

Appendix 2 The Piazzettas

Parts of *Piazza virtuale* were provided by the so-called “piazzettas”. These were two dozen groups and initiatives that produced broadcasts on their own in cities in Europe and Japan. The contributions of these initiatives were transmitted to Kassel via videophone, either with an analog Panasonic videophone in slow-scan mode or by ISDN videophone. However, some Piazzettas also transmitted at least temporarily by satellite.

The Piazzettas started to broadcast in late June 1992. The groups had to register by fax the day before and were then given an airtime, which was entered on daily broadcast schedules. As more and more piazzettas participated in the last weeks of “Piazza virtuale”, there were sometimes scheduling conflicts. Salvatore Vanasco was responsible for the coordination of the German piazzettas, Mike Hentz organized the international piazzettas with contacts from the network he had built up through his artistic work with various groups across Europe.

Some of the piazzettas – such as in Hamburg or Cologne – contributed during the entire broadcasting period, others – such as Bremen, Geneva or Zurich – were limited to a few shows. Some of the piazzettas cooperated with each other during their shows. Graz and Vienna broadcasted together for the most part, but there were also spontaneous, one-off collaborations, for example between the piazzettas in Cologne and Bremen or Hamburg and Paris.

A2.1 Berlin



Organisers: Gesellschaft zur Förderung und Pflege interdisziplinärer Kommunikation (GFPIK) (Society for the Promotion and Maintenance of Interdisciplinary Communication); Kulturverein WARTEN;

Project management: Rudolf Stoehrt/Frank Kunkel

Participants: Manfred Schmidt (equipment); Andreas Geradert (system management), Hans Hübner (system management), Thomas Kaulmann (system management and chat moderation), Robert Rothe (system management), Sascha Zumbusch (system management and chat moderation), Dana Bourdan (Frauen und Technik (FuT): mobile team), Armin Haase (video and computer animation), Jörg Langkau (computer animation), Pit Schultz (fax-based image processing), Antya Umstätter (video support), Petra Herrmann (press relations), Anja Schubert (press relations), Daniel Pflumm, Inga Knölcke, Tom Dieckmann, Natascha Sadr Haghghian.

Broadcast dates (selection):

16 August 1992, 11:03–11:15; 20 August 1992, 11:40–11:53 (all 3sat)

Description:

The organiser of the Berlin Piazzetta was the writer Rudolf Stoert, who co-edited the culture magazine *Warten*, in which he had published a long interview with Benjamin Heidersberger, Karel Dudesek and Salvatore Vanasco about Ponton and Van Gogh TV before *Piazza virtuale*.¹ In an initial letter to Van Gogh TV he writes that he wants to continue the concept of this magazine, which publishes a lot of interviews and talks, at the Piazzetta. In a proposal for the Piazzetta, planned contributions include: *Partyzone* (where the mobile team was to visit Berlin clubs), *Kontaktthof* (“contact zone”, a partner exchange), *Informationsbörse* (“information exchange”, that was to deliver “rumours and trash talk, gossip and local event information, but also current information from databases and computer networks”), *Reiseberichte* (“a travelogue about exciting places in the international data network”) and *Stammtisch* (a “regular’s table” to “finally give the whole world a piece of your mind”). Not all of these ideas were realised.

¹ Stoert, Rudolf: Lustig, dass es unterhalte, Ponton European Media Archive, Interview/Text-Collage, *Warten*. Das Magazin, Nr. 2 (1991), S. 125 - 188

From 16 August 1992, Berlin's Piazzetta broadcast from the city's Haus Podewil, the former East Berlin Haus der jungen Talente (House of Young Talents), where they had set up their own broadcasting studio including an internet café with VT-100 terminals, which was open around the clock and became a meeting place for a young scene interested in media and art even outside broadcasting hours. The city magazine *Tip* wrote about “an electronic coffee house” where one could “hack one’s input directly into the terminals, which are publicly accessible there”.² Since co-organiser Thomax Kaulmann was already running the internet provider Contributed Software at that time, there was access to the internet, and the chat in the Van Gogh TV mailbox was used more by the Berlin Piazzetta than by the others. In our interview, Thomax Kaulmann emphasises the social significance of the Berlin Piazzetta: “In my opinion, the interesting thing was this coming together of these different scenes in Berlin, because a lot came out of that.”³

Pit Schulz shares this view:

We met there for the first time. And not only us, but also in Hamburg, or [...] in Riga. It was at an important time, the transition from the old mass media to the digital network-based media. [*Piazza virtuale*] was one of the decisive projects that brought together exactly the right people: Artists and technicians [...], a network of actors ... We had a small media lab, and that’s where it started. People made things by themselves, which were not necessarily used to be broadcast afterwards.⁴

The Berlin Piazzetta was inspired by the subculture that emerged in post-reunification Berlin. There were “video mixes” – as in the techno clubs of that time – and music performances; among others, the band *Meine Lieblingsband* and the Berlin Nose Flute Orchestra performed during the 3sat night programme. In addition to the musical and artistic performances, there were political segments, including a discussion with the organisation *Jugend gegen Rassismus* (Youth against Racism) about the right-wing riots in Rostock–Lichtenhagen. But there were also technical demonstrations that would be called “tutorials” today, including a presentation of a database and an internet modem.

2 Liebherr, Christoph, “Coffee House Van Gogh”, *Tip* 17, 1992.

3 Interview with Thomax Kaulmann, 6 June 2018.

4 Interview with Pit Schultz, 6 June 2018.

There were conflicts between Piazzetta Berlin and Van Gogh TV over the content of the show. In a fax dated 23 August 1992, some members of the Berlin group even terminated the collaboration, but the Piazzetta Berlin programmes continued to run as usual. Reasons for the termination are not given in the fax, but one point of conflict was that the Berlin group wanted to broadcast pre-produced videos by Berlin artists Daniel Pflumm and Gereon Schmitz, whose video loops were shown in Berlin clubs like WMF as a visual supplement to the DJ performance. This idea contradicted the communicative concept of *Piazza virtuale*. Pit Schulz even went to Kassel on 29 July 1992 to promote these video broadcasts, but without success. Nevertheless, excerpts from the video work *Hello TV* by Daniel Pflumm, which he created for his bar Elektro, can be seen in a broadcast of 5 September. For the video, he asked people in nightlife and on the street to say the word “Hello” into the camera; the work ran silently in the bar, which was one of the nuclei of the Berlin techno scene. Because so many callers to *Piazza virtuale* answered with “Hello”, “Hello TV” also became the programme’s mock name.

From 30 June 1992, *Piazza virtuale* was also broadcast daily between 11 p.m. and midnight on the Berlin cable channel FAB (Fernsehen aus Berlin). FAB was a private station founded in 1991 by a group of film and television producers. Van Gogh TV had already worked with the station in 1991 when it broadcast *Ballroom TV* from the Berlin discotheque 90 Grad. No recordings of the FAB broadcasts are available, only the programming schedule. They show that programmes such as *Medialandscape*, *Sarah und Daniel*, *Beichtstuhl*, *Atelier*, *Classical Orchestra* and *Coffeehouse*, which ran on 3sat, were also shown here; *Marktplatz*, which had to be withdrawn from 3sat after a few broadcasts, continued to be shown on FAB. From 16 August until the end of *Piazza virtuale*, Berlin’s Piazzetta provided programming for FAB between 23:00 and 23:55.

The regular broadcast on FAB may have contributed to the fact that an above-average number of Berliners also called in to the 3sat show. Their conversations on air provide evidence that the Berlin callers sometimes also spoke to each other on the phone outside the broadcasts or possibly even met in person.

Some of the contributors to the Berlin Piazzetta were among the most important protagonists of internet culture in Berlin in the 1990s. Armin Haase was a member of the artist group Handshake in *Feldreise* (Fieldtrip, 1993), one of the earliest internet art projects in Germany. Together with other Berlin Piazzetta members such as Pit Schulz, Thomas Kaulmann and Frank Kunkel, he was also one of the founders of the Internationale Stadt

internet project, which was a predecessor of social media and hosted many early internet artworks by artists such as JODI, Eva Grubinger and others. Internationale Stadt also hosted Clubnetz, where they set up terminals at the Love Parade and in Berlin clubs such as Tresor and E-Werk so that visitors to different clubs could chat with each other.

From 1999, Schulz and Kaulmann also ran Klubradio, a website that streamed DJ and live sets from Berlin clubs – a concept that was later turned into a business model by London’s Boilerroom. Both were also among the co-founders of Mikro e.V., which organised monthly events on internet culture in the Berlin club WMF and the Wizards of OS congress in the late 1990s. In addition, Kaulmann ran the internet radio station Orang Orang. The internet radio station reboot.fm and Bootlab, probably the first Berlin co-working space, also emerged from this scene. In 1995 Pit Schulz together with Geert Lovink founded nettime, an influential mailing list for internet culture and politics that still exists today. Antya Umstätter and Natascha Sadr Haghigian, who contributed to the Berlin Piazzetta, are active today as artists and university lecturers. Haghigian participated in documenta in 2012 and exhibited under the pseudonym Natascha Süder Happelmann in the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2019. (tb)

A2.2 Bremen



Organisers: Students of the Bremen University of the Arts

Participants: Ronald Gonko, Ole Wulfers, Tobias Küch, Rachid Ali Khan, Beate Skiba, Hank Normann, Katrin Orth, Veronika My, Daniela Aligeri, Martina Schall, Joschi Jung, Prof. Gerd Dahlmann among others.

Broadcast dates (selection):

11 July, 3–5 August, 22 August,
10 September 1992 (3sat).

Description:

The Bremen “Piazza Telematica” was organised by students from the Bremen University of the Arts. Some of them came from Professor Gerd Dahlmann’s experimental film class, but students from the departments of Painting and

Architecture were also involved. Fellow students Ronald Gonko and Axel Roselius, who was later responsible for computer graphics at *Piazza virtuale* in Kassel, had seen *Hotel Pompino*, a project Van Gogh TV had done at Ars Electronica in 1990, on 3sat and contacted the group. They were invited to a symposium at the art academy in Hamburg, where Mike Hentz was a professor at the time, and also took part in “interactive training” as part of University TV, another Ponton Media Lab project, which was a kind of boot camp for the Piazzettas’ work.⁵

The live broadcast of the Piazzetta in Bremen was transmitted to Kassel via a videophone, which was connected to the ISDN network. As with some of the other Piazzettas, the ISDN connection had to be set up first. The Piazzetta was financially supported by the Media Department of the Senator for Youth and Culture, the Bremen Film Office and Telekom.

The Bremen Piazzetta broadcast daily from 3 to 16 August 1992. On weekdays it was aired during the morning show. It occasionally also provided short segments for other shows. One broadcast was in cooperation with the Piazzetta of Bremen’s twin city Riga, and another with the Piazzetta Cologne. On several occasions, broadcasts were also made from other locations, one from Café Kairo, one from the pedestrian zone in Bremen and one from a branch of electronics market Saturn, where passers-by were interviewed on the subject of consumption and television.

The influence of performance, experimental film and video art on the Bremen art students is obvious in most of their productions. These were characterised by a visual language reminiscent of the video art of that period and are informed by the garish colour palette of the Amiga computers of the time. Through the intensive use of image mixers, colour effects and superimpositions, sometimes astonishing image compositions were created. For example, in a picture of former East German head of state Erich Honecker the eyes and mouth were replaced with images of the facial expressions of a performer in the studio. In another broadcast, Roland Gonko was filmed with cameras from different perspectives as he moved back and forth in response to instructions from callers. These images were stitched together in such a way that the different perspectives created the impression of a grotesque body. (*tb*)

5 Interview with Roland Gonko, 22 February 2019.

A2.3 Earth – Space Shuttle Atlantis



Organisers: National Aeronautics
and Space Administration (NASA)
(Andrew Work)

Participants: Harald Weisser (Piazzetta Göttingen)
among others

Broadcast dates:

August 1992, 11:45–12:15 (3sat)

Description:

Piazzetta Earth was a live broadcast from the outboard camera of the Space Shuttle Atlantis on the morning of 8 August 1992. Atlantis was at the end of NASA's STS-46 mission at the time, so viewers of *Piazza virtuale* were able to witness part of its last hours in space.

At the beginning of the transmission, a caller complained that no telephone connection had yet been established with the astronauts. However, this was neither planned nor announced. For a large part of the broadcast, the Göttingen Piazzetta was on air by video phone in the lower right-hand corner of the screen. Its member Harald Weisser chatted with the callers, who were particularly fascinated by the fact that he had a video phone in his flat.

Hermann Josef Hack, who was responsible for the *Moby Dick's Eye* segment of *Piazza virtuale*, attempted to organise another broadcast of this kind in collaboration with the Mir space station. He sent a fax to the Mission Control Centre of the Russian space agency in Kaliningrad dated 28 August 1992. Hack had planned a telephone connection to the cosmonauts so that the callers could ask the crew questions, as in *Moby Dick's Eye*. That did not materialise.

The basic idea and aesthetics of Piazzetta Earth was to find a permanent broadcasting slot on public television two years later. In the show *Space Night* of Bayerischer Rundfunk, transmissions from the outboard cameras of space shuttles and science satellites were shown in the night-time programme of ARD-alpha and BR Fernsehen from June 1994. (jw)

A2.4 Freiburg



Organisers: Brainspace Café/Theater Freiburg
(15th Freiburg Theatre Festival)

Participants: Micky Remann (moderator and coordinator
of the Brainspace Café) among others

Broadcast date:

6 September 1992, 01:38–02:00 (3sat)

Description:

As part of the 15th Freiburg Theatre Festival, the media artist and writer Micky Remann presented the project *Brainspace Café*. On the night of 6 September, Remann broadcast black and white still images via slow-scan videophone. Here, the entry-point in Kassel can be seen in the split screen, where five Piazzetta staff members look into the camera and occasionally join in the conversation. The video from Kassel was temporarily replaced by the viewers' fax transmissions.

Within the theatre festival, the *Brainspace Café* dealt with connections between neurology, computer science and art. Various artistic applications were presented that used brain waves or electrodermal activity, such as devices that translated brain waves into acoustic signals on a keyboard. From today's perspective, it is striking how topical the questions about neuronal and digital networks that Remann raised in his project at the time seem in view of current developments.

This was followed by a live performance by the rock band Raiders of the Rainbow, which, however, could hardly be heard due to callers who had now joined in the *Piazza virtuale*. Afterwards, Micky Remann, sitting on a stage, explained the show in detail. The broadcast of Piazzetta Freiburg ended abruptly after barely 20 minutes of airtime. (jw)

A2.5 Frankfurt/Main



Organisers: Trust Corporate Culture GmbH

Participants: Karel Dudesek, Fritz Grosz,
Michael Todt and others

Broadcast date:

12 September 1992, 11:12–11:45 (3sat)

Description:

The Piazzetta of Frankfurt am Main was organised by the advertising and communications agency Trust Corporate Culture, which held an “Interactive TV Brunch” on that day at its premises in Frankfurt’s Ostend district. At the beginning, a Trust employee who had travelled from Frankfurt to the documenta was at the video telephone in Kassel and greeted her colleagues. In turn, Karel Dudesek had gone to Frankfurt and called on people from the neighbourhood to come to the agency to participate in the Piazzetta. The agency’s premises were open to visitors. Guests already present took advantage of the opportunity to appear in the broadcast or to have messages or drawings faxed in. (jw)

A2.6 Geneva



Organisers: Universcity TV Genève

Participants: Nicola Buri, Fred Reug
and Philippe Coeytaux

Broadcast dates:

3, 8, 6, 10 September 1992 (3sat)

Description:

Piazzetta Geneva broadcast on four dates in September 1992. It was organised during the Festival de la Batie, a festival of theatre, music and dance in Geneva, by Nicola Buri, Fred Reug and Philippe Coeytaux, who operated under the moniker Universcity TV Genève. During the four broadcasts, which took place in the self-managed cultural centre L’Usine, callers are encoura-

ged to engage in discussions in various ways. The show was broadcast using the Telekom ISDN videophone that had previously been used at Piazzetta Zurich. The picture quality is therefore relatively good. Apart from a few experiments with the video mixer, there are no visual effects; the interlocutors sit in front of the camera with a microphone and talk to the TV audience.

The first show is about the question whether *Piazza virtuale* is art. An alleged art historian is invited to speak critically about the format and claims that the project isn't art. On the call is Piazzetta Paris, where the artist Christian Vanderborcht places the project in the context of Dada, Situationism, Performance Art and Mail Art, and explains it as a new form of art in which communication processes are central. This develops into a debate with some of the callers about contemporary art and *Piazza virtuale*, which is, however, ridiculed by other callers.

In the second show, a painting of a young woman is repeatedly inserted. The audience is invited to search for her at documenta. In the third show, which is again carried out in collaboration with Piazzetta Paris, the audience is supposed to debate Europe and the European Union. Twice, a caller wants to discuss the asylum seekers in Europe; another criticises the open borders policy for bringing drugs into the EU. Still other callers express positive views about Europe. During the last broadcast, which took place on a Saturday night at around 3 a.m., Piazzetta Paris is once again involved. Because there is a loud performance going on in Paris and probably also because of the late hour, almost no meaningful conversation takes place.

"Trans-continental, trans-lingual, trans-media misunderstanding entertainment", comments Karel Dudesek after the end of the broadcast from the studio in Kassel, thus summarising the content of many Piazzetta broadcasts at *Piazza virtuale*. (tb)

A2.7 Göttingen



Organisers/Group/Initiative:

A student flat-share in Göttingen

Participants: Harald Weisser, Claudia Trepte,
Martin Hasselblatt

Broadcast dates:

*Friday, 25 July 1992, 01:45–02:00 and unannounced
for short segments during various programmes*

Description:

Piazzetta Göttingen broadcast with a videophone from a student apartment. Christian Wolff, one of the Van Gogh TV staffers, had invited his school friend Harald Weisser from his home town to take part in *Piazza virtuale*. The broadcast location in the kitchen of the apartment, where the hosts speak directly into the camera, is reminiscent of contemporary influencers on YouTube or TikTok, albeit here with the possibility of direct, verbal reaction from the callers. The group created only one quarter-hour programme in which they show their own video footage from documenta (including an installation by Mike Kelley that included a mobile toilet with a loudspeaker system facing outwards) and attempt to discuss modern art with the viewers. During some *Coffeehouse* broadcasts, transmissions of student parties from Göttingen can be seen in one of the windows on the screen, but without sound. (*tb*)

A.2.8 Vienna and Graz



Organisers/Group/Initiative: Pyramedia, ZERO.net
in collaboration with Dead Dog Gallery, MEDA.TM
and ORF-Kunstradio

Participants: Rosa von Suess, Kurt Hentschläger, Ulf Lang-
heinrich (all Vienna), Gerfried Stocker, Robert Adrian X,
Seppo Gründler (all Graz) among others

Broadcast dates:

26 July 1992, 01:36–02:15 (*Piazzetta Vienna – 3sat*), 15 August 1992,
01:45–02:15 (*Piazzetta Vienna and Graz – 3sat*), 16 August 1992,
03:00–03:30 (*Piazzetta Vienna and Graz – 3sat*)

Description:

In Austria, one *Piazzetta* was founded in Vienna and one in Graz. They co-operated for much of their broadcast time on *Piazza virtuale*. The Vienna *Piazzetta* was organized by local media art collective Pyramedia. The Graz counterpart emerged from the early internet art project ZERO.net by Gerfried Stocker and Robert Adrian X. Adrian, originally from Canada, moved to Austria in the 1970s and became a pioneer in the field of telecommunication art, which gave rise to a lively movement in Austria in the 1980s and 1990s. His most important project was *The World in 24 Hours* at *Ars Electronica* in 1984.⁶

Media art, telecommunication and internet projects were and are supported by the government in Austria, for instance by hosting media art festival *Ars Electronica* in Linz. Minus Delta T, the predecessor group of Van Gogh TV, benefited from this infrastructure and presented its *Bangkok Project* at *Ars Electronica*. Van Gogh TV had produced its interactive television project *Hotel Pompino* at *Ars Electronica* in 1990, which was broadcast by ORF and 3sat and institutionally prepared for *Piazza virtuale*. The ZERO.net

⁶ See Gehrman, Lucas; Matt, Gerald (eds.), *Robert Adrian*, Vienna: Kunsthalle Wien, 2001; Grundmann, Heidi, *Art & Telecommunication*, Vancouver/Vienna: Western Front/Vienna, 1984; Baumgärtel, Tilman, "Der Raum hinter dem Monitor: Interview with the Canadian telecommunications pioneer Robert Adrian X", *Telepolis*, 17 August 1997, <https://www.heise.de/tp/features/Interview-mit-dem-kanadischen-Telekommunikations-Pionier-Robert-Adrian-X-3446070.html>



*Ole Lüttjens and Rosa von Suess at the Piazzetta Vienna
at Kunsthalle Exnergasse*

project, which initiated the Graz Piazzetta, had formed in 1992. This was an international network that used computer Bulletin Board systems (BBS) to create art, especially in the fields of sound art and hypertext.⁷

The Austrian Piazzettas were supported by the Austrian Federal Ministry for Education and the Arts, the Vienna Werkstätten- und Kulturhaus (WUK) and the Styrian Cultural Initiative. Furthermore, the media artist Rosa von Suess, who was involved in Pyramedia, was at that time a collaborator in the *Kunstradio* show at ORF.

The first broadcast of Piazzetta Wien took place on 26 July 1992 without participation from Graz. It was broadcast from Kunsthalle Exnergasse. In the first few minutes of the broadcast, only still images of the participants in Vienna could be seen on the screen. This was because of problems with the

7 See Naveau, Manuela, *Crowd and Art – Kunst und Partizipation im Internet*, Bielefeld: transcript, 2013, pp. 117–123.

sound signal. When these were solved, one participant explained that about 300 people had gathered and were looking forward to the communication on *Piazza virtuale*. However, this came about only hesitantly. A dialogue was made difficult at times by the fact that participants on the videophone in Kassel could be heard only through loud hissing or distortion.

In the two subsequent broadcasts on 15 and 16 August, the two Piazzettas each had their own window above that of the modem chat. They each ran their own computer graphics, photographs, still images and short computer animations, a “multimedia mix”.

The concept of the Austrian Piazzettas was to convert the signals of the touch-tone telephones of callers at the three networked locations (Vienna, Graz and the studio in Kassel) into MIDI signals to control synthesizers in order to create a common composition. Recordings of the resulting audio material were subsequently edited by the artist Ulf Langheinrich and broadcast on ORF's *Kunstradio*.

In retrospect, both Rosa von Suess and Gerfried Stocker are critical of the lack of communication with the callers.⁸ In view of the circumstances of the production, Ulf Langheinrich pointed out that it was an unusual communication situation for both the audience and the artists involved. Entering such interactive “uncharted territory” had made a profound exchange difficult.⁹

Rosa von Suess remains active in the fields of art, video and new media, earned her doctorate at the University of Art in Linz and is now a professor at the University of Applied Sciences in St Pölten. Gerfried Stocker is now director of Ars Electronica in Linz. Kurt Hentschläger and Ulf Langheinrich worked together in the 1990s under the name Granular Synthesis and continue to be active as artists; likewise Seppo Gründler. (jw)

8 Interview with Gerfried Stocker, 18 July 2018; Interview with Rosa von Suess, 19 July 2018.

9 See Langheinrich in “Piazzetta Vienna”, <http://www.kunstradio.at>

A2.9 Hamburg (Frauen und Technik)



Organisers: Frauen und Technik (Women and Technology): Ellen Nonnenmacher, Bettina Schoeller, Lore Piatkowski, Ania Corcilus, Cornelia Sollfrank, Korinna Knoll, Annette Kisling, Silke Mauritius, Janine Sack, Christine Bader

Broadcast dates (selection):

24 July, 12.20; 25 July, 11:20; 29 July, 11:30; 7–8 August, 03:00; 8–9 August, 03:00; 11 August, 11.03; 14–15 August, 04:30; 15–16 August, 04:05; 16 August, 11:30; 17 August, 11:50; 21 August, 03:40; 22–23 August, 04:00 and 05:20; 24 August, 11:55; 26 August, 12:05; 28–29 August, 04:15; 29–30 August, 04:14; 30 August, 11:10; 1 September, 11:30; 5–6 September, 03:10; 10 September, 01:56; 12–13 September, 01:56; 12–13 September, 03:15; 04:00; 04:30

Participation in the shows at Piazzetta Köln

Description:

The group Frauen und Technik (Women and Technology) was founded in Hamburg in 1990 by ten female art students from the University of Fine Arts. Mike Hentz was a professor there at the time, and that is why the art school took part in *Universcity TV*, a Van Gogh TV project in which educational institutions and other media initiatives worked on joint media projects. From the 1992 *Ars Electronica* catalogue: “Universities, colleges, schools and private groups are invited to present their visions of a new television, a new television aesthetic. What is called for is a lively engagement with technology in a playful way.”¹⁰

Universcity TV activities in which students from the Hamburg Art School participated included various live television projects, among others at the Hamburg media festival *Interface* or for the *Offener Kanal*, as well as the organisation of a meeting of *Universcity* members from other cities, which was also documented in a book publication designed by the students.¹¹

¹⁰ *Ars Electronica 1990* (programme), Linz: Ars Electronica, 1990, unpaginated.

¹¹ Knoll, Corinna; Lammert, Olivert; Phroehlich, Christoph, *University TV: Das Projekt*, Hamburg (Universcity TV Headquarters, undated).



Frauen und Technik did their Piazzetta from Ponton's lab in Hamburg.

Among the contributors who later took part in *Frauen und Technik* were Jantine Sack and Silke Mauritius. *Frauen und Technik* was a collective with a common “corporate identity”, thus addressing not only questions of individual and joint authorship but also the increasing influence of cultural sponsorship and branding for the arts.

At *Piazza virtuale* they were among the most active participants of the *Piazzettas* with almost 30 broadcasts. For their participation, they made a considerable commitment of their own: their shows were produced in Ponton's office in the Hamburg Arts and Crafts building Koppel 66, which *Frauen und Technik* rented for DM500 “excluding telephone charges” from 1 July to 30 August 1992, while *Van Gogh TV* was in Kassel at *documenta*.¹² Various technical devices such as computers, modems, televisions and video recorders were available to them there, including the Panasonic videophone as well as an ISDN videophone, which was used for the broadcasts.

12 Undated draft of a contract between Women and Technology and Ponton European Media Art Lab, Hamburg, “represented by Mr. Dudesek”.

According to Cornelia Sollfrank, the attraction of *Piazza virtuale* was that it was possible to try out approaches from performance art in front of an anonymous mass audience on television, as she said in our interview, “not in a room where you interact directly, but with an anonymous audience, and still have a backchannel for the provocations we came up with ... And we were able to say, okay, we’re going to put something in front of you – what’s going to come back?”¹³ These provocations included segments in which Sollfrank showed a close-up of her mouth or her silhouette for the duration of a Piazzetta segment – “anti-television”, in other words, which contradicts the medium’s tendency towards continuous action that usually characterises conventional programming.

Other contributions of *Frauen und Technik* were feminist in nature. In the *Penis Neid Spiele* (Penis Envy Games), which were later continued in their own show on Hamburg’s Open Access Channel, they ridiculed a well-established television format, the game show. The callers were presented with three keywords from which they had to construct a story, which was then judged. Particularly successful stories were “rewarded” with an animation. The “Hallo-Gesänge” (Hello Chants), one of their first contributions, addressed the often dull and shallow dialogue of the audience at *Piazza virtuale*.

Janine Sack emphasised in our interview that it was also a matter of questioning the promise of interaction and participation, and that these broadcasts were on the one hand consciously designed for audience participation, but on the other hand there was “a very clear restriction of the audience”: “We actually always played with the expectations of those on the other end of the phone, who had relatively little leeway ... [We] experimented a lot with how narrowly or how broadly interaction could be defined. That is, we came up with settings to try out where interaction works and where it doesn’t and what can be a desired interaction.”

The ironic, feminist approach they had developed at *Piazza virtuale* was also characteristic of the group *Innen*, which Sollfrank, Nonnenmacher and Sack founded with other female artists after *Frauen und Technik*. Both Sack and Sollfrank assess their experiences with *Piazza virtuale* as predominantly positive. Cornelia Sollfrank, who as an artist still often works with media such as the internet and video, emphasises in our interview that the collective work was formative for her: “Old Boys Network, a cyber-feminist network,

13 All quotes from an interview with Cornelia Sollfrank and Janine Sack, 8 June 2018.

came out of that. And now 25 years later I'm publishing a book about techno-feminist practice in the 21st century. So that has been a theme that I totally stuck to." Janine Sack, who today works as an art director and is responsible for the redesign of the newspapers *tageszeitung* and *Freitag*, adds: "For me, artist groups were definitely the most important part of my education. And in this context, I also see University TV and then my participation in *Piazza virtuale*." (tb)

A2.10 Köln



Organisers: Quantenpool Köln, Institut für Kommunikation, Köln, Art Service Association (ASA), Pyromania Arts Foundation, Ultimate Akademie, Kunstpiraten among others.

Participants: Bernd von den Brincken, Boris Nieslony, Stefan Römer, Hassan Dyck, Lisa Cieslik, Péter Farkas, Wolfgang Ziemer, Rolf Kirsch, Boris Hieserer among others

Broadcast dates (selection):

22 June 1992, 11:45–11:55; 23 June 1992, 11:45–12:00
among others (all 3sat)

Description:

Piazzetta Köln was organized by various individual artists and artist groups under the name Quantenpool Köln. It was initiated and coordinated by the Cologne-based artists Bernd von den Brincken and Boris Nieslony. Art historian and performance artist Stefan Römer was also part of the group and later wrote a chronicle of the events.¹⁴

Quantenpool Köln was housed in the Molkerei Werkstatt in Cologne from 13 June to 30 September 1992. The Molkerei Werkstatt is a non-commercial space for experimental art and performance that still exists today. Piazzetta Köln was aired over 50 times during *Piazza virtuale* and was thus one of the most frequently broadcast Piazzettas.

14 Interview with Stefan Römer, 6 August 2020.

It received financial support from Hoppe-Ritter-Kunstförderung. Telekom set up an ISDN connection in the Moltkerei.¹⁵ However, in a later, retrospective publication, Quantenpool Köln critically noted that Telekom charged them telephone fees, even though the company had originally promised not to, thus turning their “art sponsorship” into a source of revenue.¹⁶

The programming of Piazzetta Köln was extremely diverse. On the one hand, performances and media art productions were shown; on the other hand, political and social topics were discussed. A recurring series was *Islam and Art* with the Muslim cleric Hassan Dyck. As well as recitations of the Koran, explanations of customs and spirituality within Islam were presented, whereby individual callers attracted attention through trolling and Islamophobic statements.

In addition, the communication in the *Piazza virtuale* was critically examined in humorous performances. For example, a “Hallo counter” was introduced on 9 July: callers were asked to phone in just to say “Hallo” so that the count would be as high as possible. A performance entitled “It’s a nightmare” by the Cologne conceptual artist Wolfgang Ziemer made such criticism even clearer on 18 July: Ziemer addressed the audience directly in English and accused them of one-sided, superficial communication that failed to recognise the great potential of the project as a whole. It was simply “a nightmare”, whereupon he sank to the ground and did not move again until the end of the broadcast. Other artists involved in were Rolf Kirsch, Boris Hiesserer, Slobodanka Stupar, Ljiljana Jovanovic and Robert Reschkowski.

Due to changes in the show, the management in Kassel cancelled at short notice the planned broadcasts from Cologne between 8 and 11 September and between 14 and 20 September. The Cologne group later complained of “destructive behaviour” on the part of Van Gogh TV. However, this did not affect the closing celebrations in Cologne on 20 September.¹⁷

In addition to the televised programme, Quantenpool Köln also offered performances and discussion events on site almost daily. These ranged from musical performances and video art to dialogues between artists and visitors. One regular was performance artist Lisa Cieslik from Cologne, who addressed consumption and consumer behaviour in her work.

15 See Institut für Kommunikation, *Quantenpool*, Köln: Vilter Verlag, 1993, p. 12.

16 Ibid., p. 4.

17 See *ibid.*, p. 15.

Boris Nieslony also initiated the accompanying project *The Virtual Diary* in collaboration with the Hungarian writer and publisher Péter Farkas. Approximately 50 artists from 12 nations participated by sending faxes with artworks. Individual artists were each given a period of two or three days in which to send contributions. The works were then exhibited in the Moltkerei workshop.¹⁸ Through the participation of artists such as Milan Knížák, Endre Tot and Larry Miller, the project links directly to the “Eternal Network” of Fluxus and Mail Art. Other contributors to *The Virtual Dairy* included György Galántai, Robert Jelinek, Anne-Mie van Kerckhoven, Orlan, