9</sup>

If Commonist Art offers the most populist minimum common denominator in an evolutionary framework determined by whims, it is not at all different from the minimum common denominator of inspirational/aspirational codified aesthetics that are defined by the higher echelons of contemporary oligarchies that

have increasingly blurred the boundaries of financial and aesthetic realms.

Commonist Art – if the current trends of protest will continue to affirm themselves even more strongly – will continue to defy power and will increasingly seek within global trends and its own common base viable operational structures that hierarchies will have to recognize, at one point or the other, by subsuming Commonist Art within pre-approved structures.

Red Art, therefore, if intended as Commonist Art becomes the sign of public revolts, in the physical squares or on the Internet. It is art that emerges without institutional ‘approval’ and in some cases in spite of institutional obstacles. Gramsci would perhaps say that Commonist Art is a redefinition of symbolic culture, folk art and traditional imageries that processed and blended through digital media and disseminated via the Internet enable Red Art to build up its own languages and its own aesthetics without having to be institutionally re-processed and receive hierarchical stamps of approval.

Red Art can also be the expression of people whose blood and tears – literally – mark the post-democracies of the first part of the XXIst century. Non-political, non-party, non-believers, <sup>10</sup> the crowds of the Internet rally around an argument, a sense of justice, a feeling of the future not dominated by carcinogenic politicians, intellectuals and curators, that present themselves every time, according to geographical and cultural spaces, as Sultans, Envoys of God, or even Gods.

Red Art, the Commonist Art that perhaps is worth considering as art, is the one that is self-elevated, built on the blood and bones of people still fighting in the XXIst century for justice, freedom and for a piece of bread. Art that rallies crowds’ likes and dislikes based

on the whims of a liquid Internet structure where people support within their timelines an idea, a utopia, a dream or the image of a kitten. <sup>11</sup>

This piece of writing and this whole volume is dedicated to the victims of the economic and political violence since the beginning of the Great Recession and to my father; and to the hope, hard to die off, that some utopia may still be possible.

**Lanfranco Aceti**

*Editor in Chief, Leonardo Electronic Almanac  
Director, Kasa Gallery*



## REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Larry Ray, "At the End of the Post-Communist Transformation? Normalization or Imagining Utopia?" *European Journal of Social Theory* 12 (August 2009), 321-336.
2. Commonism was used by Andy Warhol. In this essay the word is rooted in Internet 'commons,' although similarities, comparisons and contiguities exist with the earlier usage. "Thus Warhol's initial preference for the term 'Commonism' was as ambivalent, and ambiguous, as the oscillating signs 'Factory' and 'Business.' Although it flirted with connotations of the 'common' with the 'Communist' (from cheap and low to 'dignity of the common man'), the term betrayed no hidden, left-wing agenda on Warhol's part." Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 205.
3. "For one thing, utopia has now been appropriated by the entertainment industry and popular culture – what is termed the contemporary liquid utopia – as a kind of dystopia." Anthony Elliott, *The Contemporary Bauman* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 17.
4. The blurred lines between real and virtual do not exempt click-activists or armchair revolutionaries from the persecutions and abuses of the state police. The sitting room within one's home becomes the public space for conflict and revolts. One example of many around the globe: Alexander Abad-Santos, "Turkey Is Now Arresting Dozens for Using Twitter," *The Wire*, June 5, 2013, <http://www.thewire.com/global/2013/06/turkey-twitter-arrests/65908/> (accessed January 10, 2014).
5. David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 342.
6. The English translation from the Italian is from the author. *La Grande Bellezza*, DVD, directed by Paolo Sorrentino (Artificial Eye, 2014).
7. "Anti-communism was never accepted as the moral equivalent of anti-fascism, not only by my parents but also by the overwhelming majority of liberal-minded people. The Left was still morally superior." Nick Cohen, *What's Left?: How the Left Lost its Way* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 3. La questione morale or the 'moral issue' in English is the problem identified by Enrico Berlinguer and that questioned the role of the Communist party and the Left in general in Italy. The moral issue has not been resolved to this day and is at the core of the current impossibility to distinguish between the ideological frameworks of Left and Right – since both political areas are perceived as equally and intrinsically corrupt as well as tools for an oligarchic occupation of democracy. For the original interview in Italian of Enrico Berlinguer see: Eugenio Scalfari, "Intervista a Enrico Berlinguer," *La Repubblica*, July 28, 1981 available in "La questione morale di Enrico Berlinguer," Rifondazione Comunista's website, <http://web.rifondazione.it/home/index.php/12-home-page/8766-la-questione-morale-di-enrico-berlinguer> (accessed March 20, 2014).
8. "Under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it..." Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 78.
9. There are those who think that the image is an extremely rudimentary system in comparison with language and those who think that signification cannot exhaust the image's ineffable richness. Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, ed. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 33.
10. Non-believers stands for skeptics and does not have a religious connotation in this context.
11. Lanfranco Aceti, *Our Little Angel*, Lanfranco Aceti Inc., personal website, January 10, 2014, <http://www.lanfrancoaceti.com/portfolio-items/our-little-angel/> (accessed January 10, 2014).

## Changing the Game: Towards an 'Internet of Praxis'

There is a new spectre haunting the art world. Not surprisingly, it has been put forward in recent articles, panel discussions and books as the 'ism' that could, possibly, best describe the current dispositions of contemporary art. The name of the spectre is "post-internet art."<sup>1</sup> Unlike, however, its counterpart that was released in the world by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848,<sup>2</sup> this contemporary spectre has not arrived in order to axiomatically change the established order of things; conceivably, it has arrived in order to support it.

Post-internet art refers to the aesthetic qualities defining today's artistic production, which is often influenced by, mimics, or fully adopts elements of the Internet. At the same time, the term incorporates the communication tools and platforms through which contemporary artworks reach their intended (or non-intended) audiences. Notably, in his book *Post Internet* (2011), art writer Gene McHugh suggests that regardless of an artist's intentions, all artworks now find a space on the World Wide Web and, as a result, "[...] contemporary art, as a category, was/is forced, against its will, to deal with this new distribution context or at least acknowledge it."<sup>3</sup> Quite naturally, this would seem like a strong oppositional force directed against the modus operandi of the mainstream art world. Yet, further down in the same page, McHugh characterizes this acknowledgement as a constituent part of the much larger "game" that is played by commercial galleries, biennials, museums and auction houses.

Thus, there are inevitable contradictions and challenges in the role that post-internet art is called to fulfil as a movement and/or as a status of cultural production. Firstly, there is an easily identifiable 'anxiety' to historicize a phenomenon that is very much in progress: the Internet is changing so rapidly, that if we think of the online landscape ten years ago, this would be radically different from our present experience of it. Furthermore, the post-internet theorization of contemporary art runs the danger of aestheticizing (or over-aestheticizing) a context that goes well beyond the borders of art: in the same way that we could talk about post-internet art, we could also talk about post-internet commerce, post-internet dating, post-internet travel, post-internet journalism, etc. Therefore, the role and the identity of the post-internet artist are not independent of a much wider set of conditions. This false notion of autonomy is quite easy to recognize if we think, for instance, of 'post-radio art' or 'post-television art' or, even, 'post-videogames art,' and the inherent structural and conceptual limitations of such approaches.<sup>4</sup>

Most importantly, however, any kind of aestheticization may readily become a very effective tool of depoliticization. The idea of distributing images, sounds and words that merely form part of a pre-existing system of power, inescapably eradicates the political significance of distribution. The subversive potentiality inherent in the characterisation of a network as 'distributed' was systematically undermined over the 1990s and the 2000s, due to the ideological perva-



siveness of neoliberalism during the same period. Distribution – not to mention, *equal* distribution – could have enjoyed a much more prominent role as a natural fundament of the Web and, accordingly, as a contributing factor in any investigation of digital art. Last but definitely not least, one cannot ignore the crucial fact that apolitical art is much easier to enter the art market and play the ‘game’ of institutionalization (and vice versa).

To the question: could the Internet and new media at large become true ‘game changers’ in the current historical conjuncture? What does ‘red art’ have to propose, and how does it relate to the previously described ‘post-internet condition’?

Interestingly, the term “post-internet art” was born and grew parallel to the global economic crisis and the Great Recession of 2009. One of the most important objectives of the social movements that were engendered by the crisis has been the effort to “reclaim” and “re-appropriate.” This aspiration referred not only to economic resources, but also to social roles, democratic functions, human rights, and – of course – urban spaces. Syntagma Square in Greece, Puerta del Sol in Madrid, Zuccotti Park in New York, as well as some of the most iconic public locations around the world saw diverse, or even ‘irreconcilable’ in some cases crowds demand change. Within the reality of Data Capitalism and its multiple self-generated crises, people increasingly felt that they have now been totally deprived of a place (“topos” in Greek).

