The Silver Age of Social Media
Nettime.org and the Avant-Garde of the '90s

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On October 31, 1995, an e-mail message went out to a small group of people, mostly in Europe. "Welcome to the nettime mailing list," it said. Nettime described itself as:

> the official channel for the *ZK proceedings,* a series of meetings bound to the need of a cultural politics of the nets, of non/electronic, internal and international coordinated action, an open and generous definition/exchange of desired information. This list tries to bridge the gap between two meetings, it is no place, table or city.[1]

For those who don't remember such announcements, this message was launching a listserv. On a listserv, an e-mail sent to the list went to all the people subscribed to it. Listservs were a sort of intermediate stage in the evolution of social media. To give you some idea of how different they were from today's social media: when it started, Nettime.org was not moderated.[2] Spam was too rare an occurrence to worry about.

I would like to start the discussion of the avant-garde of the 1990s with Nettime because it was a place that had a fairly rare flavor in the digital media art and culture of the time. It grew out of a series of meetings at the margins of art festivals in Venice, Budapest, Amsterdam, and Ljubljana. It was transnational from the start. It brought together people working at the intersection of digital media art, theory, and activism. And it was from the beginning critical of both received ideas as to what the critical theory of media ought to be and of the "Californian ideology."

Here is how Barbrook and Cameron described this ideology:

> Implacable in its certainties, the Californian Ideology offers a fatalistic vision of the natural and inevitable triumph of the hi-tech free market—a vision which is blind to racism, poverty and environmental degradation and which has no time to debate alternatives. (Barbrook and 1995a)

From the start, Nettime was engaged with, but critical of, changes in the technical infrastructure and commodity form of communication emanating from Silicon Valley. The name Nettime itself makes this point. When everyone else was talking about "colonizing" *cyberspace*, the list called itself *net-time*, which might, among other things, be a reference to the concept of labor time. Even in the 1990s Nettimers were already complaining of the lack of time, intensified by networked communication:

> From: "Ivo Skoric"
> Organization: Anti-War Campaign
> To: nettime@is.in-berlin.de
> Date sent: Tue, 23 Jan 1996 09:58:14 +0000
> Subject: Various Subjects
> Send reply to: iskoric@igc.apc.org
> Priority: normal
>
> Hi there,
>
> I have never subscribed to this group. Yet suddenly I started receiving various (rather longish) postings on various subjects. I thought should I be offended with this (like certain decent guy Peter who asked you to unsubscribe him just recently). I noted that there is no much discussion, just apodictic postings. Apodictic in a sense that everybody writes what she or he wants, and everybody else takes it for undisputable truth (because nobody really have the net-time to read those long diatribes). This is the ultimate end of all communication: everybody has access, everybody has net-time, but nobody really cares any more. Communication that is killed by the most formidable [*sic*] means of fostering it. That's of course why I completely enjoy the NetTime. Of course, I don't really read the postings (I don't want to betray the cause). But I created a filter that separates things that come from nettime from other crap and put them in a separate mail folder for future generations. Since postings are mostly futuristic I guess guys in about 40–50 years should have a lot of fun reading them (given they have net-time to do it). Furthermore, I decided to join with a story of my own (don't bother reading it, or if you do and say – "ah? that's it?! just two pages?!" – don't be offended, I promise I can clog any newsgroup with lengthy articles). Ivo Skoric[3]

Nettime, or rather the network of artists, writers, and activists it channeled, was an instance of the avant-garde of its time. As Brian Holmes once put it, "it was our Dada" (Holmes 2000). Like Dada, it had a somewhat diffuse and borderless structure. Like Dada, the archive of texts barely hints at the range of activities of Nettime, or rather the "Nettime neigbourhood of lists."

Whether history will see it as all that important an "historical avant-garde," time will tell (Bürger 1984),[4] but I think Nettime had such an ambition. Like any good avant-garde, it was highly aware of its predecessors, such as Dada, Fluxus, and the Situationists, and also impatient to leave them behind. Its ambition was to absorb, digest, refute, and replace the dominant ideas of its time about emerging media as a space of possibility.

The historical logic of avant-garde works something like this: each avant-garde insists on a new definition of what the space of the avant-garde's mission is to be.

It advances as a group onto what appears to be new terrain. But in the process it retrospectively redefines the avant-gardes that are its predecessors—of which it is highly aware—in its own new terms. In this case, the space onto which this avant-garde advanced was not the irrational, or the dream, or chance, or the drift. Nor did this avant-garde take poetry or art or performance or the city to be its privileged form. It proposed instead to see Dada, Surrealism, Fluxus, and the Situationists as now obsolete precursors in opening up for experiments the form of communication itself.

If, like all avant-gardes, Nettime revised the terms of aesthetic advance, it also tried to distance itself from certain political options available at the time. One way to orient Nettime's innovation in this regard would be to think of it as an attempt to escape the local coordinates of certain forms of struggle, particularly in Europe. Its space of action was not defined by the state, but was the supra-state space created by the European Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The Nettime universe had many local points of origin, and I will mention just three. One was the squatter's movement in Amsterdam and Berlin (Adilkno 1990). These were cities which, for divergent reasons, had long histories of movements carving out urban space for another way of life. Another point of origin was the Autonomist movement in Italy. Unlike Germany and Holland, Italy had a powerful and effective postwar labor movement, but by the 1990s it was in decline, and a lot of activity was invested in creating a progressive culture outside of it (Lotringer and Marazzi 2007). The third was the collapse of the Soviet Union. In the mid-1990s the future of the post-Soviet states was far from clear, and a lot of energy went into formulating alternatives. At that time, the Soros Foundation was funding alternative media centers in several post-Soviet cities.

In all three cases, a minority of those involved in these movements lifted their heads above the space of action defined by the national state and what Gramsci might call national-popular culture. They saw media form, rather than cultural content, as a key part of the questions surrounding aesthetic and political struggle and experiment. Within that minority, an even smaller one saw emerging media forms, in particular the promise of the Internet, as a key space in which to develop both a social critique of the media and a media critique of the social that could escape along the Internet vector out of the national space.

Nettime grew from a handful to three thousand subscribers in the first five years of its life. Early on there had been a few posts in German and other languages, but English emerged from the start as the new lingua franca of the European avant-garde. Indeed, there was even a debate about the emergence of "netlish," a form of written English for Internet communication that retained some of the characteristics of the first language of those who wrote it (Apter 2005, 228).

If the Situationists were the last avant-garde whose dominant language was French, English was now established as the default mediator for the avant-garde milieu. The Nettime "brand" was used for listservs in several other languages, including French.[5] There were overlaps and affiliations with lists in other languages, such as Rekombinant in Italian. English as a non-national *critical* language was, however, a relatively new project.

While written in English, Nettime spent a lot of time filtering and digesting French, German, and Italian theory, and media theory, in particular. The listserv had grown out of meetings, and the sharing of printed texts loaded on tables had been one of the

activities at those meet-ups. It is hard to describe the mood of a listserv, as it is made up of many participants, not to mention lurkers. But if one were to risk a generalization, Nettime displayed a certain skepticism regarding the received media theory of its time.

Two models were dominant. One was the critical theory of the culture industries. To caricature the latter, its proponents held that the commodity form of media fatally compromised its ability to communicate anything. Commodified media made everything exchangeable; anything could be exchanged for anything and nothing was irreconcilable in the Hollywood happy ending (Adorno 2001). The variation on such themes promulgated by the Situationist International critiqued not the culture industry but the spectacle in which all of life appeared as a profusion of images. "That is good appears, and that which appears is good" (Debord 1994).

A second model, certainly far less influential in Europe but gaining traction in the anglophone world, held something like the opposite view. It focused not on the coercive power of media but on the creative power of individual media consumers to interpret media in their own sometimes creative or subversive ways (Fiske and Hartley 2003). This current would later give rise to the influential work of Henry Jenkins on fan cultures and the like (Jenkins 2008). It had enormous appeal to those who, without giving it much thought, decided that the old media were "passive" and the new media were "active," and therefore good.

One way of reading what Nettime was trying to do in the late 1990s is to think of it as an attempt to reject the old "culture industry cum spectacle theory of media" without falling into uncritical celebration of users' "creativity" that sometimes occurred within the cultural studies school. The latter was quite correctly seen as taking consumer behavior as a given. Nettime was not interested in "empowering" consumers. Like any good avant-garde, it wanted another life entirely.

Here is where the transnational quality of Nettime really came in handy, as it meant that the space of discussion had access to other resources from other traditions. These included the work of Villem Flusser and Friedrich Kittler from Germany.[6] This overturned the emphasis on commodity form in critical theory, and insisted instead on a close attention to the material properties of media itself. But rather than the bleak, all-enclosing discourse networks of Kittler, manufacturing subjects as nodes in the machine, there was rather an avant-gardist will to make at least a different kind of network and a different kind of subjective node.

