

# MUTATIONS

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net art mobile art performance art

[Rem Koolhaas (ed), *Mutations*, Barcelona: Actar 2001, pp 96-103]

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## Breakthrough to the World Code

### etoy's Concept of Net Architecture

*dedicated to Peter Cook's prepackaged frozen lunch*

### Net Architecture

People, goods, and data are: 1) distributed world wide 2) mobile 3) localized. People are localized around the focal points of their lives, goods are localized in warehouses and data on hard drives. We call the world-wide circulation of people "tourism," the global transfer of goods "shipping," and the movement of data "routing." Without packaging, there can be no transportation. People are packaged in outfits and vehicles, goods in shipping containers, and data in TCP/IP packages. Each packet travels under the code name of an address, which anticipates an arrival in a particular location. These addresses are called travel documents, freight papers or headers. It begins with a delocalization, and until arrival everything takes place in the anonymity of non-places. There can be no transit without a net(work). At the end of the twentieth century, the infrastructures of tourism, shipping, and routing are growing to form net(work) architectures which span the world.

Article 77 from Le Corbusier's "The Athens Charter" (1943) summed up the

functionalism of traffic: local living, local working, local relaxation, and between each of these a delocal movement. A whole epoch oriented itself towards this four-way division of the surfaces -- only the networks did not. With the vile maliciousness of viruses, they penetrated all protective shields of the local, and loaded even the last hut with their lines, wires, cables, pipes, canals and shafts. Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers' 1977 "Centre Pompidou" revealed unmistakably what the grids, skeletons and modules of modernity had always symbolized, namely that local architectures organize superstructures for networks and function as terminals in global networks. Thus, there is not only a net(work) architecture I, that of transit, but also a net(work) architecture II, that of the immobile.

Since data networks have begun to depict and expand physical reality, a third form of net(work) architecture has emerged, that of data worlds. A first strand virtualizes the entire architectural process, from the first sketch to final inspection. One and the same technology visualizes the architectural real and its halo of the fleeting, of the unbuilt and unbuildable. A gradual transition to the construction of virtual environments for the Net<sup>1</sup>, games and films. The second strand develops the cooperative potential of the Net. Many different hands are processing at the computers around the globe and around the clock, and their traces remain available, proposals and detailed architectural plans. A third strand models navigators and topics. Data mining begins with catalogues of web addresses, leads through the indexing of web pages by search engines to personalized information assistants, and is currently producing a software family, by which global communities will be able to allow data to circulate between hard drives (Napster and the consequences). Data representation is quickly abandoning the scheme of pages. In the beginning, pages could be extended by scrolling, broken through by way of links. The point linkages are followed by continuous hypertext and hyper media spaces, which stage immense data landscapes. All of this is integrated by net(work) architecture III, that of the data worlds, which links up the world-wide cyberpopulation on countless platforms.

It is almost a cosmic process, and nothing less than a global cultural revolution, how a colossal data network is put together from physical environments, forms an independent data sphere, and in the end forces the physical base to undergo an unimaginable reorganization, best comparable to the consequences of Neolithic city planning, the systems of inscriptions of the great civilizations, the professionalization of the psyche in the ecumenic age, modern science and industrial revolution. In principle, every physical point on the globe is being turned into information, and will be accessible, controllable, and transformable from anywhere in the world. Net(work) architecture IV generates a global matrix of virtual-physical penetrations. A mixed reality made up of data jockeys and remainder physics.

## **Tank Systems**

On October 26, 1994, the Internet agent TERM-SHOOTER launched seven travel ready Central Europeans into the Net, and called them "etoy". etoy followed two performative strategies:

- 1) they imported reality concepts like "person" and "space" into the Net, and forced them to be reformulated
- 2) they exported net concepts back into reality, and observed what effects they can have.

