RACHEL MADER
OFFSIDE COMMENTARIES — NET-BASED ART AND THE
ART SYSTEM

THE DETACHMENT OF MEDIA ART FROM THE TRADITIONAL ART BUSINESS IS
STILL CLEARLY VISIBLE, EVIDENT IN THE LOCATIONS OF ITS
PRESENTATION AND IN THE FORUMS WHERE IT IS DISCUSSED. RACHEL
MADER'S DESCRIPTION OF NET-BASED ART PIECES RISES THE QUESTION,
TO WHAT EXTENT THEY CONTINUE AN ART HISTORICAL DISCOURSE AND HOW
FAR THEIR READING REQUIRES SPECIFIC QUALIFICATION. NET-BASED ART
ALONG WITH ITS RECEPTION ALWAYS SEEMS TO SUPPLY A SPECIFIC
COMMENTARY ON THE WAY THE CONTEMPORARY ART SYSTEM FUNCTIONS.

1. INTRODUCTION

I see this division not as a consequence of artistic engagement with new media, but rather as the result of pragmatic initiatives to create presentation possibilities and media theory reflections. This means that no fundamental function has to be attributed to the «Eigensinn of the material»[1], but merely a specifying one. The endeavor to give media art an appropriate place in the art system and in the discourse is inevitably linked with an emphasis on specificities, with which legitimization is produced and established. Yvonne Volkart's thesis, according to which everything else would be «automatically generated», if the example of «the importance of exhibitions, media labs, conferences and festivals» were consistently lived, describes the necessity of the twin-track argumentation.[2] In four thematically focused chapters, selected net art works are to be acknowledged here as individual works on the one hand, and on the other to be queried in terms of how, where and to what extent they stimulate art historical debates and where they serve a specialist discourse, which makes technical specialized knowledge a fundamental prerequisite for reception.[3] The question will be raised in conclusion about the extent to which the «Eigensinn of the material» provokes an engagement with the work concept, which can exemplify current artistic production and its acceptance in the art business. This leads to the thesis on which this article is based, that net-based art along with its reception always supplies a specific commentary on the way the art system functions. When net-based art and its position in the art system are examined at the end of the article in relation to the work concept, then this is also in the interest of describing how it is constituted.

2. CREATIVE PROGRAMMING AND ACTIVE VIEWING — CHALLENGES FOR ART RECEPTION

On the average, museum visitors spend barely two minutes viewing a picture; it is a time period that hardly ever allows entering into a net art work in its entirety. Where some operate like film or video works with a linear progression closed in itself and usually lasting longer than two minutes, others make use of the possibilities of the Internet to design works that can only be viewed as a whole by continually clicking through them. The viewer stance that is highly conditioned in the exhibition context then faces at least a double challenge in the

[1] The term «Eigensinn of the material» (roughly: wilful obstinacy) is loosely based on Giaco Schiesser's reflections on the relationship between media and arts as a whole. Cf. Giaco Schiesser, «Arbeit am und mit Eigensinn», in: Monika Fleischmann and Ulrike Reinhard (Ed.): **Digitale Transformationen. Medienkunst als Schnittstelle von Kunst, Wissenschaft, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft**. Heidelberg: whois, 2004; revised English translation: http://pzwart.wdka.hro.nl/mdr/pubsfolder/Eigensinn [03.2010]. See also: Sabeth Buchmann, «‹Nur soviel: Das Medium ist nicht die Botschaft›. Kritik der Medientheorie», in: Marius Babias (Ed.), **Im Zentrum der Peripherie. Kunstvermittlung und Vermittlungskunst in den 90er Jahren**, Dresden, Basel: Verlag der Kunst, 1995, p. 79 – 102.

[2] Yvonne Volkart, «Durchstreifen und Neuvermessen. Schweizer Medienkunst im internationalen Kontext», in: **Mapping New Territories. Schweizer Medienkunst International**, ed. Bundesamt für Kultur, Plug.in, Neue Kunst Halle St. Gallen, 2005, p. 34 – 41.