It is worth remembering that the coiner of “utopia,” Thomas More, chose an island as the location where he placed his ideal society.<sup>5</sup> Any island constitutes a geographic formation that privileges the development of individual traits through a natural process of ‘appropriation.’ This encompasses both the material and the immaterial environment as expressed in the landscape, the biology of the different organisms, and – most relevant to our case – culture. Notably, when it comes to connecting utopianism with the cultural paradigm of new media art, we should not focus merely on the lack of a physical space (as articulated, for instance,

through cyberspace); rather, we should address the juxtaposition of “topos” with a potentially ‘empty’ notion of “space.” The transcendence of space in a ‘digital utopia’ absolutely necessitates the existence of a ‘topos.’ In a similar way to the one that Marx sees capitalism as a stage towards a superior system of production (communism),<sup>6</sup> the construction of a ‘topos’ is a prerequisite for the flourishing of utopianism.

‘Red Art’ can be understood as a tool for the creation of such ‘topoi.’ The lesson that new media artists can learn from the political osmoses catalyzed by the economic crisis is that, in order to be effective, cyberspace should become part of a strategy that combines physical and online spaces, practically and conceptually, whilst taking into account the individual traits of both. The necessity expressed through this combination constitutes (at least partly) a departure from the developing discourses around the ‘Internet of Things’ or the ‘Internet of Places.’<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, or additionally, what is proposed here is the formulation of an ‘Internet of Praxis’ (including, of course, artistic praxis). This approach is vividly reflected in several of the projects examined in this publication, as well as in the theoretical frameworks that are outlined.

Digital art is today in a position to capitalize on the participatory potentialities that have been revealed by the socio-political events that defined the early 2010s. The reconceptualization of cyberspace as a ‘cybertopos’ is a constituent part of this new ground on which people are called to stand and build. Accordingly, the emergence of a culture of ‘post-net participation’ in which digital media transcend physical space by consolidating it (instead of ‘merely’ augmenting it), may allow us to explore “concrete utopias”<sup>8</sup> to a greater extent than ever before in recent times. It is by actively pursuing this objective that we would expect to change the rules of the game. Artists are often the first to try.

**Bill Balaskas**

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2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in London, on February 21, 1848.
3. Gene McHugh, *Post Internet*, 6.
4. The etymological comparison between the terms ‘post-internet art’ and ‘postmodern art’ could also highlight this context. Notably, in the case of this juxtaposition, ‘post-internet art’ puts a tool (the Internet) in the position of a movement (Modernism). If we were to consider the Internet as a movement, then, the natural historical link that would be established through the term ‘post-internet art’ would be with net art. Nevertheless, such a decision would assign net art to a status of ‘legitimization,’ towards which major museums, curators and art fairs have shown a rather consistent hostility. In this instance, historicization becomes a foe, since it would refute a ‘neutral’ relationship of the Web with art. This perspective is closely connected with the formation of an abstract notion of universalism, to which I refer further down (see endnote 8).
5. Thomas More’s *Utopia* was first published in 1516, in Belgium. There are several translations of the book.
6. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, with an introduction by David Harvey (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 51: “What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”
7. The Internet of Things represents a vision in which physical items become ‘smart’ objects by being equipped with sensors that can be remotely controlled and connected through the Internet. The Internet of Places focuses on the spatial dimension of the capacities that Web 2.0 offers. For an account of the Internet of Things, see Mattern, Friedemann and Christian Floerkemeier, “From the Internet of Computers to the Internet of Things,” in *Informatik-Spektrum*, 33 (2010): 107–121, <http://www.vs.inf.ethz.ch/publ/papers/Internet-of-things.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2014). For an account of the Internet of Places, see Giuseppe Conti, Paul Watson, Nic Shape, Raffaele de Amicis and Federico Prandi, “Enabling the ‘Internet of Places’: a virtual structure of space-time-tasks to find and use Internet resources,” in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Computing for Geospatial Research & Applications* (New York: ACM, 2011), 9.
8. For more on the concept of ‘concrete utopias’ see Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, tr. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). Bloch differentiates between ‘abstract utopias’ and ‘concrete utopias,’ associating the latter with the possibility of producing real change in the present. ‘Concrete utopias’ should not be confused with seemingly similar theorizations such as Nicolas Bourriaud’s ‘microtopias,’ which structurally aim at preserving the existing status quo. Bourriaud asserts in *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) that “it seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows.” Quite evidently, this approach stands far from the universalism that he advocates in his *Altermodern Manifesto* (2009) as a direct result of new technologies and globalization. At a time when neoliberal capitalism was entering its worst ever crisis, Bourriaud chose to largely ignore this context and build on a concept that – in the end – is apolitical and counter-utopian. ‘Post-internet art’ appears to follow a comparably dangerous trajectory.

# Suggestions for Art That Could Be Called Red

**What is Red Art? Or rather: what could Red Art be in today's post-communist, post-utopian world, a world shaken by conflicts engendered by contrary beliefs and ideologies which have little to do with communism?** A world in which countries and societies are disrupted by territorial disputes, and by bloody fights about questions of religious identity, national identity, and ideology? Where communism has been overrun by capitalism with rare exception; where the European left movement is weak. Where the post-industrial era has produced an economic reality that is orders of magnitude more complex, transnational and therefore more difficult to control or change, than history has ever seen. In this situation, can there (still) be art that deals with ideas of communism constructively, or does contemporary art look at communist ideals only with nostalgia?

And let's be clear: is art that simply speaks out against capitalism, globalisation and neo-liberalism from a leftist position – is this kind of art 'red' per se? Do we expect Red Art to be 'red' in content, for instance, in directly addressing topics such as class struggle, the negatives of capitalism and a new neo-liberal world order? And if it does, is it enough to be descriptive or do we want art to be more than that, i.e., provoking, forward-thinking or even militant? In 1970, Jean-Luc Godard drafted a 39-point manifesto *Que faire? What is to be done?* that contrasted the antagonistic practices of making political films and making films 'politically.' It called unequivocally for art that actively takes up the position of the proletarian class and that

aims for nothing less than the transformation of the world. With his legacy, what kind of objectives do we request from Red Art? Do we really still think that art can change the world or is that another idea from the past that has been overwritten by something that we like to call reality? Can art that is for the most part commercialised and produced in a capitalist art market be 'red' at all, or does it have to reject the system established by galleries, fairs and museums in order to be truly 'red'?

Decades ago, when artists started to use new media such as video and the computer, their works were 'new' in the way they were produced and distributed, and changed the relationship between artists and their collaborators as well as between the artworks and their audiences and 'users' respectively. Most of this new-media-based art circulated outside the ordinary market and found other distribution channels. The majority of works were inspired by a quest for the 'new' and consistently broke with old aesthetic principles and functions. Much of it was also driven by a search for the 'better,' by overthrowing old hierarchies and introducing a more liberal and inclusive concept of the world, based on self-determination and active participation. Last but not least the emergence of the Internet brought us a fertile time for new and revisited utopias and artistic experiments dealing with collaboration, distribution of knowledge, shared authorship, and appropriation of technologies. Today we know that neither the Internet nor any other new technology has saved us, but that the hopes for a more demo-

cratic world and alternative economies sparked by it have come true, if only to a minor degree.

So how do artists respond to this post-communist, post-utopian condition? What can be discussed as Red Art in the recent past and present? In this issue of Leonardo we have gathered some answers to these questions in the form of papers, essays and artworks, the latter produced especially for this purpose. Bringing together and editing this issue was challenging because we decided from the start to keep the call for contributions as open as possible and to not pre-define too much. We were interested in what kind of responses our call would produce at a moment when the world is occupied with other, seemingly hotter topics, and it is fascinating to note that the resulting edition quite naturally spans decades of art production and the respective 'new' technologies as they related to ideas of social equality and empowerment – from video art to net art to bio art. This issue shows that the search for alternative ideas and perspectives, and an adherence to leftist ideals is neither futile nor simply nostalgic. But that this search is ever more relevant, particularly at a time when European politics is seemingly consolidating and wars around the world are establishing new regimes of social and economic inequality.