The control center during the years 1995-1997 was the navigation plan of the etoy [INTERNET-TANKSYSTEM](#), which functioned both as a spatial metaphor and as an Internet metaphor, and could thus disturb both virtual and real environments. It is made up of labyrinthine repetitions of the same base module which flanges a pipeline to a container. The structure of the base module is purely conceptual, so that pipeline, container and flange can be concretized, materialized, virtualized and combined in countless ways. Flanging is the hero of all tank systems. It serves as the universal connector, which translates the flows into worlds of representation. etoy often likes to ambush its containers with overdone media context and surreal tools and services.

Tank systems are building elements in all the net(work) architectures etoy has developed, and the [INTERNET-TANKSYSTEM](#) is the core aggregate which powers all other developments. The [OFFICE-TANK](#) anticipates the cooperation platform etoy.TOWER, the later participation formats can be traced back to FANCLUB (mail contact), ANONYMOUS-MAILER (remailer), CONFERENCE (chat with etoy.BOTS), [AIRPORT](#) (link community) and [FREEZER](#) (digital freezing of virtual identities), the PIPELINE-room installations and etoy.TANKS transfer pipelines and containers into real space, and TOYWAR obtains a good deal of its [UNDERGROUND](#) and [DISCO](#) aesthetics from there.

## Hijacks

Surfing is beautiful. There are all kinds of EXO out there. Even the tick etoy is already up. Sitting under a stuffed cockatoo, well camouflaged on a sky-blue barbed wire. I want to look at the colorful feathers from close up. Klick: the link is a tick --its a flange--its a trap! Instead of juggling EXO-evasions, an ENDO-bite deep enough to reach through the calluses: "Don't fucking move! This is a digital hijack." Diplomatic navigation through a massive battery of tanks achieves the freeing of the hostages. The political topology of the Net is nowhere more beautifully illustrated than in etoy's [digital hijack](#), which, as a web page promotion for the tank system, makes fun of itself. Thesis 1: etoy works both inside and outside. Thesis 2: etoy points out practices immanent to the system. Thesis 3: Flange creates impact.

## Technologies of Globalization

From the beginning, etoy has worked with an emphatic concept of the net(work). This concept of the net(work) retroactively interrogates its most advanced formation, the Internet, about the manifestations of the net(work) in human history, and proactively develops its unredeemed potential in the medium of new technologies. Contrary to popular opinion, people have always lived simultaneously in both local and distant networks. The transcontinental trade routes brought goods, news and contacts into the smallest circle of life, while the soul, which everywhere could be professionalized, opened up the entire cosmos. etoy had to confront the fact that the data packages which circulate in the Internet can just as scarcely be comprehended in categories of the object, as the social information-processing transmitted over the Net can be thought of in

categories of the subject. For the problem of the subject, etoy developed two solutions. On the one hand, the virtual agent identity of the net emigrants as etoy.CREW, on the other the holding company for net culture capital production as etoy.CORPORATION. etoy replaced the category of the object entirely with packages, the most monumental expressions were the cooperation platform etoy.TOWER and the freight containers etoy.TANKS. The essential coordination frame for etoy's technologies of globalization is marked by the etoy.TIMEZONE.

It's no exaggeration to say that in the years 1997 and 1998, etoy elevated the potentials of globalization to an art form. On April 4, 1997 they move into the etoy.TOWER, a veritable intranet, which documents all information, communication, and production processes meticulously, version-controlled, and in a multi-media fashion. Such a work instrument cannot be overestimated, since it allows a collaboration on the most developed prototypes independent of time and place. If a version is rejected, a more promising version continues to be worked on. Numerous projects can be pursued at the same time, and all super-users can see the development as a whole. Gradated project, time, and person-relevant reading and writing rights can be granted, so that swarms of parallel virtual groups can make use of the resources of the platform in ways tailored to the task at hand. The intranet of the etoy.TOWER completes on the level of work organization the same opening of participation formats as the [etoy.SHAREHOLDER](#) concept does on the financial level. Since going public on January 25, 1998, under the patronage of the Austrian federal chancellor at the time, Viktor Klima, in the ball room of the Viennese Institut Français, etoy is a stock corporation with an equity capital of [640,000 shares](#). In their issuing prospectus, the company declares that they will work exclusively for the increase in cultural value of their shares and, other than their stock-package, to not market any other art object. Market capitalization is made equivalent to cultural value, and only by increasing their cultural value can the corporation refinance itself. If art production in the twentieth century labored on the paradox of on the one hand raising the intangible (concept, process, intervention, context) to the level of an art "object," and on the other hand having to offer to the art market actual art objects, etoy can now both exhibit social practices in the form of ready-mades (in the tradition of Duchamp), while simultaneously setting up social sculptures in the holding formats etoy.TOWER and etoy.SHARE (in the tradition of Beuys) and capitalize on these cultural intangibles directly, instead of through the detour of the object. etoy completes this liquidation of the object and its reformatting as package in the first months of 1998 with nothing less than the patron Madonna of all traded goods and the quintessential vehicle of the global market, a 40 feet standard [shipping container](#). Since June 11, 1998, one of the top-ten icons of the twentieth century, with all its wit of allusion alternating between a prefab house and a "white cube," must put up with being seen with its shipping volume decked with all the chicaneries of the network architectures II to IV -- any number of flanged supply pipes, climate controlled, sound proof, sound studio, multi-media lab with external projection on the whole back wall, internal network with virtual offices, sleeping boxes -- in order to fulfill its transit obligations as mobile world cultural capitals of the etoy corporation. With the introduction of the [etoy.TIMEZONE](#), a global time abstracted from the orbit of the earth, etoy finally established itself as a global art player on September 2, 1998.

## Toywar

One of the most impressive front lines of the recent history of war formed on time for the new year 2000 for the visitors to the web address <http://www.toywar.com>. It was made up of small toy figures, armed with cameras, brief cases, gas masks, DJ consoles,

lap tops and detonators. They lined up next to one another in accurate rows. Fearlessly they looked out of the screen. Under each was a military agent name. Each had a nerve-wracking identity-test behind them. The scroll on the lower edge of the screen became increasingly smaller, and in a few days, 700 agents formed a line seeming to lead on forever. A few weeks later, this time at the web address <http://www.etoys.com>, a second line appeared in the opposite direction, as if the infinite wanted to push its way into our daily presence. It was the triumphant parade of the toy war, inspired by the Romans. The banner "Cheer on the Heroes and Heroines!!!" followed two massive lawyer limousines, a truck with the etoy.TANK, twelve generals and 46 heroes, all in ceremonial uniform, NASDAQ, rtmark, eviltoy, hell.com, TRN und thing.net with their battle wagons, somewhere in the crowd the defeated CEO of eToys, Toby Lenk, and the law firm Irell & Manella, and at the end of the parade the troop vehicles. When the etoy TANK was clicked, a window opened with the fax of the Los Angeles Superior Court from February 16, 2000, which announced the dismissal of the suit of the leading E-commerce toy distributor, eToys, based in Santa Monica, on the takeover of the domain [etoys.com](http://www.etoys.com). In a preliminary injunction from November 29, 1999, the same court had forbidden etoy from continuing to use their domain, which had been registered since 1995, as well as to sell etoy.SHARES in the USA. This court decision had triggered the toy war.

