

Text to MCD #69, Paris 2012

*Per Platou is an artist and curator from Oslo. He studied media theory, criminology, history of ideas and film/drama in Oslo and London, and has been involved in free radio, fanzines and various alternative media. In 1989 he founded dBUT, an alternative distribution, record label and production company.*

*From 1994 he made projects focusing on sound exchange and live performance on the internet – most often together with Ulf Knudsen (aka Nood) and/or with choreographer and artist Amanda Steggell under the group name Motherboard.*

*As a curator he has often focused on artistic and technological failure, e.g. through exhibitions and symposiums like "Glitch", "Reality Check", "Hot Wired Live Art" and "Written in Stone - a net.art Archaeology".*

*He currently works on sound-based solo installations and theatre sound, mainly in the group Verk Productions. Since 2007 he has been director for PNEK (Production Network for Electronic Art), and is currently setting up a fullscale open source video art archive in Norway.*

What has always interested me is the inherent resistance in any given technological medium at a given time, and I was lucky to be on the internet before it got too smooth. Around 1994 we were all using 14.4k modems so everything was super slooow (it took about three days/nights of hard work to find, download, decode and play my first soundfile - the sound of a cuckoo clock!)

Before that, computers were useful for writing text, layout purposes and making inventories, and that was it. It didn't feel very revolutionary, or subversive to spend a lot of time in front of the "data machine". I subscribed to a couple of BBS home servers for a year or so before I got onto the real internet. The fact that I could download a generic map or photo of an elephant for my fanzine didn't feel all that fantastic, just a practical way of being slightly more productive. We understood somehow that the network was just computers talking to each other via long distance phone connections, literally speaking.

As a political activist in the early 1990s I had some experience with hacking big corporations by simple technological tools. E.g. to stick a black page rolled into a paper loop into a telefax machine and then dial the number to the oil company Shell (during the boycott years). That would crash their fax machine in a matter of minutes by using up all the ink and thermal paper. Very simple, and very effective!

None of us really knew exactly how and why to make use this new thing called internet, the global world wide web, except maybe a handful of scientists and military intelligence. So there was an abundance of strange and very user-unfriendly technical protocols. New ways of social behaviour developed through the gaming MOOs and MUDs, not to speak of IRC – "the cocaine of the internet" as it was sometimes called because of its addictive nature. And sure enough, soon I found myself sitting up night after night at home, scouting the seedy channels and chatting to avatars named #Raindoll and #Miaow. Every evening was like a new Philip K. Dick novel unfolding itself live, and I was part of it!

In 1995 I joined the first ever internet band, Res Rocket Surfer, which was basically a server with a MIDI sequencer, a client software and a bunch of friends and musicians. That's what started everything for me. We soon learned that the crashes and farout backstage parties were artistically far more interesting than anything slightly musically "productive". So we added protocol after protocol onto our live shows, incorporating more and more elements and people, and then fed everything into each other to create insane time-space warped performances (inspired by the

audio/video experiments conducted by Woody & Steina Vasulka in their NY Kitchen around 1970). Inspired by all these wonderful mistakes and glitches from the early days of live social interaction on the internet, I have since tried to distill that magic energy and sought to discover the ontological meaning of mistakes and errors. In 2005/6 I curated three social evenings in Oslo entitled “Reality Check”, where artists were invited to bring forward projects that had failed miserably - a kind of public confession chair. To cut a long story short, the concept very soon turned out to be a great success, which in turn ruined everything. Ain't that existential?

The internet itself is rapidly disappearing these days, the matrix has been replaced by the great Ubik. We are privileged to have experienced those crazy tensions between virtual/reality, tech/social protocols and on/offline realities. Now it's about time to take the internet out of “internet art” and let art find its own path. I propose we sit down and have a drink around the campfire until the last sunstorm has wiped away everything but that weird and wonderful bunch of curious, hungry, humanoid creatures that we are. The net is us, we are the net.

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