

PIAZZA VIRTUALE : SERVICE AREA A.I. PONTON EUROPEAN MEDIA ART LAB



The forthcoming media technology, with its influence on the private sphere and private households, must be experienced anew and requires an explanatory statement. The expansion of the communications networks creates makes it possible to send images, sounds and texts around the world at breathtaking speeds. Increases in technical achievements are not always accompanied by an increase in the culture's quality. In the previous century, cafes and market squares were the places at which the largest portion of the culture could be found. People met there to do business, to exchange experiences, or to amuse themselves. Modern society is characterized by the loss of the public space. The dawn of the age of information is occurring simultaneously with the invasion of everyone's private sphere by the public.

Service Area a.i. is the installation of a virtual telematic world, which makes multimedia access for many participants via networks from their homes possible. Service Area a.i. is a virtual location in the electronic network. In this case, space also means the latitude needed by a human to develop him or herself. In Service Area a.i., this space is created by means of technology, and the humans who occupy it will shape it. The electronic community — a social system — is born. This virtual relationship is the starting point of an individual telematic culture: Service Area a.i.

The goal is not to define machines as an end in themselves, but to create interfaces at which humans can encounter find other humans via the media. Those who participate in Service Area a.i. will meet at a place which offers them both individual and joint experience. Service Area a.i. offers spaces in which humans can communicate to one. another, with one another and among one another. In Service Area a.i., the presentation of technology is not the main focus; the important factor is the human and all his or her communicative abilities, cognitive acts and creative expression.

Participating in Service Area a.i.

Service Area a.i. is on-line 24 hours per day and can be reached from anywhere. Visitors who enter via the network with the assistance of computer/modem and telephone create the

atmospheres. Texts, sounds and images are produced; where they are, what they are doing, how they behave all these things change. Strangers meet up with strangers. They have all dialled their way into this electronic world from "outside" in order to see, to act or to wonder. For the duration of the program, the audience in front of their screens can also participate directly in Service Area a.i. via telephone, modem or fax. Interfaces will aid in translation so that the participants with different media will be able to understand.

Installation

Service Area a.i. is not only a telematic project, which can be visualized on all types of screens. An entrance will be installed in the Brucknerhaus in Linz. Visitors to the Ars Electronica will have the opportunity to enter the virtual world at that point and the acoustic and visual ambience produced within the network will greet them. With the aid of sensor mats, contact to the visitors from Service Area a.i.'s network will be established. These mats will determine the visitor's position; this position will be then visualized, and communication between him or her and the participants from the network will be made possible. The images seen by the participant on his or her screen at home will be the same ones seen by the visitor to the installation on a six by four and a half-meter screen in three dimensions. The acoustic contact to Service Area a.i. will be produced via loudspeaker and microphone.

The poets and Service Area a.i.

The actual archetype of mediality lies in the narrative tradition, which has been maintained by the poets. They are ur-medialists, and we would like to include them in the Service Area a.i. project in this way.

Because of the poets' unique ability to tell stories, because of their interest in socio-cultural foundations and phenomena, they have observed the events as they occur since time immemorial: They interpret and transcend them for society through their language. Poets subject themselves to the interactive process, which enables them to build a bridge spanning the gap between Service Area a.i. and the world of the television audience, who can then watch the virtual world's creation. The media space and the chain of actions starting from it interact with the poets' art of expression.

Why Service Area a.i.?

In the near future, television as we now know it will no longer exist. The technology of the digital and interactive multimedia will provide the tools for putting 500 channels into every household in a few years. Many of the new channels will no longer be one-sided broadcasts; they will rather be interactive through the link of computer and television. Until now, the viewer has been degraded to more or less a recipient, but he or she will be provided with new opportunities for active participation. The demand for new media is at the same time a demand for content, as interactive channels can be more than vehicles for teleshopping and war games. The current condition of the media, which is desolate, the decline in the standard, the brutalization, the increasing fusion of media and advertising in a contest for ratings requires a new way of regarding the media and a new statement on them. Service Area a.i. is a cultural design for the forming of multimedia networks. It represents a communications model in which the relationship between broadcaster and consumer is fundamentally different in comparison to the well-known mass media.

Banks, television broadcasters, insurance companies, computer, transportation and energy companies — at present, they are all offering their main capital: service. The project Service Area a.i. is a possible draft for the frequently extolled information society in the age of the data super-highways. At one time, the virtual space of Service Area a.i. provides many with the opportunity to make music, paint, build, offer themselves and make offers, or engage in dialog.

How Does Service Area a.i. Set Itself Apart?

The digitalization of images, text, sound and video unifies the processing, storage and transportation of data. The computer has become a metamedium. This structure of the metamedium computer is the foundation for its utilization in "interactive television". Service Area a.i.'s interactive program confronts — though not with action served up on a platter action, not with media experts or entertainers; it makes a challenge with its call to the user to individually shape the program him or herself, thereby assuming personal responsibility.

Television Broadcasts in the Context of Service Area a.i.

The live broadcast on television functions as a window in the electronic world of Service Area a.i. It provides a look at its telematic landscape and reflects the processes, which take place inside it. At this moment, the poet finds him or herself at the interface connecting his or her own experience within Service Area a.i. and the window opened to the outer world — television. Each of the poets spend one day in the electronic world. Several times a day, they interpret the news and events. They are chroniclers of their own experiences, which they have during the time they spend in Service Area a.i. With the aid of their language, they translate impressions, thereby sensitizing the television audience for the events, which take place within the virtual telematic world.

Three broadcasts will be made each day from June 21 to 25, 1994 on 3sat (cable, satellite), each lasting 15 to 30 minutes (afternoon, prime time, and late night). This will make Service Area a.i. an experience that is accessible to a wide audience.

Explanation of the Network-Plans — Piazza Virtuale Service Area a.i.

The realization of the Piazza virtuale: Service Area a.i. is divided among three locations - at Ponton in Hannover, where the communications equipment intersects and where the computers are located - in Mainz at 3sat, where the actual broadcasting takes place and in Linz, where an interactive, walk-in spatial installation shows a three-dimensional projection of the network realization. The participant can access Service Area a.i. in two ways.

Firstly, he or she can dial in directly via the telephone line with various media. In the sense of "scalability", the dialing possibilities extend from simple touchtone telephones, which enter an acoustic world, to the fax, as a common medium for transmitting graphic materials, to computers, which can offer both orientation within the network and manifold opportunities for interacting with the help of front ends which can be downloaded. Owners of Avis will play an important role, since with the aid of a video camera, they will also be able to send images, gestures and faces from their homes into the network via normal telephone lines. Avis is reasonably priced hardware for digitalizing video images, which was developed at Ponton and which the participant can purchase.

The second type of access is via Internet with a Sun workstation equipped with Sun video and a Bintec LSDN card. Images and sound from Service Area a.i. will be sent into the network via Internet multicast backbone (mbone); in other words, Internet will also be used as a broadcast medium. This transmission will be visible around the world with the help of the appropriate tools. As front ends are as easy to use as the telephone, the participants can either dial in directly via Internet at Service Area a.i. or find a local access point via PPP/SPLIP with their computers.

The realization of Service Area a.i. in Hannover is arranged around three different systems. All objects, participants and descriptions of the world are stored on an SOL database server (Sun multiprocessor). The World Engine represents the world's total intelligence. All communication processes and relationships between objects and participants and the environmental model will be depicted here.

A modem pool consisting of 32 US Robotics analog modems will create the link to the outside; this link will be routed to Ethernet via a terminal server. Two primary multiplex connections with a total of 60 ISDN lines will be processed by a dialogic voicebox which deposits its files in the central server. The faxes will also be received by the voicebox.

The stereo image lines and eight audio frequency channels will be sent to the installation in Linz via dedicated. Two beams with polarization filters will project the image onto a reflective screen where it will be visible in three dimensions with the aid of the appropriate glasses. Sensor floor mats will register the position of the individuals inside the installation so that the audio frequency channels are positioned appropriately about the room. The status of the installation will be reported to Hannover via modem so that the computer there can react appropriately.

In addition to the participants, the poet will be in the installation. Several cameras will film him or her, at times in front of a chromakey screen and at times in front of the projection. In the O.B. van, the computer image from Hannover will be combined with the actual images and sent to the provincial studio of the ORF (Austrian Broadcasting Corporation), where it will then be transferred to Mainz.

In total, approximately 200 participants can communicate simultaneously in the network around the clock. The installation will enter the network approximately one month before the opening of the Ars Electronica and will continue to run afterwards. Three daily television broadcasts will be made during the five days of the Ars Electronica.

Ponton European Media Art Lab / Background

Ponton was founded in 1986 as a fusion of artist and technical ideas and interests which is oriented towards the central goal of researching and realizing new forms of communication within the electronic mass media.

As the work done at the Ponton Media Lab is the result of an extension in the concept of art, the Lab is a transformed artist's studio in which the artists and technicians work together as a team. The art created here does not make use of brush, canvas and paint, but the networking of various forms of communication and its technologies in order to realize new possibilities for expression and creative discussion among humans.

When dealing with television broadcasters, film teams or electronics concerns, most media artists who, for example, work with video, are immediately confronted with obstacles, rules and standards to which he or she must yield in attempting to take advantage of the possibilities of mass media in his or her art. Ponton has taken a new course, as the entire production process itself is being designed here.

The Ponton Lab is equipped with a fully automated broadcast studio. This creates the opportunity to switch directly to any broadcaster in the world. In light of the highly complex character of production in the electronic, globally networked age, only the installation of one's own broadcasting equipment can make it possible to realize that which was previously termed "autonomy of art".

The integration of audience participation is a way of exploring new possibilities, which are not available to the artist who works in isolation.

At Ponton, more and more energy is being expended for the purpose of leaving the beaten paths in the field of aesthetic design which were predetermined by the Biedermeier Naturalism of the 19th century for computer graphics and the design of three-dimensional virtual reality in a one-sided way. The artist's presentation of his or her own artistic virtuosity is consciously abandoned in the field of design at Ponton. Attention should be directed primarily towards the flow of communication.

At Ponton, interactive television is being developed. Neither pre-packaged design nor the slick products of "experts of verbal communication" are desired; the simplicity, the normality to be found this side of perfection and the normal staged reality of the mass media (to be seen on television in particular) is what appears. This also leads to an individual program dramaturgy: Phases with a lesser density of events can spontaneously develop into a hopeless muddle, which then disintegrates in a self-regulating process.

This live quality of the events is not part of the normal program design of television, which limits the viewer's activity to the operation of the remote control unit. The lack of a "reverse channel" is not the fault of the medium itself. It is the result of 40 years of television politics, which denies and to a large extent blocks the viewer's presence in the medium so that the experience of television has the everyday nature that it does.

Karel Dudesek: In the lost, common Realm of Belief, in the centre of the Sacred Parody.

*Thanks to God and also the Pope (1994), the attempt to temporarily mix parts of a text by Grotovsky *with mine* Whereby italics I does not necessarily mean upright him*

Television as an encounter in congested urban centers.

Macrointro: The design of the functions, on their formal structure, on the expressive quality of the symbols, forms, colors, tones, movement, sounds; that means: artistic processes.

The form is the bait in a trap, and the intellectual process reacts to it spontaneously, although it must struggle against the trap. The forms of general behavior obscure the truth. Work leads to an awakening of the consciousness rather being a product of consciousness.

Microprocess: In interactive television, the separation of moderator, artist, producer and viewer is abandoned; the space and the area for the producer and viewer are redesigned

constantly. The relationship between moderator, artist, producer and viewer therefore has an endless number of possible variations. The limitations, moderator, artist, producer and viewer disintegrate, meaning that one can be passive or active, act alternately or simultaneously. The "virtual" space within television and the "real" space in front of the television can be used as a concrete stage. A more suitable relationship can be created; everyone can make determinations and choose functions according to their own goals.

Humor in the Lab: Tell it to Leopoldseder

The Balkan, the id and the Slavs: The elimination of the pictorial elements, IMAGE, which lead independent lives, i.e. represent something other than that for which the function needs them, leads to every individual's creation of the most elementary and evident objects.

The elimination of music, TONE, which is produced not only by the moderator, artist, producer and viewer, enables the production itself to become music.

The elimination of information, TEXT, which is produced not only by the moderator, artist, producer and viewer, makes it possible for everyone to tell a story.

All television producers dread being homesick

Why are we occupying ourselves with art, with crossing the borders placed around us, with realizing ourselves? This is not a state; it is a process — a place full of challenges. Because the individual violates generally accepted and stereotypical views, feelings and opinions, he or she is able to make a challenge.

Between sales, prostitution and sacrifice: l'act gratuite.

A collection or the stock of clichés is bound with the conception of selling or the for-sale, a collection of skills. The equipment used for exploiting "leisure time" has already been sold; that's enough. It is no longer necessary to give oneself up to the shopping frenzy or, on the other hand, to continue generating. The individual must be let loose. "HELLO, HELLO, is anyone there", the only remaining value cannot be constantly finding new paths into the being of the individual in order to connect him or her to the equipment's ecstasy.

An advanced culture of pimps and drug dealers, although I will spare myself from defining that in detail.

Every HELLO, regardless of how it arrives, every whistle, every belch is, for me, preferable to the advertising copy of stragglers and drug dealers.

Art and design

Thanks to Andy Warhol, design no longer becomes art over and out. Many artists become layout men, athletes and designers because they think that they do not have enough money; they work for, joke around at advertising agencies, architect's agencies, discotheques, video production firms, repro companies and opinion research offices.

We know what comes out of it, how, why and for whom, don't we?

Private and public, apparent and subtle ideas

What does interactivity mean?

Selection — addition — communication

From the expert. Most developments in the area of interactivity define selection as interaction. Hypertext, CD-I, CD-ROM, interactive games and broadcasts result solely, however, in an increase in the possible selections. Two important elements of interaction are ignored:

1. addition and
2. communication.

The participant can become active and learn to deal with the media creatively only through the addition of texts, sounds and images. The networks and the related exchange of data promote communication and sensitizes both parties for mutual understanding. This can be achieved by simultaneously making an open system with an intelligent data structure available.

The users of interactive television programs of the future will expect a more intelligent range of application and operation, which contains more layers. Our work is not there to satisfy a cultural need, entertain people and offer them a form of relaxation after work: That's fraud.

Take #36. — The monitors at the computer fair show the clone of Marilyn Monroe parked in a red Ferrari along the information super-highway on the way from Disneyland to Hollywood California where she visits the concentration camps of the spirit, singing "I am a material girl — Arbeit macht frei* — Comrades ...". Will a film ever be made about Spielberg's list?

We deal with the viewer as a genuine being with intellectual and physical needs.

Our audience is not just any audience; it is a special one.

Once again, laughter from the background.

SERVICE AREA A.I. INFORMATION

Telephone numbers, numbers to dial, Internet address, and much more.

Telephone: 0049-511-391307; fax: 0049-511-391644;

e-mail: service@ponton.hanse.de AVIS orders:

The visual telephone for everyone, AVIS will be sent by return mail after receipt. Transfer DM 190.00 to the account of the Ponton Verlag at the Deutsche Bank, Hamburg, account number 6162044, bank identification number 200 700 00. The AVIS software is freeware and available via the Ponton mailbox

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3sat

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