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"Interaction versus Consumption: Mass Media and Art from 1920 to today"

Summary:
From the radio of the 1920s to the Internet of the 1990s: Open and interactive media structures in contrast to closed and distributed ones. Artistic utopias meet commercial strategies.

Introduction:

Since the 1990s, interactivity has been one of the keywords to promote a convergence of disciplines. At this convergence, artistic innovation meets with technological progress, creating links to mass culture. While some of these promises have become slightly outdated, it is worth looking back over the history of art and media for similar developments. These can be found in the 1920s, when the birth of radio broadcasting was accompanied by utopias not unlike those of the Internet of the 1990s. In both cases, a true convergence of disciplines took place as artists, technicians and media planners were jointly challenged by seemingly endless new possibilities. The utopian spirit that brought such diverse groups together in search of a new media experience was short lived, however, as the radio and the Internet's future market potential was gleaned by industry and its commercialization introduced the strict rules of business. The euphoric reaction of the stock market in the 1920s as in the 1990s still maintained some of these ex-artistic utopias. Yet, the crash only confirmed what we already know: the aims of art, technology and commerce are ultimately different. While art still believes in the old idea of eternity, technology waits for the next step to sweep away the current hype and business is just business. This essay focuses on the different evaluation systems in the fields of art, technology and commerce–differences that do not exclude temporary collaboration and deep interference, but that also do not allow for a merging of these fields in the long run.

I. From the radio of the 1920s to the Internet of the 1990s[1]

Before we focus on media art, it is necessary to first establish some foundations in the history of technology. Our preliminary thesis is that we have experienced a similar development with the transformation of the Internet from a domain for specialists to a mainstream media since 1990 as with the creation of the radio from wireless transmissions in the 1920s. Two images serve as an introduction to the comparison of the media development of wireless and radio up until 1920 and with the Internet and the WWW after 1990. Figure 1 from the year 1916 shows the proposal for a US-wide network of radio amateurs linked by a system of relay stations. With such a network, wireless messages could be transmitted beyond the range of individual stations to every place in the US. The idea for a permanent network was not realized but the principle of "forwarding" messages was customary among the amateurs.