[3] Felix Stalder has pointed out that in the field of technology, «the knowledge gap between specialists and the broad public is considerable.» He also sees as a possible task of art with new technologies its mediation potential: «One task of the artists and art institutions can be to make it possible to experience specific segments of the present ….» Felix Stalder, in: **Mapping New Territories. Schweizer Medienkunst International**, ed. Bundesamt für Kultur, Plug.in, Neue Kunst Halle St. Gallen, 2005, p. 146.

surroundings of net-based art: not only must the passive viewer stance oriented to contemplation be abandoned, but in many cases the works are embedded not in the standardized calm of the museum, but in the complex data sea of the World Wide Web. In light of this starting point, it is a more recent phenomenon that artists decide to offer assistance for entering a work. Explanations were refused in many early works. Although they did not presume computer skills beyond normal use, they did require an insistence, for instance with Jodi, where every click triggered only a new dance of graphical elements on the screen or an error message.[4] Jodi takes the user actions that are meanwhile taken for granted to the point of absurdity using simple aesthetic codes: selectable elements of the image first have to be discovered by randomly moving the cursor over the screen. A click leads to a new page, where in turn there is no narratively logical connection with the previous one, but which usually only shows orderly new numbers, graphical signs or simple pictures.[5] Programming languages, source code or the generally hidden information of the Internet are brought to the surface in different treatments, a principle of various early net works, with which their authors pointed out the problematic issue of latent concurrently running protocols.[6]

2.1. BACK TO THE ROOTS: LOW TECH AND MINIMAL INTERACTION

It was not rare for the visualization of elementary data to result in an aesthetics, which, even though it could have taken on manifold forms, still remained far behind the possibilities of the Internet, and which artists therefore postulated under the term Low Tech as a kind of programmatic stance.[7] Exonemo's **rgb-f_cker** (2003), for instance, makes countless flickering rectangles in different formats dance across the screen, whose coloration consists increasingly obviously of the basic colors of screen transfers, namely red, green and blue. «Flickering» is the technical term for rapidly changing light intensity. The title, ambiguous due to the omission of single letters (f_cker = fucker) alludes to the uncomfortable perception situation with vulgar vocabulary.[8] With a group of works that can be subsumed under the term «data visualization», **rgb-f_cker** brings otherwise hidden data transfers to the surface, presenting them as a digital aesthetics of their own.[9]

4 http://wwwwwwww.jodi.org; this is the address of Jodi's official website, but not all of their works are collected there. Numerous works, especially early ones, are hosted on their own websites, whose names usually consist of unintelligible abbreviations and their name. One example is http://404.jodi.org : 404 is a frequently occurring code in error messages, which is shown in this work as the only writing on a colorful background. Clicking leads to a list of cryptic terms (e.g. «Bttr nvr thn lt.» or ff), at the end of which the blinking cursor invites an interactivity that does not even exist. The only selection that can be made is a square blinking in the top left corner of the picture, which brings one directly back to the start page [03.2010].

5 http://wwwwwwww.jodi.org/betalab/index.html, the work **betalab**, which is listed on the current [03.2010] website is a good example of this. Whereas the first page shows a compilation of 3D animated cards and set pieces of a source code, a click leads to sub-pages that are extremely differently arranged, one showing simply a list of four-digit numbers, another offering changing bird portraits, and another showing model drawings of technical processes and the prototype of a simple machine in constant rotation.

6 An interest in isolating individual technical components of the Internet is already found in the first net art works. Not only was the early sign code for information exchange ASCII addressed (see for instance Vuk Cosic, **Deep ASCII**, 1998, or also the exhibition **CODeDOC** organized by Christiane Paul at the Whitney Museum in 2002, which was exclusively devoted to the reworking of code), but also the design of the Desktop (cf. the work **Desktop Is**, 1997, by Alexei Shulgin) and the connecting of linked information through a common or multiple websites (cf. Olia Lialina's work **Agatha Appears**, 1997) were subjects of artistic reflection.