**Susanne Jaschko**

# Why Digital Art is Red

**The divide between the art shown in major museums and art fairs and that associated with the new media scene has been deep and durable.** Many critics have puzzled over it, particularly because there is much that the two realms share, including the desire to put people into unusual social situations. <sup>1</sup> Yet

some of the reasons for the divide are plain enough, and they are about money, power and social distinction. The economic divide is across competing models of capitalist activity: the exclusive ownership of objects set against the release of reproducible symbols into networks with the ambition that they achieve maximum speed and ubiquity of circulation. The social divide is between a conservative club of super-rich collectors and patrons, and their attendant advisors, who buy their way into what they like to think of as a sophisticated cultural scene (Duchamp Land), against a realm which is closer to the mundane and more evidently compromised world of technological tools (Turing Land). <sup>2</sup> Power relations are where the divide appears starkest: in one world, special individuals known as artists make exceptional objects or events with clear boundaries that distinguish them from run-of-the-mill life; and through elite ownership and expert curation, these works are presented for the enlightenment of the rest of us. In the new media world, some 'artists' but also collectives and other shifting and anonymous producers offer up temporary creations onto a scene in which their works are open to copying, alteration and comment, and in which there is little possible control of context, frame or conversation.

This description of the divide has been put in extreme terms for the sake of clarity, and there are a few instances of the split appearing to erode. <sup>3</sup> Yet its persistence remains one of the most striking features of the general fragmentation of the fast-growing and globalising art world. That persistence rests on solid material grounds, laid out by Marx: the clash of economic models is a clear case of the mode and relations of production coming into conflict, and is part of a much wider conflict over the legal, political and social aspects of digital culture, and its synthesis of production and reproduction. <sup>4</sup> Copyright is one arena where the clash is very clear. Think of the efforts of museums to control the circulation of images and to levy copyright charges, while at the same time surrendering to the camera-phone as they abandon the attempt to forbid photography in their galleries.

So where is Red Art and the left in this scenario? Amidst the general gloom and lassitude that has beset much of the Left in Europe and the US, the development of the digital realm stands out as an extraordinary gain. It allows for the direct communication, without the intermediary of newspapers and TV, of masses of people globally – who turn out to be more egalitarian, more environmentally concerned and more seditious than the elite had bargained for. Alexander Cockburn, with his long career in activism and journalism, remarks:

*Thirty years ago, to find out what was happening in Gaza, you would have to have had a decent short-wave radio, a fax machine, or access to those great newsstands in Times Square and North Hollywood that carried the world's press. Not anymore. We can get a news story from [...] Gaza or Ramallah or Oaxaca or Vidarbha and have it out to a world audience in a matter of hours.* <sup>5</sup>

It is hard to ban social media, it has been claimed, because it entwines video fads, kittens and politics (and banning kittens looks bad). So the insight attributed by some to Lenin – that capitalists will sell us the rope with which to hang them – is still relevant. <sup>6</sup>

In an era in which the political and artistic avant-gardes have faded, the affiliation of the art world that is founded upon the sale and display of rare and unique objects made by a few exceptional individuals – in which high prices are driven by monopoly rent effects – tends to be with the conspicuous consumption of the state and the super-rich. <sup>7</sup> Here, the slightest taint of the common desktop environment is enough to kill aesthetic feeling. The affiliation of at least some of new media art is rather to the kitsch, the populist, and to the egalitarian circulation of images and words, along with discourse and interaction. New media artists who push those attachments work against some of the deepest seated elements of the art world ethos: individualism, distinction, discreteness and preservation for posterity (and long-term investment

value). It should be no surprise that they are frequently and without qualification denied the status of 'artist.'

It is also clear why the death of leftist ideas in elite discourse does not hold in new media circles, where the revival of thinking about the Left, Marxism and Communism is very evident. <sup>8</sup> The borders of art are blurred by putting works to explicit political use (in violation of the Kantian imperative still policed in the mainstream art world). <sup>9</sup> Very large numbers of people are continually making cultural interventions online, and value lies not in any particular exceptional work but in the massive flow of interaction and exchange. In that world, as it never could in a gallery, the thought may creep in that there is nothing special about any one of us. And this may lead to the greatest scandal of all: think of the statements that artists who deal with politics in the mainstream art world are obliged to make as their ticket of admission – 'my art has no political effect.' They have to say it, even when it is patently absurd; and they have to say it, even as the art world itself becomes more exposed to social media, and is ever less able to protect its exclusive domain and regulate the effects of its displays. So at base, the divide is economic, but at the level of what causes the repulsion from digital art – that puts collectors and critics to flight – it is deeply and incontrovertibly political. <sup>10</sup> They run headlong from the red.

**Julian Stallabrass**

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# THE THING Hamburg

## A Temporary Democratization of the Local Art Field

by

**Cornelia Sollfrank,  
Rahel Puffert &  
Michel Chevalier**

CORNELIA SOLLFRANK

Lecturer, Art & Media

Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design

University of Dundee, UK

c.sollfrank@dundee.ac.uk

<http://artwarez.org>

RAHEL PUFFERT

Lecturer, Cultural Studies

Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, Germany

[rahel.puffert@uni-oldenburg.de](mailto:rahel.puffert@uni-oldenburg.de)

<http://www.uni-oldenburg.de/kunst/lehrende/mitarbeiterinnen-und-lehrkraefte/puffert-rahel/>

MICHEL CHEVALIER

[targetautonopop@jpberlin.de](mailto:targetautonopop@jpberlin.de)

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

### INTRODUCTION

**THE THING Hamburg was an independent Internet publishing platform for art and criticism that was in operation between 2006 and 2009.** Within the larger framework of the Internet as a laboratory for social innovation, it was a local artistic experiment that aimed at using networked technology for the democratization of the art field. To anticipate the end: the project only lasted for three years. We decided to cancel the experiment at the point when public funding ended and the initiative's status as art project was revoked by the city's tax authorities.

In this paper we will trace the circumstances that led to the emergence of the project in the first place, describe how it was organized, and discuss various historical precursors as well as the core questions and contradictions that are inherent in art projects that claim socio-political impact: is it possible that an art identifiable as such has any effect? Or to put it differently: how can art operate as art and still work on the expansion of what is accepted as art? We also look at the role new technologies can play within that context as a means to build new spaces and break new ground that allows for a discussion and practice, which takes

### A B S T R A C T

THE THING Hamburg was an experimental Internet platform whose vocation was to contribute to the democratization of the art field, to negotiate new forms of art in practice, and to be a site for political learning and engagement. We, the authors, were actively involved in the project on various levels. In this paper, we trace the (local) circumstances that led to the emergence of the project and take a look at its historical precursor, we reflect on the organizational form of this collectively-run and participatory platform, and we investigate the role locality can play in the development of political agency. As a non-profit Internet platform built with free software, the project also invites a reflection of the role technology can play for the creation of independent experimental spaces for social innovation and how they make a difference against the backdrop of corporate social media. Relating the project to both the conceptual innovations of the Russian avant-garde as well as media-utopian projections shows that THE THING Hamburg stands in the tradition of an art that expands its own field by invoking a self-issued social assignment. Challenging the norms and institutions of the art field does not remain an exercise in self-referentiality; it rather redefines the role of art as an agent for political learning and how the use of technology in society at large can be emancipatory. And just as small projects like the THE THING Hamburg draw on old utopias for their contemporary negotiations of art, they equally produce more questions than they provide answers.

place – and only ‘can’ take place – beyond traditional categorizations.

In its aim to democratize the local art field, *THE THING Hamburg* had concrete effects; it had an im-

pact on the city of Hamburg, the (local) art field, and on the numerous people involved. We reflect on this impact and our experiences and would like to share them in order to engage in a broader discussion of what still has to be done. ‘We,’ the authors of this

**IF / THEN – our program****IF** you dislike the art world, **THEN** start to criticize it.**IF** you are alone, **THEN** start to work together with somebody.**IF** the art institutions don't fit to your work, **THEN** invent your own.**IF** you think art should be connected to life, **THEN** start working with your local context.**IF** you can't paint your thoughts, **THEN** write them down.**IF** you don't feel represented by the media, **THEN** create your own public spheres.**IF** you find the white cube lame, **THEN** work online.**IF** you don't like their language, **THEN** experiment with your own.**IF** you want to be more than a consumer, **THEN** become a citizen.**IF** you want to share your work, **THEN** create digitally.**IF** you get censored, **THEN** you know you are on the right way.**IF** you think that art objects are dispensible, **THEN** share your knowledge through communication.**IF** you want to be good to art, **THEN** ignore the art market.**IF** you don't like this program, **THEN** write your own.