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[1] For sources and background information, see Dieter Daniels, *Kunst als Sendung: Von der Telegrafie zum Internet (Art as Transmission: From the Telegraph to the Internet)*, München 2002, pp. 136-152. See also the book's website at www.hgb-leipzig.de/daniels.
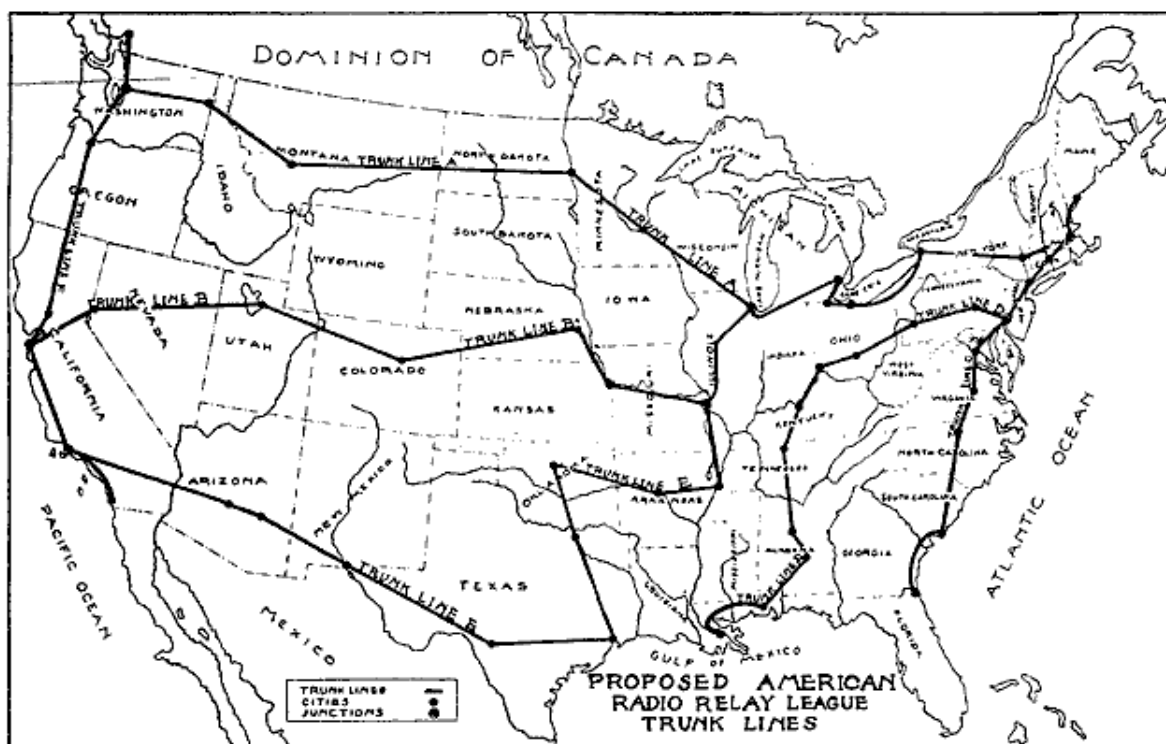
(Figure 1: Proposal for a relay network of American radio amateurs, Hiriam Percy Maxim in: Q.S.T., Feb. 1916)
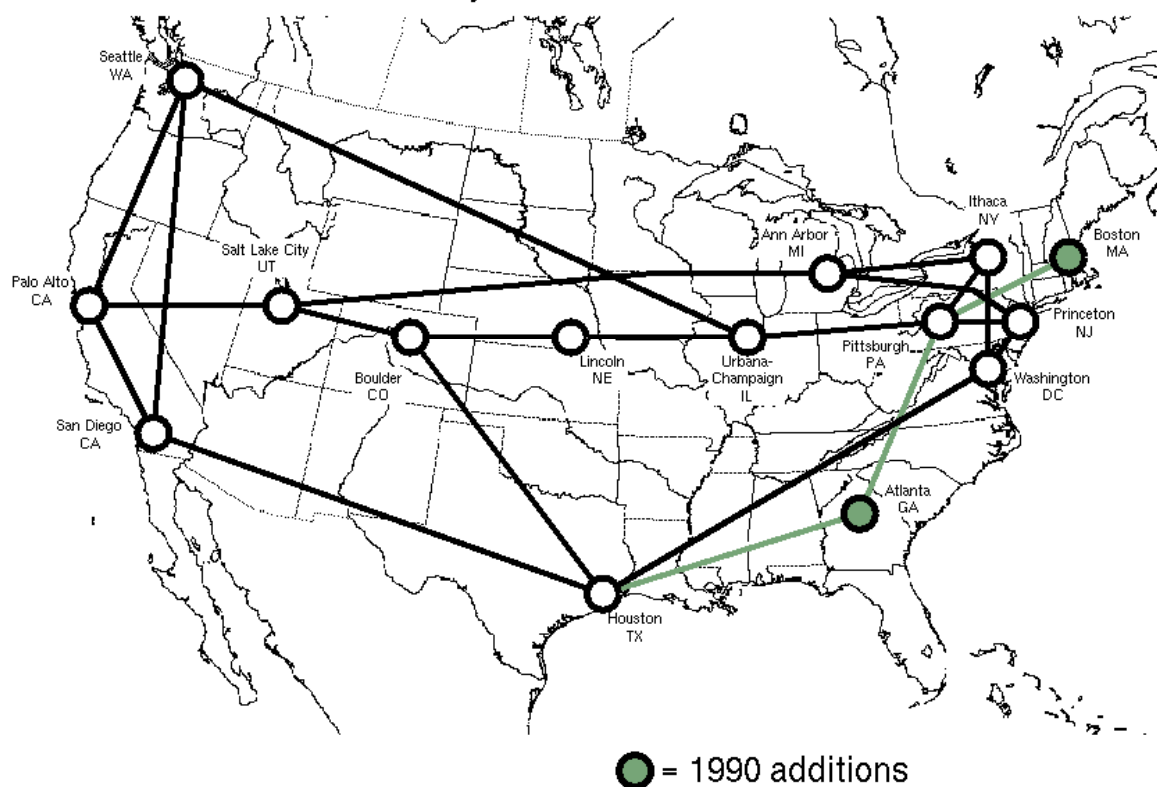

Figure 2: Structure of the Internet backbone NSFNET T1 in the USA, 1989-1992)

The structural similarity between Figure 1 and Figure 2 showing the structure of the Internet backbone in the early part of the 1990s is immediately evident. Whereas in the amateur wireless net, human beings (i.e., the amateurs) recorded and forwarded messages, this process is now automated by the computer in the Internet. Without further differentiating these two technologies, however, let us focus on the politically motivated common ground between both of these network projects. In 1916, the US stood at the brink of World War I. For the first time in American history, the US was confronted with the risk of an attack on its territory. In the service of their country, radio amateurs proposed a network that would secure nation-wide communication if the telegraph lines and large wireless stations on the coast were destroyed. The core element of this idea was that connections would be maintained if individual stations were destroyed since transmissions could reach their goal over alternative routes. This concept of a quasi-indestructible network corresponds to the extensive arguments for introducing the ARPANET in the 1950s; a network that was supposed to preserve communication in the case of an atomic war in Cold War times.

On the other hand, there are fundamental differences between these two network models. The ARPANET and its consequent transformation to the Internet were government initiatives. The official structure was converted into a private communication medium step by step-a medium that today we take for granted like the mail or the newspaper. In contrast, the 1916 proposal emerged from a grass roots movement of amateurs who were dedicated to the medium of radio out of pure enthusiasm. Before 1912, there were no federal regulations for wireless in the US and compared to Europe, there were extensive possibilities for anyone to use the ether. This sometimes caused chaotic situations-navy operators and amateur stations debating on the air about who had the right to stay on a particular frequency.

Before World War I, there were already approximately 100,000 such wireless enthusiasts. They formed a communication structure outside of government or commercial control-a kind of rhizomatic collective of initiates. With Morse code, they developed their own language style and collective ideals. A few expanded their transmissions to include talk and music and produced small but periodic "broadcasts" for their colleagues. Before 1920, radio did not exist as a mass broadcast medium. The airwaves were essentially used for point-to-point communication. Radio as a broadcast medium would soon have arisen out of these amateur transmissions, however, if World War I had not interrupted this development. Here, I contradict Friedrich Kittler's thesis that the origin of radio, in a media historical sense, was World War I and that still even today, *all* electronic entertainment media comes from the "abuse of army equipment."[2]

The radio amateurs built their own equipment since off the shelf technologies did not exist and tinkering with the technology was as an important part of their hobby. Through this, impulses for further technical development emerged. These amateurs are the predecessors of hackers and tech-nerds and without intending

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[2] See Friedrich Kittler, *Grammophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated and with an introduction by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz, Stanford University Press, 1999, pp.94-114. For the origin of the "abuse of army equipment," see p. 96. With these words, the German radio pioneer Hans Bredow was forbidden during World War I to continue his music broadcasts, which soldiers on the front line could receive with their army equipment. Even after the end of World War I, the German military strongly opposed the freeing up of the airwaves for civilian use.

to, sparked the first "hype" in the history of media. The so-called "radio boom" after the end of World War I lead to the emergence of the first electronic mass media.

Before long, however, politics forcibly interrupted civilian media development. With the entrance of the US in World War I, all private radio activities were declared security risks and prohibited, forcing the amateurs to shut down their transmissions. Instead, they entered the war as US army radio operators, transmitting commands and reconnaissance information in the fight against enemy jamming transmitters in the first electronic communication war in history.

After the end of the World War I, the amateurs who returned from the front resumed their hobby. During the course of the war, the need for military innovation lead to significant advances in radio technology – advances that Kittler bases his argument on. Now, broadcasting talk and music was significantly easier and Morse code was continually interrupted by such sounds.


Figure 3: Radio amateur and family, Cartoon, from Q.S.T., May 1922

The cartoon from 1922 in Figure 2 encapsulates the transformation of the medium of the radio-no longer a *communication* medium for male initiates but rather a fascinating *consumption* medium casting a spell over the entire family. The male amateur is in a type of "on line chat" (to use a contemporary notion) with his buddies while his wife and kids simply want to listen to music. Such conflicts take place most likely in some households today: "Kids, I have to first read my email, then you can surf the Net."

While the author of this cartoon in 1922 still hoped that the family also would be infected by this fascination of Morse code, the opposite was soon to be the case. The number of those who built radios only for listening instead of transmission, steadily increased. This resulted in a new type of media user-the "ether-flaneur" who explored the increasingly growing frequency jungle. This explorer still worked actively with the medium but increasingly became a passive eavesdropper. His contemporary equivalent is the Web surfer, who uses the Internet more as a consumption medium than a communication one and in so doing, loses him/herself in the vastness of information. On the other hand, with strongly improved technology and partially with the use of old army equipment, semi-professional "hobby stations" were increasingly committed to playing records or live music and to transmitting occasional addresses.

This marked the beginning of the industrial development of the radio in the USA. Until 1921, all radio devices were still self-built. With the marketing of electronic components after World War I, the stagnating radio industry recognized a potential for future customers. In November 1920, KDKA, the first commercially paid for and installed radio station went into service in order to further stimulate the sale of radio components. Frank Conrad, an electrical engineer working for the electrical equipment company Westinghouse and a dedicated radio amateur, could now turn his hobby into a profession and built the station. During 1921, thirty additional professional station licenses followed from firms, newspapers and universities, engaging amateurs for what was now officially called "broadcasting." Here, the word "radio" took on its contemporary significance as a mass medium.