7 For the British collective **Redundant Technology Initiative**, Low Tech is the program. Cf. www.lowtech.org [03.2010]. In 2000 Justin Hoffmann organized an exhibition in the Shedhalle, Zurich on this theme and

The machine character of the computer and its generative possibilities based on chance are features used by various artists to question or ironically portray the classical concept of creativity. Beat Brogle's **onewordmovie** (2003) and Cornelia Sollfrank's **net.art generator** (from 1999 on) are two image generating works, which leave creativity up to the «machine» through a minimal interaction with the user. Both have a simply arranged start page offering users a possibility to enter a term that serves as a search command to find files marked with this term in various image search engines. **onewordmovie** then recompiles these in a high speed image sequence like a film.[10] A rapidly changing sequence of images is played in a constantly renewed loop of four to eight single images at a time. Once they have been generated, the films are collected and remain on the website to be viewed. As arbitrarily as the images end up on the net, they become just as randomly part of a panorama of the digital image flood subsumed under a search term.[11] The machine and its vast virtual hinterland are tamed through the conceptual framework of the artist Beat Brogle and finally the individual entry in the form of a film.[12] With thematic image sequences that sometimes seem absurd, **onewordmovie** represents not only a segment from the collective digital image treasury, but also indicates its organization on the net, which is neither stringently logical nor controllable.

2.2. ATTACKING IMAGE AND MOUSE

Although Cornelia Sollfrank's **net.art generator** functions according to the same basic principle, the proximity of its resultant products to classical art works aims for a fruitful conflict with the conditions and modalities of the art business.[13] In numerous exhibitions the artist also showed the computer-generated images along with the **net.art generator**, so that questions about the artistic quality of these images, problems of copyright or reflections on the work concept were consequently not merely by-products, but integral components of the installations.[14] The fact that the **net.art generator** exists in five implementations, each designed by the artist in collaboration with different programmers, is a further indication of Sollfrank's attempts to re-develop and assess the concept of creativity under current conditions.

A radical attack on the machine itself is undertaken by the Japanese artist duo Exonemo with the **Danmatsumouse** (2007).[15] While the most diverse attacks on the computer mouse are demonstrated on

illustrated how topical this interest is with works by Sadie Benning, etoy, Critical Art Ensemble and others.

8 http://www.exonemo.com/rgb/indexE.html [03.2010].

9 The term **Data Visualisation** is taken from the publication by Rachel Greene. Under this term she also includes works, for instance, by Lisa Jevbratt, who visualizes Internet protocols, but only optically removes their information content, because it is still possible to click on them. Greene 2004, p. 132–151.

10 An explanation of how the images are generated is found along with much further information about the work on the website of **OneWord-Movie** itself: www.onewordmovie.ch [03.2010].

11 Brogle himself mentions the problematic term image flood on the website. He indicates that it is organized with his work according to a user-oriented principle. Cf. www.onewordmovie.ch. [03.2010].

12 Philip Galanter compares the development of a conceptual framework that first assumes a concrete form through the user's input with the way Fluxus and Happening artists worked. Cf. Greene 2004, p. 152 (see note 9). Verena Kuni calls Sollfrank's works conceptual and situates them in the tradition of early institutional critique. Cf. Verena Kuni, «Totally Automatically a Genius», in: **net.art generator. Programmed Seduction**, ed. Institut für moderne Kunst Nürnberg, Nuremberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2004, p. 180.

13 http://net.art-generator.com/src/gen.html [03.2010].

14 The **nag** was shown publicly six times between 1999 and 2004; framed prints of the digitally generated image collages were exhibited in the Bremen City Gallery (1999) and in conjunction with the collection exhibition of the Volksfürsorge in Hamburg (2003).

15 http://exonemo.com/Danmatsu-Mouse/indexE.html [03.2010].

the screen, it gradually becomes clear that the cursor is the organ of this abuse. And later still, it becomes obvious that when the connection is completely broken, when the cursor no longer transfers any movement, then the goal of the attack has been reached. The violent separation between the really existing mouse and its virtual effect is an ironic commentary on the autonomy of a machine, which is ultimately always the result of human construction.