**Figure 1.** *THE THING Hamburg Program*, poster for the exhibition Shanghai-Hamburg (urban public) Space [SHupS], 2010, Cornelia Sollfrank, Kathrin Wildner, and Rahel Puffert. Used with permission via the Creative Commons, Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

text, were actively involved in the project on various levels: Cornelia Sollfrank initiated the project and later became chairwoman of the association that operated the project; Rahel Puffert was a founding member of the association and later succeeded as chairwoman; Michel Chevalier was an active user and contributor to the platform.

#### **A CONCURRENCE OF LOCAL CONDITIONS AND A TESTED ARTISTIC CONCEPT**

The principal idea of *THE THING Hamburg* was to build a technology-based and non-exclusive environment, which would emphasize a critical discussion of local conditions while, at the same time, tracking contemporary theory and the general upheavals taking place in the cultural realm. On a structural level, the platform was the expansion of two smaller projects of local artistic self-organization: the calendar of events *kunstecho-hamburg.de* and *[echo] – the mailing list for art, criticism and cultural policy*.<sup>1</sup> On a conceptual level, *THE THING Hamburg* grounded itself in the idea of that artist-driven communication network founded

by German artist Wolfgang Staehle in New York City in 1991: *The Thing*.

#### **In the Run-up to *THE THING Hamburg***

The idea of initiating a platform for art and criticism in Hamburg emerged in 2005, after a number of interventions and direct actions within the art field in Hamburg had mobilized hundreds of artists and cultural producers; this laid the grounds for further organization.

The preceding years had indeed been marked by local developments that were strongly contradictory in nature. The mid-to-late 1990s were a period in which it had become almost obligatory for art students and recent graduates to start their own exhibition spaces, which were removed from both commercial galleries and institutions. Pre-existing artist-run initiatives such as Künstlerhaus Hamburg (founded 1977), Westwerk (founded in 1985) and KX (founded in 1987) could not do justice to the many new approaches. These newer projects were motivated by interests as diverse and contradictory as being a launching-pad for the gallery scene, refining approaches that could be 'exported'

to institutions, creating hybrid spaces between party clubs and art spaces, developing alternatives to the white cube, making political art, working collectively, avoiding the 'formatting' of the art market.<sup>2</sup> Long shadows were cast on these activities by two theory fashions since discredited, but all the rage then: "relational art" and postmodern institutional critique.<sup>3</sup>

The optimism underlying this fractious experimentation hit a brick wall in 2001, after the events of 9/11 spilled into the Hamburg mayoral election, unseating the Social Democrats after over 40 years in power. The new government was a coalition of the Christian Democrats and the xenophobic *Partei Rechtsstaatlicher Offensive* (Law and Order Offensive Party). Within a year, the city drastically switched its cultural funding priorities, favoring 'beacon projects,' real-estate development, and public-private partnerships. No twenty-year anniversary celebration of the city's once-famed art-in-public-space program was held in 2002. Instead, that year the University of Fine Arts (HfbK) was subjected to a new city law and restructured by its newly appointed director, who weakened the control that students and staff could exercise on his power.

A tipping point came in 2005, on three separate fronts. The first was funding: twenty artist-run spaces formed the lobby *Wir Sind Woanders* (*We are somewhere else*) in order to stave off cuts from the city that would have threatened their existence.<sup>4</sup> The second, cultural policy: at the initiative of Cornelia Sollfrank, 121 artists each adopted one of the 121 members of the Hamburg City Council to express their protest against the newly planned *International Maritime Museum*.<sup>5</sup> The third: patronage (and its hidden strings). This was the so-called 'éclat' at the city-funded *Kunstverein in Hamburg* (Hamburg Contemporary Art Center). That year, many critical artists were newly elected in the *Kunstverein's* nine-member Board of Directors. For

collectors, gallerists, and the market-oriented director of the Center, however, this was a stinging defeat, slandered thereafter as a 'putsch.' A court decision ultimately allowed the election to be held again, as sought by former chairman and well-known collector Harald Falckenberg; control by the art-business fraction was reestablished.

#### **The-coming-into-being of *THE THING Hamburg***

The two projects that already had a networking function within Hamburg's self-organized art scene were *[echo] – the mailing list for art, criticism and cultural policy*, founded in 2003 by Cornelia Sollfrank, with about 400 subscribers at that time, and the self-organized calendar of events *kunstecho-hamburg.de*, run by Ulrich Mattes since early 2005. The mailing list in particular had already proven successful as a tactical medium for the dissemination of critical information and the organization of actions. In the loosely organized field, it functioned as a flexible, easy-to-use and easily accessible means of organization. Although mailing lists are mainly described as "translocal networks,"<sup>6</sup> the combination of a local, urban field of reference and virtual communication has, still to this day, yielded lasting synergies.

Sollfrank and Mattes struck up a strategic alliance to facilitate a new, web-based Internet platform, which would expand the scope of participation and intensify a substantive discussion of local conditions. They conceived an initial first concept and put it up for discussion at a public meeting. During a discussion process that lasted several months, a group of nine people eventually volunteered to take responsibility for the platform. It was a diverse group of cultural producers with different backgrounds and skill sets who were all enthusiastic about the idea of a platform, although there were – and remained – disagreements regarding the art status of the project. Eventually, the group founded the legal entity *THE THING Hamburg e.V.* for

*the advancement of art and criticism*, a non-profit organization (gemeinnütziger Verein) whose purpose was to establish and run *THE THING Hamburg*.<sup>7</sup> This legal status entitled the group to apply for public funding that would back up the personal investment involved. During earlier negotiations, the Hamburg Cultural Office offered funding from a special budget (*Sondermittel*), complemented by funding for public art (15%). For its three years of existence, the project had an overall budget of about 170,000 EUR of which 41% was financed through public funding and the rest through the personal investment of the members of the association.

#### History and Historicization of *The Thing*

In its first incarnation *The Thing*, founded by German artist Wolfgang Staehle in New York in 1991, was an experiment in exploring the potential of new information technologies for various artistic purposes. Equipped with a modem and a computer, the artists involved 'went online' to discuss with others, break new grounds for aesthetic expression, or build infrastructures for others to communicate. Departing from the notion of institutional critique, a main driving force for Staehle was to go beyond the making of critical art works within the art institutional context, embodying a stance critical of institutions by building an independent structure.<sup>8</sup> Others joined to help building the infrastructure, to populate it and fill it with life and content.

In the initial phase of *The Thing*, from 1991-1995, the project consisted of a number of small international nodes engaging in text-based exchange. They were connected through a bulletin board system, which offered boards for various themes.<sup>9</sup> In the midst of the technological and also conceptual developments of the mid 1990s, the formerly small nodes largely disappeared; some of them were transformed into discrete Internet platforms and new ones were initi-

ated. The focus of *The Thing* activities shifted from enabling exchange and creating discourse to building more complex, mainly locally-oriented information infrastructures to foster media art and activism and support media artists. *The Thing New York*, for instance, became an Internet provider and also hosted artists' websites and mailing lists. The mainly experimental discourse-enabling function made way for context and community building via technical services.<sup>10</sup>

Since 1991 a total of twelve independent branches emerged (and vanished) in seven different countries, with *THE THING Hamburg* being the most recent one.<sup>11</sup> All *The Thing* platforms have given credit to the first *The Thing* in New York as inspiration, while operating completely independently and implementing highly different versions of the basic idea: to create an artistically organized information and communication infrastructure. Having said that, all local *The Thing* platforms have considered themselves as equal parts of the international *The Thing* network, which served as a kind of conceptual meta-structure.

Despite the institution-critical spirit from which the early *The Thing* had emerged, the project slowly converged with the art world. *The Thing International* was exhibited as an art project,<sup>12</sup> numerous interviews were conducted with its founder in the art context,<sup>13</sup> it had friendly relations with art institutions and received major art grants.<sup>14</sup> Eventually, *The Thing* was categorized as Internet art and included in a number of art historical overviews investigating this genre.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, at the same time that the early *The Thing* became the subject of a major art-historical research project – fifteen years after its first launch – it yielded its latest offspring: *THE THING Hamburg*. A fact that could have very well served the investigation and better understanding of its aesthetic and political complexity, which was largely neglected by these researchers.