This was just one of the strands influencing the intellectual life of Nettime. Much to the chagrin of some subscribers and participants, it became a place for posting essays by the theory stars of the time, from Guattari to Negri and Žižek. On December 2, 1999, for example, someone called "anticopyright," posted Žižek's essay "The Matrix, Or, The Two Sides of Perversion" (Žižek 1999).[7] The culture of sharing such texts had begun, which would result in the global anglophone-theory blogosphere and file sharing culture of more recent times. It was also a moment of propagating and stabilizing a transnational use of English as a medium for critical, theoretical writing.

The genre of theory writing favored on Nettime certainly had an influence on anglophone media theory, and perhaps not a bad one. Nettime writing could be inventive, speculative, highly condensed, and relatively free of specific national-cultural reference. The form of the listserv and a certain kind of theory-inflected essay seemed a good match. But there was a lack of specificity to much of this writing where

it concerned media, not to mention "new" media. Why read Baudrillard or Virilio on such things, when it was well enough known that all of their actual communication was managed, in both cases, by their wives? The theory stars were not even online, let alone conducting experiments in the form.

Nettime co-founders Geert Lovink and Pit Schulz (2010) led the way in countering this practice, with a series of essays, originally in German, on netkritik. Many others followed. The beauty of these texts was the matching of form and content, of writing both about and on the Internet, and in a mode of circulation outside of commodified life. The "open and generous definition/exchange of desired information" was not always smooth sailing. There were "flame wars," misunderstandings, stand-offs, and all the rest (Dery 1995).[8] But what gradually emerged from all that was a theory and practice of writing both on and about the Net that had at least some distance from the adversarial style of "debate" deemed characteristic of American online communication. Many Nettimers had experienced this in online forums such as Usenet or The Well, and were looking for another kind of communicative practice.

If one looks not just at Nettime but at the "Nettime neighborhood of lists," one finds that many key ideas and writers were trialed and tempered there, including work by Lev Manovich, Alex Galloway, and Tiziana Terranova.[9] Nettime was not just for theory-heads, however. It really was a convergence of the three things that characterize any avant-garde: thought, art, and action. With art, as with writing, Nettime became a place not to recirculate past forms but to invent new ones.

A particularly controversial example is antiorp, also known as integer and Netochka Nezvanova (NN) (Mieszkowski 2002). This entity—there is no other word for it—was probably behind the production of a graphical environment for music and media called *Nato.0+55+3d* (1999), widely used and respected at the time. It ran on the Apple OS, and extended the Max environment from audio to visual objects. It was one of the first real-time video manipulation and display environments, predating GEM and Jitter, and it was relatively cheap.

While several people report meeting antiorp, it is not clear whether the woman they encountered was part of antiorp, or an actor, or even the same woman. As an online avatar, antiorp made it her, his, or its mission to disrupt and insult pretty much everybody via listservs. A typical integer/antiorp insult looks something like this:

To: nettime-l {AT} bbs.thing.net
Subject: [Nettime-bold] Re: GRAVE YOU DIG YOU[R] OWN
From: integer {AT} www.god-emil.dk
Date: Tue, 8 Aug 2000 13:55:14 +0200
List-Id: the uncut, unmoderated version of nettime-l <nettime-bold.nettime.org>
Reply-To: nettime-bold {AT} nettime.org
Sender: nettime-bold-admin {AT} nettime.org

>when you chose to validate artmuseum mafia schemes online

varum = ent!tl maf!a +?
= != maf!a. = 01 plantaz!e zt!le z!ztm.

= nett!me.rh!zome = ultra zaturatd avec lo.tekk.!mbez!l!k kr!t!kx
+ dze!r luvl! + unshapl! pet`art!ztz`. cezt 0+1 komed!e + traged!e
=01.m!tholog!kl.debr!z.
nn. (integer 2000)

Frequent posts like this led to furious debates about "netiquette." In one post Lorenzo Taiuti replied to Josephine Berry:

> i read your nice essai and i agree on many things. About "NN/antiorp/integer" i may only disagree. Neither Adorno or Breton would think that around 2000 people would try to realize fragile attempts of a web-democracy through contacts, exchange of informations and attempts of organizations totally free from society controls. And i underline "attempts" because what we are tryng to do is extremely 'light' compared to the tremendous weight of the real official info-structure. In this moment an interesting list like Syndicate is dyng because the strategy of 'spamming' create by NN&Company breaks the subtle balance of the 'comunication agreement' between members of the list. There are not cultural excuses to something like that. (Taiuti 2001)

In retrospect antiorp/NN/integer is perhaps best seen as a conceptual art project, an update on, say, Ray Johnson's mail art strategies for the Internet age (De Salvo and Gudis 1999). Or perhaps as a precursor to 4chan and Anonymous (Coleman 2014). But the Taiuti message neatly sums up some of the tensions between the political and the aesthetic on Nettime. Is the form of the listserv there to serve some larger purpose, or is the form itself something that is open to experiments, even of a disruptive kind? This was a practical double to the theoretical question as to whether what mattered about the Internet in general were questions of form (as in German media theory) or what people do with it (as in British cultural studies).

That the avant-garde is an act of disruptive noise within a media form is an idea that could combine aspects of both points of view. It is an idea with quite a pedigree. Dick Hebdige (1979) used it to understand punk; Greil Marcus (1989) thought it was the thread connecting Dada to the Situationist International. Certainly one of the key strategies to emerge out of the Nettime milieu was a disruptive one: the denial-of-service attack on a web site, for example. When an Internet start-up by the name of eToys.com tried to use legal intimidation to take over the domain name of the art group eToy.com in 1999, the response was a swift and effective campaign to shut down eToys.com in what became known as the Toy War (Wishart and Boschsler 2003).[10] The Electronic Disturbance Theater used similar denial-of-service attacks against Mexican government web sites as a way of drawing attention to the struggles of the Zapatistas.[11]

Such tactics elaborated in new ways and in new domains the classic avant-garde strategy of noise or "disturbance." But next to noise there was another strand to what became known as "tactical media" (Garcia and Lovink 1997). Drawing on Michel De Certeau and others, this approach tried to use ready-made media tools to make temporary interventions in specific media forms for limited periods of time (De Certeau 2011). Critical Art Ensemble's *Free Range Grain* (2003–2004), which used off-the-shelf technologies to allow people to test the products of the global agribusiness system for themselves, might be one example (Critical Art Ensemble 2012).

Perhaps one could describe this other strand as conceptual design. Unlike conceptual art, it inhabited the artworld, but its conceptual questioning was not of art-historical forms, but more directly of the media and technical aspect of social, cultural, and political forms (Lippard 1997). As in any design prototyping, it got as far as proof-of-concept productions—things that worked but were never mass-produced or implemented.

Occasionally there were actual implementations, if temporary and tactical ones. Consider the events around the closure of the (Soros-supported) B92 radio station by the Milosevic government in Yugoslavia in 1999 (Collins 2001). B92 was practically the only media voice of the opposition in Yugoslavia at the time of the Kosovo war. When the government raided the station, the Dutch Internet provider xs4all.nl stepped in to rebroadcast the service, from a secret location in Belgrade, over the Internet. The xsforall.nl signal was for a time rebroadcast by the BBC World Service via shortwave radio. It was a demonstration of both the power and the limitations of the Internet to route around government control of the old, centralized broadcast media apparatus.

Listservs such as Nettime were networks of information sharing, concept formation, and rhetoric generation, or what was called "collaborative filtering" for such activities. What cheap printing and the postal service was to the historic avant-gardes, the listserv was to the new. Sometimes the content of a listserv would be redacted down and printed as a free newspaper, then distributed at art and media festivals. One of these publications was produced by a global network around the Zagreb-originated group Arkzin, which redacted debates around the Kosovo war; it was distributed on at least three continents (Buden 1999).

Not the least of the charms of the Nettime world was that it combined a listserv with sporadic attempts to meet in person. The relation between online and embodied life was a lively topic in the 1990s. Anomalies like antiorp notwithstanding, Nettime was less interested in the theme of "virtual life" than many other online avant-gardes of the time.[12] The focus was more on the interaction between two kinds of *collective* experience than on the vicissitudes of personal "identity."

The emphasis on new forms of collectivity also aligns Nettime more closely with the historic avant-gardes, all of which conducted critical experiments in forms of organization. Some, such as the Futurists, Surrealists, and Situationists, adopted quasi-party forms, including formal tests of membership and exclusion. Some, such as Dada and Fluxus, were looser networks. From Fluxus came the even more distributed practices of mail art, in some ways an intermediate form toward the network practices of Internet-based avant-garde collectivity. From mail art also came the practice of the shared name, the most successful of which was Luther Blissett (Deseriis 2010).

Within the ever-evolving collectivity of Nettime were other forms of collectivity, like the multidisciplinary art collaborations of I/O/D, VNS Matrix, Mongrel, Critical Art Ensemble, Electronic Disturbance Theater, Institute for Applied Autonomy, and FakeShop. ®TMark and the eToy group were early exponents of the more-or-less fake company, later redeployed by the Bernadette Corporation (Wark 2005). Nettime was thus a network of networks in which some nodes were institutions, some scenes, and others groups.

Speaking of scenes: there is a remarkable portrait of this world in science fiction writer Bruce Sterling's novel *Holy Fire* (1996).[13] Sterling was active on The Well, an American bulletin board based in San Francisco, which one might describe as a distant ancestor of Facebook today. Sterling drew that world's attention to Nettime, usually prefacing his observations with remarks about "goofy letfists!" (Sterling 1997). In *Holy Fire,* Sterling captures the ambience of groups that met in an almost clandestine way in the back rooms of bars and nightclubs to plot how to change the world with the combined force of new ideas and new media.

More than most other networks of its kind, but like all of the historic avant-gardes, Nettime was obsessive about self-documentation. Four photocopied and sta-pled anthologies were produced in 1996 alone. These were always called *ZKP*, short for the German initials for Publication of the Central Committee (Zentralkomiteepublikation)—a joke on old-style socialist organization, although one that did not go down so well with Eastern European Nettimers. *Readme!* (1999) was an ambitious attempt to create a "Nettime bible," edited by a half dozen people in different time zones working around the clock, with the heavy lifting done by Ted Byfield in Amsterdam. The introduction, a détournement of avant-gardist manifesto language, quite accurately describes the milieu of Nettime:

> The discursive interactions on Nettime appear as a fluid process that can't be simulated or staged. The list is a milieu that encourages a certain radicalism of approach: miscellaneous ex-East going on ex-West ancien-regime misfits turned NGO-perfect-fits, fun-guerrilla playgirls, connected autonomists, entrepreneurial molto-hippies, squatters turned digital imperialists, postcynical berks, slacktivists and wackademics, minimalist elitist subtechnodrifters, name- your-cause party people, name-your-price statists, can-do cyber-individualists, can't–won't workers, accredited weird-scientists, and assorted other theoretical and practical avant-gardeners, senders, receivers, and orphans.[14]

That list (artfully composed by Matthew Fuller) is a good description of the Nettime milieu and its range of ambitions. Like all avant-gardes, the most radical and utopian ideas of Nettime actually came true, but always with some small modification. A whole new form of communication really did come to pass, outside of the broadcast model. Transnational networks did form outside of, and often indifferent to, the old national media and state envelopes. New intellectual and creative practices emerged, rendering redundant the old publishing and distributing practices for thought and art. Twenty years after Nettime's founding, these stabilized into a series of corporate silos—Apple, Google, Facebook, etc.—that extract value from the kind of voluntary collaborative filtering of which Nettimers were one of the pioneers.

What Nettimers did not quite foresee was how easily it would all, in the end, be swept back into the commodity system, how quickly state surveillance would catch up, and how the creative energies of time spent on the Net would actually drive a new stage of commodified life rather than escape from it. Like all previous avant-gardes, it won its battle but lost the war.

Here I think it wise to hew closely to the "radical media pragmatism" of one of Nettime's founders, Geert Lovink, who was always far too much of an instinctive pessimist to drink the utopian Kool-Aid (Lovink 2002, 218). Contrary to what is sometimes said today, many Internet activists and theorists of the 1990s were well aware of the dangers and limitations of the impending world. Lovink always paid particularly close attention to the changing working conditions for people in the sector formerly known as the culture industries.

The key theme here is the tension in our working lives between precariousness and autonomy.[15] Creative workers are often willing to forego a big, steady pay-check to achieve some measure of control over their own work and time. The question is how to maximize the autonomy and minimize the precariousness. Nettime itself is instructive in that regard. Many of the writers on it went on to successful

careers in media industries, programming, academia, the artworld, journalism, organizing. But there are also a lot of voices who simply disappeared from view. Precarity has its price.