3. THE NEW USER-FRIENDLINESS OF «TACTICAL MEDIA»

«The Digital Age exploded into existence,» stated the media artist Lynn Herschman Leeson in 1996, thus describing the sudden and vehement presence of new information and communication forms in the mid-1990s. Similar to the way artistic works of the 1960s and 1970s took the phenomenon of new information technologies practically as a material basis and critically commented on them, a community of cultural workers interested in the Internet reacted to the omnipresence of the World Wide Web.[16] Fascination with the possibilities of global, decentralized and also low-cost communication is already to be found very early in Internet art. Even the project **The World's First Collaborative Sentence** (1994), generally called the first net art work, by the American artist Douglas Davis, operates with the possibility of virtual exchange not controlled by any instance above it.[17] As a contribution to the exhibition **InterActions** (1967–1981), Davis prepared the web server only just set up at the Lehman College Art Gallery in New York to launch his sentence that has still not been finished today.[18] What was soon also to be heard was growing criticism on the part of artists about the commercialization of communication tools by large corporations such as the British Telecom. This theme includes, for instance, **Communication Creates Conflicts** (1995) by the net art pioneer Heath Bunting. Here he adapted the only seemingly interactive tools of these companies and attempted to use them for a personal conversation with the users.[19] With **G-Spam** in 2001 Exonemo took the meanwhile actively used mail culture as a starting point and made a framework of objectionable spam mails in connection with popular electronic greeting cards, in order to address the ambivalence and risks of these forms of communication.[20] Their project offers an opportunity to send these virtual greetings in the form of spam to friends, who – if they

[16] On the use of information technologies in the art of the 1960s and 1970s, cf. Sabeth Buchmann, **Denken gegen das Denken: Produktion, Technologie und Subjektivität bei Sol LeWitt, Yvonne Rainer und Hélio Oiticicia**, Berlin: b_books, 2007.

[17] In 1969 Jan van der Marck organized the exhibition **Art by Telephone** for the Museum of Contemporary Art in Chicago, whereby the numerous artists associated with conceptual art used the telephone not only as an art object, but also in its function as a communication carrier. This group of works also includes the work **The World in 24 Hours** (1982, presented at the Ars Electronica) by the Canadian artist Robert Adrian X. Using the most different telecommunication apparatuses, he established ongoing communication for a period of 24 hours among participants distributed all over the world. There is also Nam June Paik's video work **Global Groove** (1973), which attempted to summarize the idea of the global TV landscape in a single film using numerous technical tricks.

[18] http://artport.whitney.org/collection/davis/Sentence/sentence1.html [03.2010]. Only a year after the project was initiated, it was bought by the Whitney Museum and has been running since then on its server. Input possibilities have been adapted to technical possibilities over the course of time. Audio and video material can meanwhile be inserted as well. Cf. Douglas Davis in an interview with Tilman Baumgärtel, **net.art 2.0. Neue Materialien zur Netzkunst**, Nuremberg: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2001, p. 60.

[19] http://www.irational.org/cybercafe/tokyo [03.2010].

[20] http://www.exonemo.com/G-spam/index.html [03.2010].

have activated an efficient firewall — will never even receive this courtesy.

3.1. LESS UTOPIA, MORE PRAGMATISM

Works like those by Birgit Kempker or Marc Lee include interactive elements, thus also offering indications of the shift from utopias projected onto the net in the direction of pragmatic perspectives. Kempker's **Sphinx** (2004) and Lee's works as a whole presuppose a participating viewer, who takes part in the arrangement or the course of the work not simply by clicking through, but by actively making small contributions. Like Brogle and Sollfrank, Lee also offers users the possibility of controlling the work with a term they have selected. In addition to this input, which substantially influences the character of the work, although not its fundamental constitution, all three authors present options that can result in a refined development of the appearance. Whereas in Lee's **Breaking the News** these relate to the inflection of news announcements, technical details can be influenced in Sollfrank and Brogle's works, such as the number of single images to generate a new image in **net.art generator**, or the amount of images grouped together in a loop with **onewordmovie**. Whereas Sollfrank's work results in images that are sampled, but conventional, Brogle's results in films that are only finished when the search engine finds no more new images.[21] Both use small supplements to adapt the logic of popular search engines. Especially the additional options offered on the website hosting the work, such as «hit list», «favorites» or «send a movie to a friend», liberate the artistic intention from the political radicalness linked with the term «tactical media».[22] The subcultural vocabulary has given way to a user-friendliness that is not only more strongly and clearly oriented to consumers, but also addresses a less specialized audience. For this reason, I do not find it meaningful to speak of a «depoliticization»; the loss of utopian projections goes hand in hand with a factual democratization of the appearance. The fact that this can certainly be in the artists' own interest is evident in Sollfrank's idea of distributing the images created in the **net.art generator** through the major furniture retailer IKEA, for example.[23]