Heavyweights in the cultural technology of hype fought about the definitional power over virtuality. EToys, protagonist of the commercialization of the Internet, stood for a flat virtuality, in which pre-defined human needs are provided with their consumerist satisfaction. etoy, which "embodied" the representation of "embodiment of the virtual" like nobody else, also fought literally for their own existence, as well as for a fissured, inscrutable and eccentric virtuality, which wanted to develop the possibilities of the Net for spontaneous networking, social information processing, culture jamming, interweaving and penetration and personal globalization. EToys' hype was that it presented 100,000 toys on their website, and hoped to thus create the impression that these things would soon only be obtained from them. Their market capitalization increased after going public on May 20, 1999 to an astronomical \$ 10 billion, while they passed on every order individually to the supplier and, following the law of the gift economy, practically distributed the toys for free, so that they made a 60 cent loss on every dollar of sales. Against eToys was the fact that they were always a step behind etoy. In their domain registration, they were 24 months behind, and so they ended up with awkward "s," which was forgotten by 20,000 customers a day, who landed of all places on etoy.com. When they went public, they were still 15 months behind. In June 1999, eToys began negotiations with etoy, and in the end offered 7,000 shares and \$50,000 cash. By allowing this offer to fall through, the tick of etoy grabbed this unique chance for a world-wide performative art project. Declared a toy war, it was possible with a clear definition of fronts to lead fissured virtuality to battle against flat virtuality. With the motto "to hype out the hype," the general strategy was to force the stock value of eToys down to zero. A world wide cooperating phalanx of scenes worked on making this strategy effective with overwhelming fantasy<sup>2</sup>. And the price fell.

From the linearity of their starting position, the agents were soon sent off to a dozen battle fields located in global hot spots, where they had to prove their mettle. During their recruitment, they had decided on a task: thus, there were 388 bombers, 294 war reporters, 270 coders, 261 soldiers, 248 spies, 245 disc jockeys, 46 bankers and 42 lawyers. Battle fields were in Santa Monica, San Francisco, New York, Cuba, Sao Paulo, UK, Switzerland, Italy, Hanoi, China, Tokyo, Ibiza and Tonga. Later, there were also two sea burial grounds in the Indian Ocean. With a radar function, it could be found out on which battle field a particular agent was. It was then necessary to change battle fields with a travel function in order to give this agent a message. Various tools were installed on the individual battlefields, and naturally, in the course of the confrontation, they constantly increased. Thus, there were functions to send mails to various groups of people, for example, eToys management or art curators. Sound tracks could be deposited on battle fields; in the meantime, a Lullabies CD has been made from

these. In addition, there were all sorts of links to the Net, for example to protest pages and media reports. If you had not registered early enough for the toy war, you had to ask one of the agents listed on the starting page to recruit you. During the recruiting procedure, it was possible to name the email addresses of further candidates. Virtual troops emerged from the recruiting hierarchies, which were mixed of friends and unknowns from all over the world. Using a chat function, you could communicate with all those logged onto the platform, using the travel function with individual agents, using the troop function with each recruiting circle and using the alarm function with the entire Toywar community. etoy had transferred 10% of its stock, that is 64,000 shares, to Toywar, and every agent recruited received 10 shares. For services in battle and further recruits, additional shares were distributed, but one also had to cope with losses, since being deployed in the toy war used up energy. Those who did not acquire any energy, departed by way of a sea burial.

In the course of 81 days, eToys lost \$ 4.5 billion in stock value, and thus sponsored the most expensive performance of art history. The gift economy celebrated a triumph over the commerce economy. If you go to <http://www.toywar.com> today, you will be greeted with the TOYWAR.timeline depicting the opposite price trends of eToys and etoy and hundreds of links to the story of the battle. The influential Japanese businessman Joichi Ito commented on etoy's breakthrough to the world code as follows: *etoy continues to beat analysts expectations on reach and retention. Solid products, strong marketing and first mover advantage in the impact management sector have put etoy in the lead. I would rate etoy.SHARES a strong BUY.*

<sup>1</sup>Translator's note: The German word *Netz*, like the english *Net* is commonly used as a shorthand for the *Internet*. However, the German word *Netz* is also used in everyday discourse to refer to networks of all kinds. I have thus chosen to shift between *Net*, when the author is clearly referring to the Internet, and when he is referring to a broader notion, I have used net(work).

<sup>2</sup>Reinhold Grether, [How the etoy Campaign Was Won](#), Telepolis Feb. 26, 2000.

[Translation: Brian Currid]

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