When I hear the word "innovation" I know I can relax. Innovation does not really mean change. It just means decorating the edges of existing technical, economic, and cultural models. Just do the same stuff but maybe make the logo light green instead of green. Perhaps we are in an age of stasis rather than "innovation" in media architecture. The forms of innovation are not themselves innovative. The architecture of corporate media silos may have more or less stabilized again.

While I do not want to wax nostalgic about the Nettime era, or suggest it is in any way the origins of anything, I think there is something worth recapturing about the spirit of adventure of the time: the general experiment in every direction; the desire to make things new. It was at best a silver age. There never was a golden age of media. As Barbrook and Cameron put it,

> As pioneers of the new, the digital artisans need to reconnect themselves with the theory and practice of productive art. They are not just employees of others, or even would-be cybernetic entrepreneurs. They are also artist-engineers—designers of the next stage of modernity. Drawing on the experience of the Saint-Simonists and Constructivists, the digital artisans can create a new machine aesthetic for the information age. (Barbrook and Cameron 1995b)

The Constructivists were an avant-garde active in the Soviet Union, where it appeared, at least for a moment, that capitalist relations of commodity production had been superseded, even though certain aspects of it—like royalty payments—persisted in the cultural sphere (Kiaer 2008). Perversely enough, Nettimers confronted the opposite situation. Commodity production thrived in every sphere except cultural production, where the digital sharing of information was rapidly undermining the old industrial production methods (Scholz 2013).[16] Perhaps another way of seeing the avant-gardes is as antennae tuned toward changing roles for cognition and experiment within commodity production.

Time and again avant-gardes have tried to escape the logic of the commodification of the aesthetic, only to meet one of two fates. One was to crash back into subservience to party or state (Futurists, Constructivists, Surrealists). The other was to be captured by the artworld's valorization of the bespoke cultural commodity (Dada, Surrealists again, Situationists, Fluxus, Conceptualism). In the Nettime era, neither option was quite available. Whatever the political intentions of particular Nettimers, there simply were no mass parties exerting a powerful gravitational pull on cultural life. While much of the activity collaboratively filtered by Nettime required the support of various state cultural ministries, it was always marginal to any state cultural project.

Most curiously, this avant-garde has arguably not resulted in particularly stellar art careers for its members when compared to its predecessors. This is not to gainsay the very interesting work that has come out of this milieu. Eva and Franco Mattes, for example, created a series of works at the Postmasters gallery in New York called *13 Most Beautiful Avatars* (2006), high-resolution digital "portraits" of the avatars people used in the then-popular online world *Second Life* and an "update" of Andy Warhols's *Screen Tests* (1964–1966), such as *13 Most Beautiful Boys* or *13 Most Beautiful Women*).[17]

The institutional capture of this avant-garde was more fully achieved by the university. Many Nettimers ended up in teaching positions, often in art schools or media studies programs. In this respect the Nettime milieu is more reminiscent of the College of Pataphysics, an avant-garde for people with day jobs (Brotchie 1995).

In the margins of *Documenta X*, the 1997 version of the famous art exhibition taking place in Kassel, Germany, every five years, was an area called *Hybrid Workspace*. It ran for a hundred days, not a summer of discontent, but a summer of "content." *Hybrid Workspace* was something of a coming-out party for Nettime and friends. Looking at the pictures, it is striking how the informal workspaces, littered with computers, resemble the studios of the Design and Technology program of Parsons School of Design today,[18] both being low-rent, low-tech versions of the new workspace designed by Google for its New York employees and contractors. If Nettime was the avant-garde of anything, perhaps it was the new spatial and temporal patterns of cognitive and experimental work itself (Ross 2004).

Avant-gardes have their time. They conduct exploits (Galloway and Thacker 2007). They find the unintended possibilities of a given configuration of media form. Those possibilities typically either seed new forms of power and commodity or are closed off in favor of those that do. Nettime had its time. The time of its experimental power ended with the more or less full enclosure of the Internet into business as usual. The time is ripe for considering Nettime, indeed the whole media era, in the past tense. It is time now for working out what in it is living and what is dead in the form of an archive. Perhaps its bones can be picked clean in the interests of feeding new avant-gardes, working in other ways, and elsewhere.