3.2. THE SIMULTANEITY OF POPULARITY AND SUBVERSION

The connection between popularity and subversive use is the basis of Marc Lee's works. In keeping with his interest in Internet news, he adapts and manipulates the aesthetics and user modalities of popular news sites. On the fictive news site **Loogie.net NEWS** (first version 2004), freely selectable search terms are used to generate new news an-

21 Cf. the information from Brogle and Zimmermann at www.onewordmovie.ch under the link «Concept» [03.2010], the link to **Breaking the News** is http://www.oamos.com [03.2010].

22 The term «tactical media» goes back to the historian and philosopher Michel de Certeau; he proposed it in **The Practice of Everyday Life** (in French: **Arts de Faire**, Paris 1980) in conjunction with his analysis of consumer behavior, thus identifying the possibility of a creatively subversive use of hegemonic specifications and positions. In the course of the 1990s, «tactical media» was associated with a political activism aimed at positions of power and frequently adapting their strategies. In 1997 Geert Lovink and David Garcia wrote the manifesto **The ABC of Tactical Media** (http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/contributors2/garcialovinktext.html), which was published with the launch of the **Tactical Media Network** website (http://www.waag.org/project/tmn) [03.2010].

23 The artist expressed this idea during the presentation of her works at the opening conference of the research project **Owning Online Art**. http://www.ooart.ch/konferenz230607/index.html [03.2010].

nouncements that, when they are fed back into the net, develop an effective impact in virtual reality. [24] This subversive act is based on the strategic way of dealing with mass media that grew in significance in the late 1990s, which was covered by the aforementioned term «tactical media».

In the work created three years later, **Breaking the News – Be a News-Jockey** (2007), this legacy can still be sensed, but now the heretical manipulation of Internet news is presented as a caricature and no longer has any feedback effect on items on existing news websites. The News Jockey generates a new news broadcast based on the input of single words or sentence fragments by searching the Internet for the relevant key word and composing an image, text and sound collage from the findings, which can be modified according to individual needs. Yet it is not only the content of the information that can be determined, but also the inflection can be selected in keeping with the user's interests from the options «critical», «informative» or «entertaining». Together with the cartoon-like graphical elements and changing the size and duplication of single image fragments, the interpretive gesture of the News Jockey becomes transparent. Marc Lee mocks the lure of the live broadcast, today a conventional argument for TV formats, by breaking down the material and wildly reconstructing it with aesthetic arguments. Unlike Vuk Cosic's **Net.art per se (CNN Interactive)** (1996), one of the first artistic adaptations of a mainstream website, Lee's works do not intend to represent a targeted attack on effectively operating market leaders, but instead present their aesthetics and mode of argumentation in a playful form. [25]

4. ANTI-AUTHORITARIAN GESTURES AND ANIMATED POETRY – STORYTELLING IN HYPERTEXT

The interest of net artists in the possibilities of storytelling in virtual space correlated with vehement debates about narrative models in art. Art historiography related methods of narration familiar from literature to aesthetic issues specific to art. Whereas in painting, for instance, the paradoxical simultaneity of a captured segment and its narrative potential was discussed, the starting point for the art of new media proved to be completely different. [26] Despite being assigned to the field of visual arts, the art of new media had more in common with the narrative possibilities of literature and film and their critical reflections. These are shared in turn with cultural philosophy discussions, which more recently make a case for the knotted and less linear constitution of all social systems with metaphors like rhizome, network or hyperculture. In her descriptions of narrative strategies in virtual space, the new media specialist Söke Dinkla takes recourse specifically to this terminology marked by