#### THE THING HAMBURG

*THE THING Hamburg* was a collective media experiment. It rested on the vision of artists empowered to speak and write about their own work as well as its framing policies and theories. Exploring the potential of an Internet-based Content Management System to open up public discussions,<sup>16</sup> it was, in many respects, a reaction and an alternative to the distribution and mediation approaches preponderant in the art field. The concept was based on the premise that critical contemporary art can only arise from an intensive awareness and active reflection of its conditions and, in that sense, that critique is productive. For the initiators of *THE THING Hamburg*, this premise was a conviction. The disinclination of institutions in the city to serve as such a forum motivated the invention of a structure that made the above possible, while remaining, at the same time, subject to permanent change.

Insofar as writing is seen as an obvious component of artistic practice – something not delegated to experts such as critics or curators – the project could be viewed in the tradition of Conceptual art. This is also true for another reason: *THE THING Hamburg* offered a frame conducive to in-depth discussions about art, critically addressing the pressure to commodify and draw profits from artistic work. The approach taken was uncommon in the sense that it included the users by offering access, easy and free of charge, to an ongoing discourse. It allowed the users to intervene in and influence the course of the discussions, thus fostering a political learning process that aimed at practicing democracy.

#### Social and Technological Forms of Participation

Assuming public discussion was the common goal of all those making contributions, there was, nevertheless, a hierarchy in the degree of participation. Initially, a non-profit institution was founded whose defined purpose was the support of art and criticism by running an Internet platform. The non-profit institution

administered funds and was the point of contact for Hamburg City officials. The founding group decided to establish an editorial team, especially responsible for the direction of the website's content as well as its structure and interface modalities. The first group of editors was recruited from the founding members, but later underwent constant transformations. The editors were anchored in different cultural scenes, allowing for the highest possible diversity of themes to be covered, while their different backgrounds in journalistic, artistic, or academic professions could ensure the lively co-existence of a variety of working styles and methods.

*THE THING Hamburg* also made the point of encouraging people with little or no journalistic experience to publish contributions, thereby offering technical and editorial assistance. In this case, the Internet provided advantages over print journalism: there were no limits to text length; unusual writing styles were explicitly called for and not subsequently standardized. The goal was to foster a plurality of voices and offer publication for those authors and projects that 'fall through the cracks' in other outlets. In its three years of existence, *THE THING Hamburg* published the contributions of 120 authors. A so-called 'unedited forum' was set up parallel to the other sections. It offered to any and all the chance to post visual and/or textual contributions without having to undergo any editorial screening. The authors of unedited contributions were, needless to say, not paid the 100 EUR that other contributors were. However, topics addressed in edited articles were picked up in the unedited forum, and vice versa. Both realms were of equal importance for the whole project. Each published contribution was coupled to a 'comment' function allowing readers to address authors with their feedback. This opportunity was used with gusto: some discussions stretched out over months. The *echo mailing-list* was the perfect tool to announce every new article.

The design of the platform required close collaboration between the editors and the web designers. The fact that the desired social and political potential of such a platform could only unfold on the basis of a well thought-out technological infrastructure was an important insight gained after two failed attempts to delegate the design to professionals. At the same time, discussing the technically available options and their particular implications resulted in a steep learning curve for the technically rather inexperienced editors.

At the suggestion of one of the web-designers, the decision was made to use TYPO3, a free and open source web content management framework based on PHP. Being one of the most popular CMSes on the web, it turned out to fully meet the needs of the project: supported by a large number of international programmers, it made available a variety of functions and extensions, which then only needed to be built together to form one integrative system that combines stability and flexibility. It stores content and layout files separately, and the elaborate rights-managing function guarantees a secure but open and transparent system. The web designers acted as administrators of the site and initiated the editors to the extent that they were, then, each able to independently work with the system.

### Content Structure

Over time there was a crystallization of 'sections' under which the various contributions could be classified (current events, special subjects of focus, thing-on-the-road, images, cultural policy). Special subjects included: changes in and reorientation of art education, forms of self-organization in the political and cultural realms, art in public space, culture-political conditions of artistic production – including funding policy, juries, and the marketing of cultural production. This was complemented by regular updates and tips about relevant events and funding opportunities, job offers,

open calls, etc. Insofar as *THE THING Hamburg* recommended specific exhibitions, workshops, or lectures in town, it took up the chance to distinguish itself from other (official) institutions and mass media. By deliberately neglecting some exhibitions and announcing and reviewing others, the platform sharpened its profile as a corrective to official institutions' politics of information and representation.

The thematic orientation of the sections also followed an approach one could identify with the notion of a "counter public sphere."<sup>17</sup> The platform empowered the activities of self-organized groups in the art scene, seized on conflict-ridden topics, and in this way initiated and moderated discussions spurring controversy in the city. Protest activities, for example at the Hamburg University of Fine Arts (HfbK), were registered and discursively extended. Concrete arguments were injected into debates via critical interviews (e.g. with the Director of the HfbK), or culture-historical analysis (e.g. of the highly controversial and publicly-funded private collection of Peter Tamm, or the extravagantly over-budget Elbe-Philharmonic project). The issue of gentrification and the role of artists doing commissioned work for the *International Building Exhibition (IBA) Hamburg* – held in a traditionally working class district with a high migrant population – drew exchanges of marked intensity on *THE THING Hamburg*, whereby efforts were made to offer space to voices not heard in the official media. The existence of *THE THING Hamburg* thereby added a critical impulse affecting public perceptions, one that could not be ignored by city and cultural administrators.

### The Benefits of Locality

From the very start, *THE THING Hamburg* consciously adopted a local scope. This did not mean that national or international issues and developments were neglected. On the contrary, the local anchoring offered many theoretical or reflective extrapolations of

THEMEN  
AKTUELLES  
BILDER  
KULTURPOLITIK  
REISETHING  
ARCHIVE  
THE THING  
SERVICE  
A-Z



PLATTFORM FÜR KUNST UND KRITIK **THE THING HAMBURG**

THE THING HAMBURG / START

EDITORIAL

21. Dezember 2008

**Kathrin Wildner**  
**Das letzte und das nächste Jahr**

Weiterhin drehen sich die lokalen Diskussionen um Fragen der Zusammenarbeit mit prosperierenden Institutionen der Stadt – wie der IBA – und wie das Verhältnis von Kunst und Stadtentwicklung aussehen könnte. Ergänzend zu dem **Interview mit Anke Haarmann und Harald Lemke**, den Kuratoren des „Elbinsel-Sommers 2008“, gibt es demnächst Ausschnitte aus einem Interview mit den Ausstellungsteilnehmern *Critical Art Ensemble*; gerade neu erschienen, ist eine **Besprechung dieser Veranstaltung** in Wilhelmsburg von Heike Breitenfeld und weitere – von Sabine Falk zusammengestellte – Kommentare Hamburger KünstlerInnen und AktivistInnen zur aktuellen Debatte um Stadtentwicklung, Gentrifizierung und die Instrumentalisierung der Kunst: **Pudels Reisen**. Auf ein neues Jahr! [\[mehr\]](#)

**BILDER**

**Nana Petzet**  
**Wenn die Katze fort ist, tanzen die Mäuse**

Im Winter 2004 wurde eines der wichtigsten Werke von Dieter Roth in Hamburg zerstört: Das Schimmelmuseum an der Alsterchaussee. Vom 28. Januar bis zum 19. Februar 2004 beobachtete Nana Petzet mit einer Gruppe von Freunden den Abriss. [\[mehr\]](#)

**DO THE THING!**

**SPECIAL THINGS**  
RE.ACT.FEMINISM – PERFORMANCEKUNST DER 60ER UND 70ER JAHRE HEUTE  
Eine besondere Empfehlung von der THE THING Hamburg Redaktion [\[mehr\]](#)

**FORUM UNEDITED**

FORUM UNEDITED ist ein offenes Forum. Hier sind BesucherInnen eingeladen, eigene Beiträge zu Kunst und Kultur zu verfassen und mit Bildern zu ergänzen.

Spontane Meinungsäußerungen zu Veranstaltungen und Ausstellungen können gepostet, Entwicklungen im kulturellen Bereich (auch kulturpolitische) kritisch

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Um im **FORUM UNEDITED** Artikel zu schreiben oder zu diskutieren müssen Sie sich zunächst

Figure 2. *THE THING Hamburg* Frontpage, 2008. Used with permission via the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

a general bearing on art discourse or cultural policy. Conversely, theoretical positions and critical thought gained traction with the examples of local circumstances, citing names when called for, and so avoiding a drift into abstract self-referentiality, or other manneristic pitfalls. The political meaning of this medium of communication lay precisely in this dialectic.

Hamburg, an unusually wealthy city of merchants, a former bastion of the Hanseatic League, in which social polarization cannot go unnoticed: it lends itself as both symptom and example for broader social debates. It is large enough to be abreast of global developments, while small enough to allow for an easy overview and monitoring of changes and developments, and the ongoing communication of this information to those various groups and 'scenes' that are affected.

The local character of *THE THING Hamburg* also proved to be an advantage in other respects. Discussions did not have to remain virtual. On a sporadic basis, *THE THING Hamburg* set up public presentations or discussions in the city, touching on aforementioned themes and allowing for personal exchange with various authors and contributors, as well as the chance to clear up misunderstandings or just to get to know one another. Last but not least, such events were, also, an opportunity to get in touch with the editorial group and express criticism or discuss possible ways of collaboration on a personal level.

### THE ART OF SPAWNING EFFECTS

Claiming *THE THING Hamburg* to be an Internet art project that attempted the democratization of the local art field suggests its location within specific his-



torical contexts, as well as everyday social media. This leads to the elaboration of the implied conception of art and the discussion of the role that new technologies play for its realization.

### Avant-garde Relations

The Russian October Revolution and its immediate aftermath gave artists and art-theorists seeking a revolution in their own field unprecedented opportunities. On the one hand the *caesura* of the revolution allowed them to analyze all that was wrong with the art that had accompanied class domination. On the other, they could draw up new cultural programs, set up or take part in bodies of the new Soviet government, and theorize, produce, and exhibit new forms of art. The Russian avant-garde's project of fusing art and life is to this day a much used – and abused – point of reference. It is therefore worth bearing in mind that not just any integration of art into life was sought in those post-revolution years, but a very specific one:

*The use of an artist's work has no value per se, no purpose of its own, no beauty of its own; it receives all this solely from its relation to the community. In the creation of every great work the architect's part is visible and the community's part is latent. The artist, the creator, invents nothing that falls into his lap from the sky.*<sup>18</sup>

What finds expression in this quote is a new understanding of the social function of art as well as a criticism of the bourgeois conception of the artist. According to this new understanding, an artist is no longer an individual expressing him-/herself, but rather invokes a self-issued *social* assignment. Consequently, the aimed-at work of art is considered to be a common product. Art steps out of its aesthetic constraints and contributes to the experiment of reorganizing society, of which art's own institutional structures, including art education and funding policies, are a part.

In fact, only working on new forms of organization and new structures of production and dissemination would enable the creation of new forms of art. This led to “basic problems of liberated work, linked in the closest way to the problems of the transformation of production culture on the one hand, and with the transformation of everyday on the other.”<sup>19</sup>

The elaborations of such claims in theory and practice, however, varied regarding the degree to which art would remain an independent field. Certain Productivists, for instance, wished for the outright integration of art into industrial production and proclaimed that art would become obsolete in a future, free society. Alexander Rodchenko temporarily advocated an experimental space for artists, a laboratory, in which artists would work on the development of a new vocabulary of forms and products that would invite their users to creatively engage with their environment, and whose purpose would be the empowerment of their users.<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, just as Engels favored “scientific socialism” over those utopian socialisms, which – in his view – turned away from modernity, so did the Constructivists and Productivists push for an art that was in and of its time.<sup>21</sup> Looking back at its reception, Hal Foster diagnosed that the scandal of the Russian avant-garde was that it not only posed analogies, but actually forged connections between artistic and industrial production, cultural and political revolution: “And this scandal (which remains its mystique) could not be entirely ignored; it had to be managed – averted and absorbed.”<sup>22</sup>

### Media Utopian Projections

The conceptual innovations yielded by the Russian avant-garde have served as a point of reference throughout the 20th century, especially for art that harbors socio-political ambitions. And it had been in particular those forms of art that embrace new tech-

nologies in artistic and experimental ways in order to achieve a socio-political agency that drew on avant-garde ideas.

The basis of Gene Youngblood's conception of *Meta-Design* (1986) is a liaison of artists and designers who collaborate on the integration of technological and social systems. They would create virtual spaces in which people could experiment with technology for the purpose of self-organization, the acquisition of democratic skills and techniques of self-configuration (*Selbstgestaltung*). These ‘autonomous social worlds,’ laboratories of ‘resocialisation,’ which bear an obvious reference to Rodchenko's experimental spaces, are to empower users in an environment in which they may cultivate ‘creative conversations’ and take control of the context of their cultural and aesthetic production. “Controlling the context implies controlling of meaning, and controlling meaning is identical with controlling reality.”<sup>23</sup>

For Youngblood, the revolutionary quality of the new decentralized communication environments, however, is directly related to certain conditions; all users would need to have free access to the means of production: what he calls “personal meta media,” as well as full control over distribution networks and infrastructures, the “public meta media.”<sup>24</sup>

Youngblood makes an important ‘transfer’ in his prospective model: just as industrial production played a central role for the post-revolutionary Russian avant-garde, so does immaterial production become central to his conception of the avant-garde of what he considers to be a “post-industrial revolution.” The fact of users controlling the production and distribution media, in fact, amounts to a telecommunications revolution, which not only implies a new role for art in building a new society, but also comes very close to the completion of the project of the historical avant-

garde. However, what has to be questioned regarding this model is that it ignores the continuing existence of industrial production.

Many years prior to Youngblood, German writer and publisher Hans Magnus Enzensberger had already pointed out the emancipatory potential of digital media networks in his essay *Constituents of a theory of the media*.<sup>25</sup> Decentralized media production in which receivers/consumers would be able to turn into senders/producers would mobilize the masses and, thus, instigate political learning, collective production and social control through self-organization. For Enzensberger, however, one of the core issues of his model is that only collective media production can achieve social and political progress:

*For the prospect that in the future, with the aid of the media, anyone can become a producer, would remain apolitical and limited were this productive effort to find an outlet in individual tinkering. Work on the media is possible for an individual only in so far as it remains socially and therefore aesthetically irrelevant. The collection of transparencies from the last holiday trip provides a model. [...] Any socialist strategy for the media must, on the contrary, strive to end the isolation of the individual participants from the social learning and production process. This is impossible unless those concerned organize themselves. This is the political core of the question of the media.*<sup>26</sup>

He insists on collectivity as a necessary precondition for an emancipatory use of media – the former bringing with it social relevance, which for him automatically implies aesthetic relevance. As a result, preoccupation with new media may be seen as a threat for bourgeois art and culture:

*It often seems as if it were precisely because of their progressive potential that the media are felt to be an immense threatening power; because for the first time they present a basic challenge to bourgeois culture and thereby to the privileges of the bourgeois intelligentsia – a challenge far more radical than any self-doubt this social group can display.* <sup>27</sup>

Youngblood and Enzensberger both address some of the core issues that – until today – pertain to an emancipatory use of new technologies and may give some indication of the persistent reservations of the traditional art world against new media.

#### The Reality of Art World Media

While the utopian models introduced above refer to the implications digital media could have on the conception of art within a networked culture, Andrew Menard and Ron White, contemporaries of Enzensberger, call for attention to the increasing interlocking of media coverage and art production. They insist that “media have completely penetrated to the level of art production” and “the form and content of art is in fact determined by the modes of distribution (media),” <sup>28</sup> warning that the emerging glossy art magazines of the 1970s demonstrate that “art media have simply reified distribution by developing as an independent mode of production, a business.” <sup>29</sup> Menard and White fault the art trade journals of their day for serving less distribution than a hierarchical redistribution (of information) that benefits their own platforms and those who finance them (advertisers/investors). The authors conclude with a call that prefigures the trial-and-error efforts of *THE THING Hamburg*:

*If we really don't want to capitulate to the consciousness industry we have to use media differently. Using media differently means organizing differently. Like technology in general, media aren't*

*inherently good or bad; they merely happen to be used oppressively whenever they are embedded in capitalism.* <sup>30</sup>

Arguing from the perspective of such an investor- and gallery-financed trade journal targeted by Menard and White, Isabelle Graw offers her perspective on the emancipatory potential of Internet art, the avant-garde and the art market in an essay published in 1998. Expressing apprehension at a “milieu” that is both hyped and its “own world,” distinct from and even dismissive of commercial gallery art, she sets to deconstruct the phenomenon of artist’s aesthetic experiments with self-organization on the Net. The concepts of Internet art are, to her, nothing but a “revival” of artistic concepts of the seventies and eighties. <sup>31</sup> She expresses little enthusiasm for the historical references that defenders of Internet art may make to “the Russian futurists, Dada, Fluxus, or more modestly, to Mail Art,” for these strike her as “hasty and not thought-out.” <sup>32</sup> Skeptically, she asks: “can it not be that working with software limits artists more than, for example, in-stock paint or standardized brush sizes do?” <sup>33</sup> Desperately trying to find arguments that support her dismissal of Internet art, she is not even reluctant to contradict herself by surprisingly concluding that the program of Internet art would realize the long-sought demand of the classic avant-garde, “the demand for an overcoming of the contradiction between art and what Peter Bürger called ‘Lebenspraxis’ (praxis of life).” The problem is that this achievement draws up short from a cost-benefit analysis: “On the basis of Internet art it becomes apparent that this overcoming yields less than does a maintenance of a notion of art as a specific area.” <sup>34</sup>

Of course, Internet art is not scarce and materially unique, and it also has the same habitat, i.e. the Internet, as production and distribution environment as all other websites; it might not immediately be

identifiable as art, but what is ‘worse’ is that it is out of control of the traditional value-ascribing mechanisms of the art world. No wonder that many art critics have come up with attempts to dismiss the art status of such projects: they render these critics obsolete. Graw abuses the historical avant-garde(s) only for the purpose of discrediting that new art form – which, as it turned out, hardly deserved such a comparison in the first place. Indeed, many Internet artists were all too keen to attract art-historical judgment – quite the opposite of fundamentally challenging the art world.

#### Everyday Life of (Capitalist) Social Media

The substantial degree to which social media currently influence everyday communication is obvious. The analog sender/receiver model is about to be replaced by a large-scale model of distributed creation and dissemination of information – one of the central utopias related to digital networked media. A closer look, however, reveals that this media shift is far from a fulfillment of the socio-political utopias of equal creation and dissemination of information as imagined by early media theorists. While social networked knowledge and agency, interaction and exchange, are central to networked society, they are concurrently the basis of a new economy, which is based on the appropriation of this collectively yielded work. “Aggressive privatization destroys the preconditions of knowledge and culture,” <sup>35</sup> as Felix Stalder puts it, who considers the Internet to have been a laboratory for social innovation during the last 20 years, but also points out that the initial openness of the Internet is currently at risk.

Early Internet art projects such as *The Thing* may have anticipated contemporary forms of exchange and community-building. However, their main purpose was not to generate profit, but rather to think up and experiment with new forms of technology-based anti-institutional and emancipatory organization – on a small scale, of course. In that sense, the everyday so-

cio-technical living conditions we are all experiencing today are not to be mistaken as the fulfillment of any avant-garde aspirations, a vision that Dieter Daniels and Gunther Reisinger put forward: “The strands of utopian thinking of the 1920s and the 1960s held that art anticipates the future and that art transforms, or is transformed, into life; the history of Internet-based art would seem to indicate that it fulfilled both of these utopias.” <sup>36</sup> Speculating about the fact that Internet art resisted commodification and, to its credit in their view, did not (just) become another art genre defined by its technology, their notion of a “fulfillment” that has expanded from a small, specialized art field into everyday life is, nonetheless, just as exaggerated as Graw’s speculations. It is worth asking, however, what are the dynamics between *THE THING Hamburg’s* symbolic status as an art project – which were not immediately obvious to anybody – and the real-life effects it spawned.

#### Art without Identity

In a recently published essay reflecting the ‘art and gentrification’ that has occurred under the auspice of *IBA Hamburg*, historian Peter Birke dwells on a confession made by the artist collective *Ligna*: that they were incapable of providing effective tools for critique within the *IBA* project they accepted a commission from. Birke echoes their conclusion that the operation within a context of institutional funding made any critique inoperative, a hypothesis confirmed by his conclusion that no single art project succeeded in gaining critical traction on *IBA*. <sup>37</sup> Implicitly, Birke hereby shares Peter Bürger’s conception of the ‘neo-avantgarde’ (art after the historical avant-garde) being bound in bourgeois society and having no effect on it at all. He concludes, sweepingly: “that which is striking in all the projects mentioned is that there are hardly any works that directly thematize the process of gentrification. That applies both to the *IBA*-sponsored projects as it does to all other projects.” <sup>38</sup> In

the course of this very study, however, Birke quotes the *THE THING Hamburg* four times, citing various debates and statements made on the platform. Birke has, interestingly, proved the relevance of *THE THING Hamburg* as a 'tool' of critique, while leaving unconsidered the possibility that this platform is itself to be considered as art (one that was even financed institutionally). An artwork that fostered debate on and still serves as an archive for the topic that Birke himself is writing about three years later. <sup>39</sup>

More than an anecdote, this example is an indicator that *THE THING Hamburg* was less an incarnation of neo-avant-garde art practice than it is an embodiment of what Jean-Claude Moineau has called "art without identity." For Moineau, "it is an art (without an *oeuvre*) that, in the manner of so-called 'activist' practices, seeks to be active, to act 'for real' – even if 'modestly' – on and within the world instead of obstinately seeking to prettify it or wanting to re-enchant it." <sup>40</sup> Just as the challenges of the 1920s deeply modified art-reception, so too does art without identity. "It solicits a non-artistic reception, in the ignorance of its artistic identity, including its identity of art without identity." <sup>41</sup>

It seems that art is often ineffective precisely because its identification as art prevents people from taking the 'tools' it offers seriously – or from adapting them to everyday life. One could, thus, claim that it is not necessarily important to present art in an identifiable form – although, in principle, it should be possible to find out about the roots of a practice. On the other hand, it seems immensely important to define and legitimize this 'art without identity' as an extension of artistic practice, or even as a possible vector of where art could go.

## CONCLUSION

*THE THING Hamburg* set out to build an independent space, in which artists could experiment with new forms of organization and dissemination of their work, reflect on their working conditions and the pecking order of the art world, expand the notion of what they wanted art to be, and test how they could critically relate to their environment and collaborate with people from other fields. This space was virtual, but as it related to a specific local environment, it also functioned as a laboratory whose experiments reached out into the real life of the city and affected it – and vice versa. It was based on collective production, aiming at involving as many people as possible including non-art publics and, thus, it was a site for political learning.

Collectivity, however, did not mean increasing one's number of 'friends.' The platform was rather guided by the conviction that – to quote Hamburg artist Beate Katz – "good art cannot be produced when everyone has to always stay friends." <sup>42</sup> *THE THING Hamburg* steered towards controversy, arguments, and dispute and – on more than a few occasions – even making 'enemies.' In this sense, the project contributed to a culture of contention, which is the basis of any democratization process; something that is hard to find in the art world. From this perspective, it is perhaps *THE THING Hamburg's* greatest 'success' that in a relatively short period of time it consolidated the various critical currents in the city and rendered them visible.

Running the project on public funding was a condition that allowed us not only to be in control of our own infrastructure, but also to pay and get paid for work and content related to the platform. While this put us in a permanent conflict (and contradiction) with the authorities who assigned the funding, we considered the ongoing negotiations as part of our aim to expand the notion of what is accepted as art.

The wide range of practices that are not compatible with the business-as-usual of exhibitions, the gallery-driven exchange of communication and money, and the discursive power of art theorists and museum experts can only operate outside or in conflict with the system; there are no spaces within the traditional art world in which timely applications of art can be negotiated. Therefore, it is even more important to look for and create spaces in which this 'can' happen.

Although *THE THING Hamburg* was an experiment based on networked technologies, its focus was not on the development of technology as it was for the early *The Thing*, for example. We rather used the tools available to enable new social relations – ones that foster critical speech – and thus 'renewing art' by bringing together technology, art and politics. However, there were limits set to our experiment of building infrastructure as art; it seems that it had to cease exactly because it was successful, because it started to have a social impact, with this leading to the eventual revocation of its art status. ■

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1. Both projects remained intact during the existence of the *THE THING Hamburg* and are fully functional until today. In April 2013 the mailing list [*echo*] counts over 1,500 subscribers. Since its establishment, in 2003, by Cornelia Sollfrank, the list has played an important role in disseminating independent information regarding art and cultural policy, thus, establishing a context for sharing information and fostering critical discussion.
2. In 2000, the local magazine *Szene Hamburg* ran profiles of nine of these new projects.
3. In 2007, Jean-Claude Moineau provided dismissive epitaphs for both: see J.-C. Moineau, *Contre l'art global, pour un art sans identité* (Alfortville: ere, 2007), 14-16. This section is also available in English translation at the website of *THE THING Hamburg*, "Excerpts from 'Contre l'art global pour un art sans identité,'" November 13, 2008, <http://www.thing-hamburg.de/index.php?id=919> (accessed: September 24, 2013).
4. See Jörn Müller and Nora Sdun, eds., *Wir Sind Woanders: Reader* (Hamburg: Textem, 2007); and Anabela Angelovska, Michel Chevalier, and Nora Sdun, eds., *Wir Sind Woanders #2: Reader* (Hamburg: Textem, 2009).
5. The museum was a public-private partnership with right-wing publisher Peter Tamm, whose 'maritime' collection indicated less any historic or scientific method than a desire to exhibit Nazi devotionalia. The city contributed 30 million EUR and a historic building to the deal.
6. Inke Arns, *Netzkulturen* (Hamburg: Europäische Verlagssanstalt, 2002), 76.
7. Founding date was August 2006; founding members included Cornelia Sollfrank, Ulrich Mattes, Herbert Hossmann, Rahel Puffert, Malte Steiner, Hans-Christian Dany, Ulrike Bergermann, Ole Frahm and Barbara Thoens. The club rules are available in German only at the website of *THE THING Hamburg*: <http://www.thing-hamburg.de/fileadmin/redaktion/Zusammen/Satzung-TheThingHamburg.pdf> (accessed September 24, 2013).
8. Wolfgang Staehle in an interview with Dieter Daniels, "Net Pioneers 1.0," video, 10:26, <http://www.netzpioniere.at/> (accessed September 24, 2013).

9. For a more detailed history of *The Thing* also see the article on *Wikipedia*: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Thing\\_\(art\\_project\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Thing_(art_project)) (accessed May 9, 2013).
10. The thesis that *The Thing* underwent a transformation from “the production of pure sociality to product- or commodity like substitutes surrendering the stage to a more technologically attention-seeking work concept,” is also held by Marc Ries, “Rendez-vous: the Discovery of pure Sociality in early net art,” in *Net Pioneers 1.0: Contextualizing Early Net-Based Art*, ed. Dieter Daniels and Gunther Reisinger (Berlin and New York: Sternberg, 2010), 78.
11. “The Thing (art project),” *Wikipedia*, last modified February 20, 2014, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Thing\\_\(art\\_project\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Thing_(art_project)).
12. For example in 1995 at the festival ‘ars electronica,’ see Karl Gerbel and Peter Weibel, eds., *Mythos Information: Welcome to the Wired World* (Wien/New York: Springer, 1995), 313-317.
13. Selection of interviews mit Wolfgang Staehle: Jan Avgikos, Lacan Dot Com, <http://www.lacan.com/frameVIII15.htm> (accessed June 3, 2013); Dike Blair, “His Thingness,” the website of *The Thing*, <http://www.thing.net/~lilyvac/writing34.html> (accessed September 24, 2013); Dieter Daniels, *netpioneers.info*, <http://www.netzpioniere.at/> (accessed September 24, 2013); Tilman Baumgaertel, Telepolis’ website, “Website-Auktion: The Thing unter dem Hammer,” May 12, 1999, <http://www.heise.de/tp/artikel/3/3372/1.html> (accessed September 24, 2013); Klaus Ottmann, the website of *Journal of Contemporary Art website*, <http://www.jca-online.com/staehle.html> (accessed September 24, 2013); Baumgärtel, Tilman: *net.art – Materialien zur Kunst im Internet* (Nürnberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 1999), 56-63.
14. *The Thing* has been generously supported by the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, the National Endowment for the Arts. The website of *The Thing*, <http://post.thing.net/about> (accessed September 24, 2013).
15. Dieter Daniels and Gunther Reisinger, eds., *Net Pioneers 1.0: Contextualizing Early Net-Based Art* (Berlin and New York: Sternberg, 2010); Christiane Paul, *Digital Art* (London: Thames & Hudson Ltd., 2008), 111; Edward A. Shanken, *Art and Electronic Media* (London: Phaidon, 2009), 50; Mark Tribe and Reena Jana, eds., *New Media Art* (Cologne: Taschen, 2006), 22-23.
16. The operators of the platform were very aware of the fact that people with no Internet access were excluded from that discussion and, in that sense, the notion of public was limited.
17. Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 91.
18. El Lissitzky, “Ideological Superstructure,” in *Programs and Manifestoes of 20th-Century Architecture*, ed. Ulrich Conrads, trans. Michael Bullock (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1971), 121.
19. Editors of *Iskusstvo v proizvodstve* (1920), quoted by Christina Lodder, “Constructivism and Productivism in the 1920s,” in Richard Andrews and Milena Kalinovska, *Art into Life: Russian Constructivism 1914-1932* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 100.
20. Rahel Puffert, *Die Kunst und ihre Folgen. Zur Genealogie der Kunstvermittlung* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2013), 90.
21. Marx and Engels repeatedly took the utopian socialists to task, seeing them as too willing to bracket the necessity of a revolutionary proletarian struggle, and instead all too often “appeal to the purses and the feelings of the bourgeois” [Karl Marx and Frederick Engels “The Communist Manifesto,” in *Karl Marx Selected Writings*, ed. David McLellan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 269]. Instead of taking dreams for reality, opponents of capitalist society were urged to find ways to turn its dynamics against itself and thereby accelerate its collapse. Engels later developed the term scientific socialism, an approach founded on “fully comprehending historical conditions” for the cause of proletarian revolution.
22. Hal Foster, “Some Uses and Abuses of Russian Constructivism,” in *Art Into Life: Russian Constructivism 1914-1932* (New York: Rizzoli, 1990), 244.
23. *Ibid.*, 80.
24. Gene Youngblood, “Metadesign,” *Kunstforum International* 98 (1989): 79.
25. Hans Magnus Enzensberger, “Constituents of a Theory of the Media,” *New Left Review* 64 (1970): 13-26.
26. *Ibid.*, 22-23.
27. *Ibid.*, 18.
28. Andrew Menard and Ron White, “Media Madness,” *The Fox* 2, (1975): 105.
29. *Ibid.*, 108.
30. *Ibid.*, 114.
31. Isabelle Graw, “Man sieht, was man sieht. Anmerkungen zur Netzkunst,” *Texte zur Kunst* 32 (1998): 18. (Authors’ translation.)
32. *Ibid.*, 23.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*, 31. Much like Isabelle Graw, Nicolas Bourriaud holds that the institutional space of galleries or contemporary art centers is a prerequisite for art and its affiliated notion of the “formal construction of time-spaces.” N. Bourriaud, *Esthetique relationelle* (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 1998), 86-87. (Authors’ translation.) He is even more dismissive than Graw of what he terms “those pseudo artists” who “smack on their hard-drives the schemes of thought of the past,” judging that IT tools have hardly made any contribution to “actual art.” N. Bourriaud, *Formes de Vie* (Paris: Denoel, 1999), 184. (Authors’ translation.)
35. Felix Stalder, “Digitale Solidarität – Keynote,” the website of Netz Für Alle, September 15, 2012, <http://netzfueralle.blog.rosalux.de/2012/09/15/felix-stalder-digitale-solidaritaet-keynote/> (accessed June 2, 2013).
36. Dieter Daniels and Gunther Reisinger, *net pioneers 1.0* (Berlin and New York: Sternberg Press, 2009), 6.
37. Peter Birke, “Himmelfahrtskommando Kunst und Gentrifizierung auf den Elbinseln,” in *Arbeitskreis Umstrukturierung Wilhelmsburg*, ed. Unternehmen Wilhelmsburg, Stadtentwicklung im Zeichen von IBA und igs (Berlin: assoziation A, 2013), 75-76.
38. *Ibid.*, 82. (Authors’ translation.)
39. *THE THING Hamburg* had even solicited a statement from Birke about art and gentrification in 2009. See Peter Birke, “Ein Muster, ein Monster und drei Illusionen – Künstlerische Arbeit in der lokalen Klassengesellschaft,” the website of *THE THING Hamburg*, n.d., <http://www.thing-hamburg.de/index.php?id=938#c1328> (accessed June 3, 2013).
40. Jean-Claude Moineau, *Contre l’art global pour un art sans identité* (Alfort: Ere, 2007), 132.
41. *Ibid.*, 134. (Authors’ translation.)
42. The quote stems from a sticker produced by Beate Katz that has been reproduced and referred to in Rahel Puffert, “Die Kunst der vielen Unbekannten/The Art of the Many Unknown,” in *Art in Public Space Styra: Projects 2010*, ed. Werner Fenz, Evelyn Kraus and Birgit Kulturer (Vienna and New York: Springer, 2012), 52-61.



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