Notes

1   As of July 2014, the whole Nettime archive was available at nettime.org.

2   How moderation changed the feel of the list is another topic:

    To: nettime-l {AT} Desk.nl

    Subject: <nettime> nettime moderation

    From: Matthew Fuller <matt {AT} axia.demon.co.uk>

    Date: Sun, 1 Feb 1998 18:15:29 +0000

    Sender: owner-nettime-l {AT} basis.Desk.nl

    Over the next month or so Pit will be away from Berlin and the net. During this period, moderation of the Nettime list will be carried out by Geert Lovink (geert {AT} xs4all.nl) and Matthew Fuller (matt {AT} axia.demon.co.uk). The style of moderation will generally remain the same. At the same time however, we want to take this opportunity of having dual moderation to invite people involved in the list to experiment a little with it as a technical and social form.

    In particular we are conscious that there is a tendency for specific styles of writing to dominate traffic on Nettime. Increasingly the list is being used for men to compare the length of their bookshelves. Whilst we're hot for polemic and monumental essays of universal importance, we also believe that other things need to be said.

    To this end we have consulted the relevant tabulations and urge all nettimers to increase productivity in the following areas:

    rants – 25% increase

    12.8% more manifestos

a full 50% more fiction
software reviews – 23.8% increase
nasty weird shit – 100%

Other formats such as, conversations compiled by email and turned into chat documents; stupid sayings; things overheard on the bus; stolen documents; specifications for impossible network devices, and so on. In addition, we would love to hear from the many lurkers on the list. We'd like your invisibility to remain comfortable, but if you fancy saying something – get typing.

It is expected that the amount of traffic will increase to some extent due to this invitation. In anticipation of this there will be two shifts of moderation: morning and evening (GMT). In order not to swell the tide too much any complaints about overload will be noted, but not posted.

Quality and relevance control will still be important. In order to meet any problems with overload the moderators have arranged to have a new key delivered to the keyboard of every nettimer. It should now be appearing in the top right of your keyboard. It is called the >delete< key. Use it – it feels good.

3 Ivo Skoric on Tuesday, January 23, 1996, 17:05 MET. http://nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9601/msg00042.html (accessed January 4, 2015).

4 While Peter Bürger's *Theory of the Avant Garde* (1984) gave us the category of the historic avant-garde, it is still in need of more elaboration to extract it from dependence on the category of art and the artworld.

5 For a useful documentation of what interested the French scene at the time, see Nettimers Nathalie Magnan and Annick Bureaud (2002).

6 For example, Geert Lovink on Saturday, February 6, 1999, 21:08:19 +0100 (CET), where Lovink forwards "On the Implementation of Knowledge: Towards a Theory of Hardware" from Kitter himself to the list: http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9902/msg00038.html. Or Pit Schultz on Tuesday, October 13, 1998, 08:16:47 +0200 (MET DST), forwarding the Flusser essay "The Bag" to the list. It would become the opening text of the 1999 Nettime anthology. http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9810/msg00081.html (accessed January 4, 2015).

7 Anticopyright on Friday, December 3, 1999, 01:35:54 +0100 (CET): http://nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9912/msg00019.html (accessed January 4, 2015).

8 The phenomenon of flame wars, or positive feedback loops of escalating vituperation, was a quite new experience for a lot of Internet users at the time. It became the title of a pioneering collection of essays edited by Nettimer Mark Dery (1995).

9 See, for example, Lev Manovich on Tuesday, December 15, 1998, 19:27:21+0100 (CET): http://nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9812/msg00041.html (accessed January 4, 2015). His influential book *The Language of New Media* (2000) grew out of posts such as these.

10 Also see http://toywar.etoy.com (accessed January 4, 2015).

11 See http://www.thing.net/~rdom/ecd/ZapTact.html (accessed January 4, 2015).

12 See Nettimer Julian Dibbell (1999) for a sophisticated take on the then-new topic of the relation between on- and offline identity and ethics.

13 See also Sterling's Viridian design movement: http://www.viridiandesign.org/ (accessed January 4, 2015).

14 http://www.medialounge.net/lounge/workspace/nettime/DOCS/zkp5/pdf/intro.pdf (accessed January 4, 2015).

15 On precarity see, for example, Franco Berardi (2012). Berardi was both a Nettimer and instrumental in the Italian-language Rekombinant listserv.
16 Scholz is a Nettimer and founder of the listserv The Institute for Distributed Creativity: http://distributedcreativity.org/ (accessed January 4, 2015).
17 http://0100101110101101.org/home/portraits/index.html (accessed January 4, 2015).
18 http://www.medialounge.net/lounge/workspace/ (accessed January 4, 2015).

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