Independently of this and before the first industrial stations, there were already the listeners and tinkerers who were the nucleus of the audience for this first electronic mass medium. The same phenomenon soon took place in Europe with the difference that stations were built by governments, not by the industry. Yet here as well, there was an extensive amateur movement that for the most part, explicitly supported the development of radio programs. This leads us to the summarizing thesis that *the listeners invented the radio*.
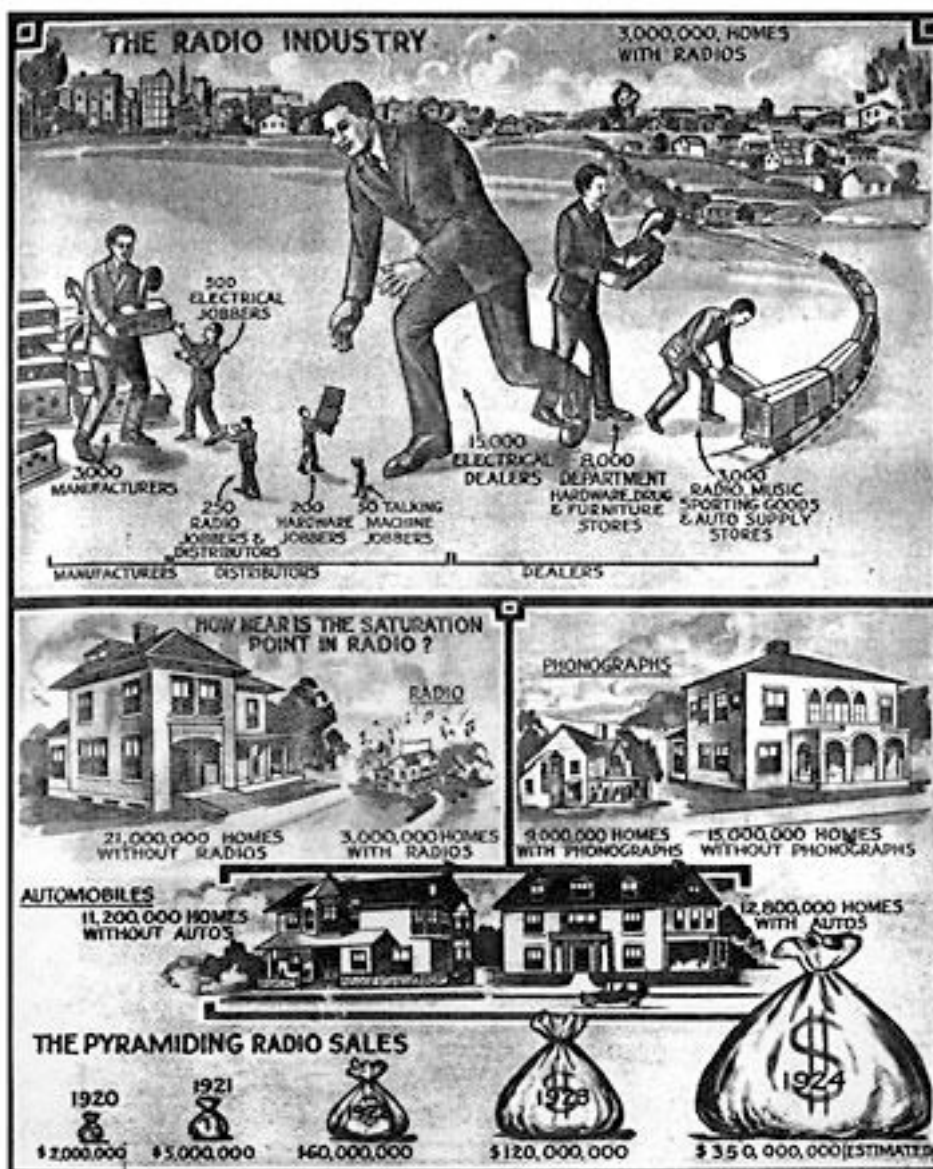
(Figure 4: Growth prognosis for the radio industry from Radio News, July 1924)

The so-called radio boom occurred at the moment where the number of amateurs reached critical mass, unfolding with its own self propelled and uncontrollable dynamic. Suddenly, the noise-filled birth of a new medium occurred; a medium whose sound resulted in the moniker the "Roaring 20s." A gold rush-like mood and "get rich quick" euphoria turned the medium into a scene of stock market speculation and distribution fights over frequencies and licenses (See Figure 4).

The radio amateurs were pushed to the side by the power of industrial capital, however, and frequencies for their individual broadcasts were increasingly limited. In this marginalized form as a medium for a few technology freaks and harmless hobbyists, the radio amateurs have survived till today. In their place, industry supported the further propagation of the hobby of the radio tinkerer who could no longer operate a station and could also hardly contribute to its further technological development but rather could purchase pre-produced components and programs. Fifteen years after the radio boom, Theodor Adorno described the

"pseudo-activities" of the radio tinkerers as the distinguishing evidence for the fetishism and commodification of art that he criticized.[3]

A comparable development took place in the private use of the Internet in the 1990s. A medium for experts, initiates and hackers was transformed into a commercially offered commodity. Today email and a personal web site is, like television and the telephone, nothing special. The frustrating flood of spam advertising as well as the communication blockage from banner ads with eternal downloading times now replace the enthusiasm of the first emails. The "new economy" boom is comparable to the radio euphoria of the 1920s, with both ending in similar fashion: 1929, through the world financial crisis after "Black Friday" on Wall Street and today, the collapsing of the Internet bubble and the fall of Internet stocks into the abyss.

II. Radio utopias in art and politics

What does all of this have to do with art? In the 1920s, radio as a broadcast medium was the glimmer of hope for far-reaching cultural utopias, especially in Europe where it was completely under state control and therefore intended to serve an educational purpose. The radio was even compared to Gutenberg's invention of the printing press and its democratic function was also emphasized.

In the Soviet Union in particular, radio was linked to sweeping political and cultural utopias, in stark contrast to its commercialization in the US.[4] Tatlin's design for the four hundred meter tall Monument of the Third Internationale (around 1919-1920) was crowned at the top by an antenna for the radio station below. From here, the results of the International Communist Congress that was planned on site were to be transmitted worldwide and incoming broadcasts were to be received.

In fact, Lenin early on picked up on ideas for the distribution function of the radio medium. His telegram over the formation of the new Soviet government on November 12, 1917 began with the shorthand "CQ," which in Morse code signified "to all;" a sign for the new use of the radio as a news medium. Already in February 1920, Lenin wrote to the Russian radio pioneer Mikhail A. Bonch-Bruevich: " The newspaper without paper and without distance which you are creating will be a great thing." [5] Based on this quote, Lenin was characterized as a visionary of the radio age in socialist propaganda. A small part of this exaggeration is true in that he already recognized the potential of the medium two years before the radio boom in the US. Nevertheless, he was thinking above all of the distribution of speeches of revolutionary ideology in a country with numerous illiterates. Thus, the Soviet Union from 1922 on was one of the first countries to support the development of radio through government funding. Due

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[3] Adorno's text "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening" derives from 1938, as he directed the musical part of the Princeton Radio Research Project. Consequently, the radio tinkerer becomes "a discover of industrial products which are interested to be discovered by him. He brings nothing home which is not delivered to his home."

[4] See also: Sylvia Sasse, "Anna Karenina goes to Paradise" in: Dissense, Zeitschrift des Graduiertenkollegs der Uni Konstanz. http://www.uni-konstanz.de/FuF/Philo/LitWiss/Gra-Ko/dissense/sasse.htm.

[5] Winfried B. Lerg, „in „Ein Pionier des sowjetrussischen Rundfunks, „(A Pioneer of the Soviet radio") in: Studienkreis Rundfunk und Geschichte, Nr. 3, Juli 1980, p. 136.

to the difficult economic situation, however, regular station operation did not begin until the end of 1924.

Despite these very real problems, the revolutionary-stimulated utopias of artists were already pointing to a possible media future. To take a particular dramatic example among many others: "The radio of the future," the title of a 1921 text from the Russian writer Velimir Chlebnikov, was comparable "to the consciousness of man," whose new, collective dimension it creates. "The problem of celebrating the communion of humanity's single soul, one daily spiritual wave that washes over the entire country every 24 hours, saturating it with a flood of scientific and artistic news-this problem has been solved by Radio, using lightning as its tool."[6] Like an act of god, the medium descends on humanity. From the earliest exploration of electricity, electricity's connection to nerve reflexes fascinated people immensely.

Comparably, the radio fulfilled for Chlebnikov a kind of neurological function so that "the least disruption of radio operations would produce a mental blackout over the entire country, a temporary loss of consciousness." This vital necessity of electronic communication today is without a doubt a realistic scenario out of which the Internet, as stated, developed.

Radio was also imagined as a regular tool of art. Chlebnikov's imagined "radio reading wall," a colossal public projection screen which showed text and images transmitted over the radio, "will allow every little town in the entire country to take part in an exhibit of paintings being held in the capital city…if radio previously acted as the universal ear, now it has become a pair of eyes which annihilate distance. The main radio signal tower emits its rays and from Moscow an exhibit of the best painters bursts into flower on the reading walls of every small town in this enormous country, on load to every inhabited spot on the map."

(Figure 5: Gustav Klucis, Radio Orator, 1922)

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[6] Velimir Chlebnikov, *The King of Time: Selected Writings of the Russian Futurian*. Trans. By Paul Schmidt, Ed. By Charlotte Douglas. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985, pp. 155-159.

Next to these utopias, Gustav Klucis' 1922 "Radio Orator" belongs to one of the few realized examples of a revolutionary art with this medium. The Soviet Union was a poor country in which few could afford a radio. Therefore, public squares with such artistic loudspeakers served to distribute the speeches of the 4th Congress of the Cominterm and the 5th anniversary of the October Revolution.

Similar utopias were expressed in the debates over the role of the Internet in the 1990's. While aspects of communication persist in the network, the radio functioned as a pure distribution medium. This is the point of critique of Bertolt Brecht's famous thesis that is known today as "Brecht's radio theory." Although it consists of only of a couple of short texts, it still has had enormous impact, from the media theory of the 1970s in the work of Enzensberger and Baudrillard to contemporary debates, for example, the motto "do it yourself" of the 2001 transmediale festival, which still refers to Brecht's thesis.

One must read Brecht's thesis, however, in the context of its time. In Germany, the cultural responsibility of the radio was seen as classical rather than revolutionary after the motto "Goethe and Schiller for all." All broadcasts were transmitted live from the studio. Theater was the most important model and with the help of sometimes very elaborate sonic mise en scene, a kind of acoustic stage set was created. Therefore, radio, far more than film, was used as an illusionistic medium. Brecht counteracted this tendency: "Change this apparatus over from distribution to communication…through continual, incessant suggestions to improve the usage of the apparatus in the interest of the general public, we have to shake up the societal foundation of this apparatus and discuss its use in the interest of a few."[7]

Figure 6: Brecht's staging of the radio play "The Flight of the Lindberg," 1929

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[7] Bertolt Brecht, "The Radio as a Apparatus for Communication" in *Brecht on Theater*, Translated by John Willett, London: Methuen, 1957, pp. 51-53.

Brecht had even attempted to create a model for such a different use of the medium. His radio play "The Flight of the Lindberg," developed in 1929 as a commission for the Deutscher Rundfunk, sought active participation of the listeners. They were supposed to take on a part of the presentation at home and sing, speak and hum together with the radio. This was not, however, realized by Deutscher Rundfunk, therefore Brecht clarified his intention in the scenic presentation. Brecht gave a short speech in which he declared: "You see placed on one side of the stage the radio and on the other side the listener and you will see that the radio and the listener will perform the work together. They mutually will play, so to speak, hand in hand and so the radio will provide everything that the listener needs (but that is difficult for him to produce) in order to be able to perform his part. "[8] This corresponded to the principles projected on the stage which read: "Free roaming feelings aroused by music, special thoughts such as may be entertained when listening to music, physical exhaustion such as easily arises just from listening to music are distractions from music. To avoid these distractions, the individual shares in the music, thus obeying the principle that doing is better than feeling…"[9]

Of course, this is the *model* of a model since Brecht's unrealized interaction of the listener would have been only a model for a extensive re-fashioning of the radio to a communication and politically revolutionary instrument; an ambition whose technical realization Brecht hardly discussed. It is doubtful whether Brecht knew of radio's origin as a communication medium for amateurs. In actuality, Brecht's listener-interaction model completely contradicts the logic and aesthetic of the medium, whose fascination consists of the quiet contemplation of distant sounds and the digression into the scenery of the ether. For Brecht, the radio was suspect due to these characteristics, yet it is hopeless to turn back the wheel of development of a mass medium through art. Perhaps Brecht himself realized this since he left only a single practical attempt to realize his theories; theories which are still influential today.

From the viewpoint of contemporary media studies, Brecht's suggestions come *too late* since the radio from its beginning was transformed from an open communication structure to a closed, strictly hierarchical broadcast medium; a transformation that could not be stopped through artistic means. From the viewpoint of contemporary art theory, they come *too early* as the artistic precursors of interactive art, since the technological possibilities still do not exist for artists to create a self-programmable communication medium.

III. Pioneering artistic projects in electronic networks since 1990

It is only with electronic networks that the technologies for the realization of the utopia of a "communication apparatus in public life" (Brecht) have appeared. The early 1990s are seen today as the phase of Net utopia. Yet, even if the concept of utopia contains its own impossibility – the same is true as for the emergence of the radio: the users invent the Net, at least in its social dimension. Industry comes late in the game and takes it over as its market for future. One only needs to think of the fact that Microsoft in the mid 1990s almost missed the Internet boom. Some of these users were also artists who along with hackers

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[8] Reiner Steinweg, *Das Lehrstück. Brechts Theorie einer politisch-ästhetische Erziehung* (*The Lehrstück: Brecht's theory in a political-aesthetic context*), Stuttgart, 1976, p. 39f.

[9] Brecht, 557. For the text part shown on stage: Klaus-Dieter Krabiel, *Brecht's Lehrstücke*, Stuttgart 1993, p, 335.

and amateur programmers are the successors to the radio amateurs before the 1920s, without knowing their predecessors. Two examples should demonstrate how artists in the early 1990s developed their own technology instead of only using existing platforms to implement and realize their utopias.
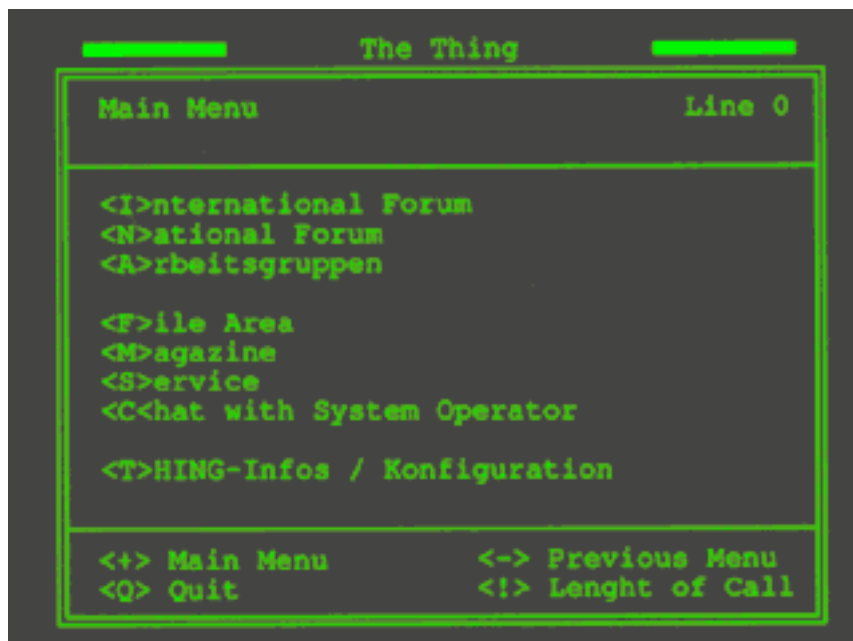

Figure 7: The Thing in 1991, BBS system interface

The Thing was founded in New York in 1991 and has since opened nodes at least temporarily, in Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, Cologne, London, Stockholm and Vienna. Its technology is self-developed by its participating artists, based on the BBS systems of the hacker scene.[10] Instead of the usual "tech talk," a conceptual art discourse, independent from any art magazines, took place on the Thing's BBS system and was continued by the users on this international, self-organized platform. Such computer mailbox systems still had nothing to do with the Internet since in 1991 access was only through institutions; principally, universities. For the participants, the Thing opened up for the first time private access to an electronic network, which for many was a unique experience.

The Thing's founder Wolfgang Staehle was not afraid to draw comparisons to the great role models of the arts: "Beuys' work deals with social sculpture-artistic production that is produced by a group or community. The Thing is such a sculpture: it realizes Beuys' idea of direct democracy-the polis as social structure. Simultaneously, it represents an expansion of the concept of art."[11] The International City Berlin emerged out of a 1994 European wide network of "digital cities" which were already based on the Internet and the WWW. These projects pursued two parallel goals: first, to create general access to the Internet ("access for all," or, *xs4all*) and second, to establish a cultural and social platform for new forms of community with such technologies. The technological platforms were developed from a collective of cultural workers, artists and programmers.

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[10] See the pre WWW archive sites from the Thing: http://www.thing.at/portal/archiv/index.html as well as http://www.thing.at/old_thing.

[11] Staehle in: Vera Graf, "Kunst im Informationszeitalter," ("Art in the Information Age") Süddeutsche Zeitung, March 22, 1994, p.11.
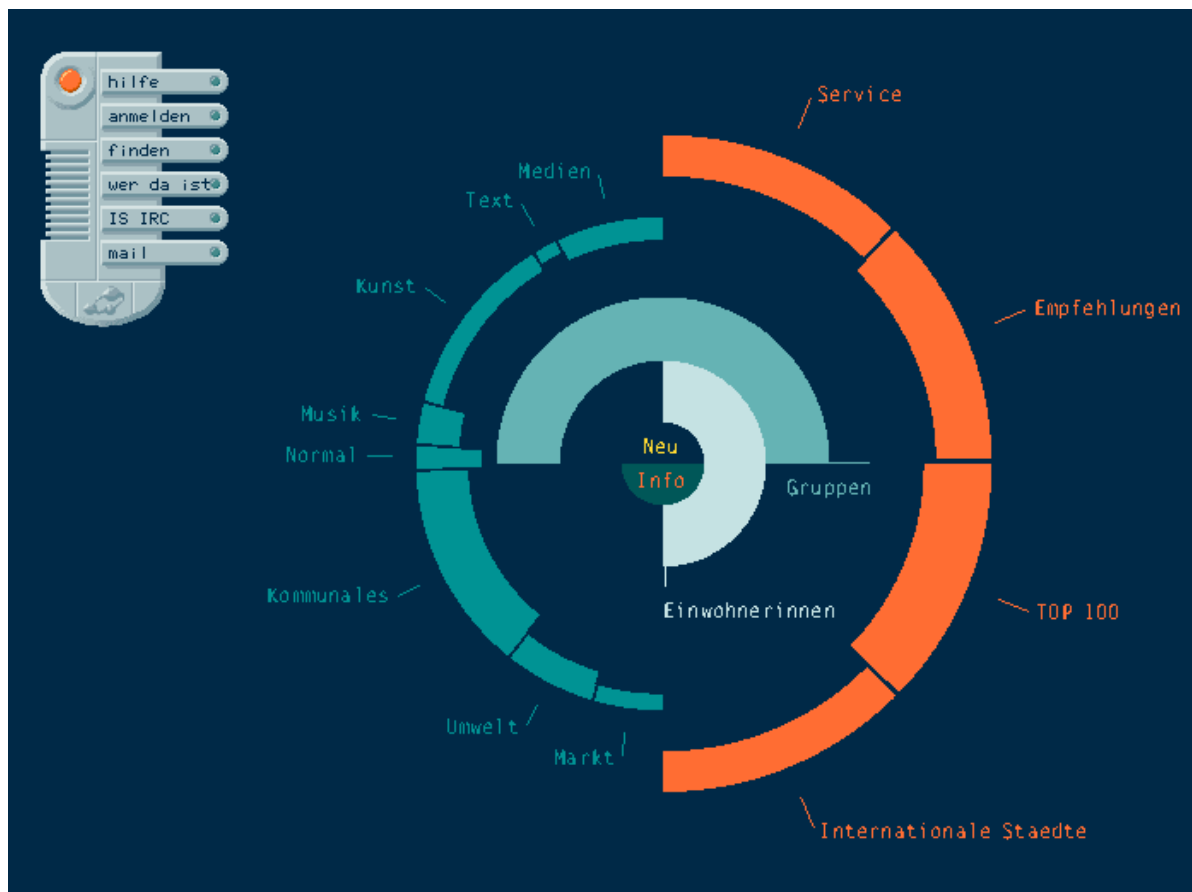
(Figure 8: International City Berlin 1996, second version of the interface)

Here, as with the radio amateurs, a fully autonomous, self-designed communication world was formed outside of institutional or industrial control. This was seen as a kind of home in virtual space-one is a "resident" in this digital city and not simply a paying customer.

The program of the International City Berlin described it in the following way: "New human communications will be initiated through the International City and will influence everyday life in the real city. In contrast to other media, new information will result through social exchange." [12] Instead of Mc Luhan's 1960s concept of the "global village," a "glocale" identity would be formed through the electronic neighborhood in regional frameworks but with an even exchange between each of the networked digital metropolises.

Many of these projects would soon be challenged whether to remain in the realm of alternative, artistic media works or be professionalized into service providers in the rapidly booming commercial reality. Based on this conflict of roles, the International City Berlin was dissolved in 1997.[13] It was, so to speak, the victim of its own utopian success. Only one to two years later, a similar pioneer enterprise with a fixed user group, established acceptance, high image factor and

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[12] On-line Manifesto of the International City Berlin, 1994.

[13] See Gottfried Kerscher/Joachim Blank, brave new city, in: Krtische Berichte, H. 1, 1998, pp. 10-16, Theme issue Netart.

recognized innovation potential could have become a million dollar startup in the "new economy." Not even five years after its dissolution, the data of the International City were acquired by the M.A.K. Frankfurt (Museum of applied Arts) as a pioneer project of "digital crafts" and reconstructed to once again provide access and to preserve it for posterity.[14] Thus, in only a few years the lifecycle of the International City covered the entire spectrum, from avant-garde to its collapse from commercialization and finally, to its resting place in the museum.

(Figure 9: home@aol.com, Advertisement 2003)

IV. Commercialization of the Internet

Ever since there has been an industry that delivers Internet access to the home and the mailbox has been stuffed with AOL "100 hours free online" CD's, the aforementioned double objectives of pioneer projects like the Thing and the International City as the last 20th century utopias of a synthesis between technological and artistic progress have become obsolete. Even the advertising tag lines have co-opted and perverted the ideals of the self-organized "residents" of the virtual world: home@aol.com.

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14 See http://www.digitalcraft.org

It is already foreseeable what the ultimate goal of the activation of the public through the mainstream media is: not emancipation from consumption but rather a high tech-based new round of experience economy in which each action of the viewer has a potential commercial value. When ex AOL CEO Steve Case says that "increasingly, more people want interactivity," he means that in the future "the viewer can click on a dress of Britney Spears during a TV show and then have it home delivered from K-Mart."[15]

(Figure 10: HyperSoap, MIT since 1988)

Correspondingly, an MIT research group developed a so-called "HyperSoap" which perfects the age-old TV principle of product placement.[16] While the story takes place, each article on screen can be clicked on to receive product information or direct ordering options. For instance: The car that the lead actor drives-"Mercedes Benz 300 SLK, $ 30,000- links to different models and options for a test drive." The beer he drinks-"Tuborg, $ 3. 99 a six-pack, delivery in 30 minutes through online order." "The facial tissue which he uses to wipe the tears from his lover's face," Kleenex, $ 1.99-comes together with the beer." The entire action of the TV show takes place in a kind of virtual warehouse in which the actors react like living store window display manekins. The identification with the star becomes a 100% commercializable factor in which one can purchase the same clothing, furniture and seemingly become like him/her. Commercial breaks would therefore be superfluous, in fact, counterproductive. Finally, broadcast media would reach a total synthesis between technological and economic structures, a synthesis whose divergence has been fought against with techniques such as ratings since the days of radio.

The example of "HyperSoap" demonstrates that a principal such as interactivity, developed in the media arts context, is co-opted by the mainstream media and turned into the opposite of its originally intended goal. Or, to once again quote Brecht: "Capitalism immediately transforms that which tries to poison it and

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[15] Steve Case and AOL Manager Myer Berlow in: Christian Tenbrock, "Online sucht Inhalt" ("*Online Searches for Content*"), Die Zeit, September 14, 2000, p. 32f.

[16] See http://www.media.mit.edu/hypersoap

immediately relishes it like a drug."[17] The artistic utopia of interactive art as an emancipation of the observer from the consumer mentality that goes against the classical notion of the eternal artwork faces the paradox: its concepts are reused as motors of the new economy and with this, converts everyday media consumption into a totally commercial experience. This confirms the avant-garde status of media art, but does it not at the same time relegate the ideals of interactivity to the historical relics of a past revolutionary feeling?

Which possibilities still exist for media or Net art today? Perhaps the only path is to accept the commercialization of the Net and to work with it in a playful manner. Why not bring the old utopias of the communicative artwork into an E-Bay auction? Would the public take such an offer seriously? Would they enter into the game, understanding its irony? The answer is yes. Blank and Jeron's project "Public White Cube" from 2001 uses the URL publicwhitecube.com and four exhibits from four invited artists in a small gallery in Berlin Mitte.[18] The audience exists partly out of the Net and partly out of gallery visitors, who can purchase the right to alter the exhibition and the artworks. The active participants where ready to pay up to DM 200 so that her/his suggestion for the reconstruction of the exhibit would be realized by Blank and Jeron. Through the project, both artists, who belonged to the founding members of the International City Berlin, could reconsider ironically their own ideas out of the pioneering time of the Net utopia. Even as a post-utopian symbol, art still remembers the utopias that stimulated the creation of the medium, but did not become reality with its everyday existence.[19]

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[17] Bertolt Brecht, Werke, Berlin, Frankfurt/M. 1988ff, Volume 21, p. 516.

[18] See the numerous documentation under http://www.publicwhitecube.com.

[19] See Daniels, *Kunst als Sendung*, p. 258. "Media art can offer a glance into the possible future of a medium and, at the same time, remember in hindsight the unredeemed utopias which accompanied the birth and formulation of that medium. As avant-garde in sense of vanguard, it anticipates perceptual forms that will then be wide spread by the mass media. Simultaneously, however, with this wide spread impact, such forms lose their utopian character. In the sense of rearguard, media art forms a site where the buried aesthetic ideals of an autonomous construction and reception of media are preserved and can still be experienced."