24 http://www.1go1.net/index.php/ Loogie/NetNEWS [03.2010].
25 http://www.ljudmila.org/naps/ cnn/cnn.htm [03.2010].
26 According to the art historian Wolfgang Kemp, the artistic treatment of content material was based from the beginning on stories. The development of iconographic codes and modalities served to ensure the readability of the narrative, which could necessarily only be represented by a single moment. Wolfgang Kemp, «Über Bilderzerzählungen», in: Michael Glasmeier (Ed.), **Erzählen. Eine Anthologie**, Ostfildern: Cantz Verlag, 1994, p. 55 – 69.

post-structuralist discourse and maintains that it is «the trans-
formation from analog to digital medium [that makes] the fundamen-
tal doubt about what is real and the search for altered possibili-
ties for representing reality comprehensible.»[27]

Olia Lialina's early work **My Boyfriend Cam Back from the War**
(1996) confirms Dinkla's diagnosis, as the narrative assumes the
possibility form. The story tells of a couple meeting again after
a long separation due to war.[28] Using frame technology that enab-
les a division of the screen into sections that can be individ-
ually activated, Lialina develops a dialogue between the two per-
sons, which makes the difficulty of regaining closeness obvious
just through the staccato-like sentences. The speaker position
always remains unclear here, only individual statements allow for
conjectures about whether he or she is speaking. Viewers thus tap
their way, not only using the mouse to search for active areas,
through the screen increasingly divided into single squares. They
also move through a story that is clearly arranged optically, but
has multiple levels in the narrative. In this story, the helpless-
ness of the couple in the face of unexpected closeness and their
struggle for words corresponds conceptually to the searching,
probing movement forwards. Although the viewers are able to dis-
cover the strand of the narrative by following their curiosity,
the freely selectable options are limited by the technical deve-
lopment to avoid a linear logic of narration. This structure is
nevertheless to be read as an anti-authoritarian gesture, which
does not – as the frequently mentioned comparison
to Sergei Eisenstein's technique of parallel mon-
tage suggests – work with the means of a dramatic
acceleration. In accordance with the complexity of
the situation, instead it raises the search for
words to a principle of content and design.[29]

Against this background, the works by the Korean
duo Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries seem almost
antagonistic. They additionally emphasize espe-
cially the principle of linearity and the dramatic
development of a story through rhythmic arrange-
ment, such as in **The End**, for instance, one of the
currently forty «text-based animations» that can
be viewed on their website.[30] Following the usual
introduction, in which there is a count-down from
ten to one as in a film, the story begins – seeming-
ly – from the end: «The End» it says, the phrase
that generally marks the end of a film. The subse-
quent sentence fragments reveal that the story
first starts here and will probably escalate. Rhyth-
mically adapted to accompanying jazz music, the
separation of a couple is rendered in dialogue form.
What first looks like an amicable agreement soon
becomes a forceful exchange between two furious and
hurt individuals, who even lash out in the end.[31]
The music enhances the drama by increasing in vo-

27 Söke Dinkla, «Virtuelle Narra-
tionen. Von der Krise des Erzählens
zur neuen Narration als mentales
Möglichkeitsfeld», in: Rudolf
Frieling / Dieter Daniels (Ed.),
**Medien Kunst Netz. Medienkunst
im Überblick**, Vienna, New York:
Springer, 2004, p. 253.
28 http://www.teleportacia.org/
war/war.html [03.2010]. Without
being autobiographical, it seems
likely that Lialina ties the theme
to the Chechen conflict then topi-
cal in Russia. The narrative itself
provides no information about this.
29 This comparison was made
by Lev Manovich, for instance,
in his essay «Behind the Screen»
cf. http://www.nettime.org/Lists-
Archives/nettime-1-9707/msg00119.
html [03.2010]; Tilman Baumgärtel
addresses parallel montage in
an interview with Lialina, although
she does not respond to it. Cf.
Tilman Baumgärtel, **net.art**,
Nuremberg: Verlag für moderne
Kunst, 1999, p. 129.
30 The duo's work is described
with this telling phrase in their
Wikipedia entry. The URL for
their website is: http://www.
yhchang.com [03.2010].

lume, intensity and speed, consequently becoming silent after the woman's violent blow, which corresponds to the end of the short story. The design and compositional principle of this work is found as a structural basis and as a kind of trademark in almost all the animations by Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries. Although the subject matter of the stories and their sources are sometimes fundamentally different, the implementation always reflects the specific theme, despite the framework that remains the same. **Cunnilingus in North Korea** combines the political propaganda of North Korea with the idea of sexual liberation through the equality of all people as postulated by the state in an ironically broken narrative. The text imitates a popular science lecture, which Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries were apparently invited by the North Korean dictator Kim Jong II — according to the introductory words — to hold before a North Korean audience.[32] The background music is upbeat and sprinkled with funk elements, the text is highlighted with red and sometimes black bars, and the changing format of the words emphasizes the ironic tone of the appearance. Absurd aphorisms such as «Dialectic Sex + Gender = Happy People» or the remark about the bourgeois-conditioned sexual inhibitions of the South Korean population are commentaries from an unusual perspective of a politically rigidified and self-satisfied nation. Young-Hae Chang's interpretation of this situation oscillates between caricaturing and seemingly cynical commentaries, the taboo-breaking form of which recounts the prohibitions in North and South Korea in the same way.

Similar to Lialina's multi-layered dialogue, Birgit Kempker's **Sphinx** is interested in a narrative structure, in which the position of the narrator is destabilized.[33] This happens on the one hand in that the **Sphinx** is increasingly succeeded by the machine, on the other through the radical departure from a meta-narrative. The authorship is constituted by questioners and respondents, who generate narrative fragments in collaborative communication, dispensing with an overarching structure of meaning.[34] The net-based communication among the multiple authors results in an interwoven and continually proliferating web of questions and answers, which are only loosely or barely connected in demonstrating the simultaneity of very different positions.

As these examples show, the interest in media-specific narrative possibilities has mostly abandoned the constitutive function. More recent works playfully explore the media conditions of the Internet, often entirely without an educational impetus.[35] Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries' casual remark about the choice of medium — «Net art is relatively cheap to make, and you don't need a studio

[31] http://www.yhchang.com/THE_END.html [03.2010].

[32] http://www.yhchang.com/CUNNILINGUS_IN_NORDKOREA.html [03.2010] is one of the few works that is also available in German. Most of the others can be viewed in English and/or Korean on the website. According to the artists, they usually produce the stories in English first, also because the member Mark Voge is from the USA. Cf. http://www.brown.edu/Research/dichtung-digital/2005/2/Yoo/index-engl.htm [03.2010].

[33] http://www.xcult.org/sphinx/index.html [03.2010].

[34] Söke Dinkla calls the departure from «grand narratives» a central interest of postmodern art. Cf. Dinkla 2004 (op. cit.), p. 252 – 253.

[35] Net art shares this development with video and performance art. Whereas usually artists initially engaged intensively and focused with the specific conditions of the medium, this perspective frequently expanded to a pragmatic use of the different media. An illustrative example of this kind of artistic development is shown in Dan Graham's complex of works. Cf. Brian Wallis (Ed.), **Rock my Religion. Writings and Art Projects 1965 – 1990**, Massachusetts: MIT, 1993.

for all your unsold works»**36** – only underlines this observation.
At the same time, it testifies to current artistic production con-
ditions, in which media decisions are not of a purely artistic
nature.

5. WORKING ON THE WORK CONCEPT

Young-Hae Chang Heavy Industries are distinguished by lively in-
ternational exhibition activity, which is not at all limited to
specialized art forums reserved for new media. At the same time,
their works rarely undergo crucial changes here: sometimes the
computer screen is replaced by a flatscreen, occasionally an en-
larged projection with a data projector. The works themselves re-
main unchanged in their course and composition. Marc Lee fre-
quently already conceives his works for the exhibition context, so
it is not unusual for them to be seen in a room-filling installa-
tion, within which the visitors find themselves surrounded by cons-
tantly renewing news collages.**37** Exonemo principally operate in
virtual and real space at the same time, making exactly this con-
nection the subject matter of numerous works.**38** Cornelia Sollfrank
has found various implementations for the public presentation of
the **net.art generator**: in the City Gallery Bremen (1999), the
collection exhibition of the Volksfürsorge Hamburg (2003), and in
the Tinguely Museum (**Kunstmaschinen – Maschinenkunst,** 2008), she
also showed digitally generated image collages next to a computer
station. Beat Brogle, who also produces videos and installations
in addition to his computer-based projects, is familiar with treat-
ments for three-dimensional space. The work **Iconic Flow,** which he
realized as a construction site art project for the Swisscom Busi-
ness Park in Köniz in 2005, is loosely based on **onewordmovie** in
content and form. The 28 plasma screens placed in the entrance
area show short films with random images from the Internet. Fol-
lowing the principle of **onewordmovie,** search terms can be entered
via text messages.**39** These adaptations of the works to the respec-
tive specific contexts is not regarded by the artists as a make-
shift solution. Instead it is part of their activities, which have
to take place in keeping with the existing conditions, whether on
the net or in real space. Whereas the net presupposes a reflected
way of dealing with it due to its technical condi-
tions, the expansion into the exhibition space ne-
cessarily results in including its parameters. Net
artists thus operate with a situative understan-
ding of work, which centers around sensitivity to
context, openness, and process-orientation. Topoi
such as the immateriality of net-based art, as they
have been named as a fundamental criterion, for in-
stance by Timothy Druckerey and Peter Weibel in
the exhibition **net-condition,** are consequently more
of a mystification of an artistic practice than a
description of current productions.**40** It is pre-

36 http://www.brown.edu/Research/
dichtung-digital/2005/2/Yoo/
index-engl.htm [03.2010].
37 http://www.1go1.net [03.2010].
On Marc Lee's website there are
video and photo documentations of
various exhibitions.
38 Cf. for instance, the exhibi-
tion at Plug.in, Basel, 2 June to
14 September 2008,
http://www.iplugin.org [03.2010].
39 Whereas the online version
has no restrictions, sexualized or
erotic terms are suppressed in the
installation for the Swisscom.

Beat Brogle, Iconic Flow, 2005 Installation in the Swisscom Business Park, Köniz / Bern

cisely the relaxed way in which net artists deal with the work concept and the materiality of the works that fundamentally re-values the notion of artistry – the most intrinsic artistic capabi-lity. The radicalness of this stance results from the situative use of material foundations, which thereby reject an essentiali-zation, as it is demanded and asserted by a branch of media theo-ry. This gesture also remains a potential, because it requires the same flexibility from the reception, and the works thus refuse a reductionist interpretation following criteria such as signature or exclusively specific expertise. In this way, net-based art ques-tions and destabilizes not only various parameters of art produc-tion (such as the concentration on a work concept that can be clearly delimited or the notion of a mainly reflective viewer atti-tude), but it also equally irritates art criticism and art histo-ry. The latter, dedicated to the autonomy of art and the resultant consequences, find themselves confronted with a form of art produc-tion that self-confidently takes up and demonstrates the dependen-cy of creative practice on various technological, social and institutional conditions. The hesitant inclusion of net art in the traditional art system is consequently also a sign of its obstinate insis-tence on the principles, with which the indepen-dence of art is seemingly guaranteed in society.

Translated from the German by Aileen Derieg

40 The exhibition **net_condition. Art and Global Media** curated by Timothy Druckery and Peter Weibel in 2001 was called a first attempt to historicize net art two years later by Julian Stallabrass. Cf. Julian Stallabrass, **The Online Clash of Culture and Commerce,** London: Tate, 2003, p. 126.

RACHEL MADER

is an art historian and the director of the «Art as Enterprise: Creative Practice
and Cultural Politics since 1980» (2009–12). From 2002–09 she worked as a scientific
assistant at ZHdK (IFCAR) and the universities of Berne and Zurich. Her research
and publications deal with contemporary art, the art market, sponsorship and cultu-
ral politics, ambivalence as an artistic strategy, feminist art history and science
criticism. Rachel Mader is also active as a tutor in art schools, supervisor of
research projects (Owning Online Art: Study for a Netart Gallery), and as a critic
and curator. In 2008, she became a member of the board of the GegenwART Foundation,
Kunstmuseum Bern.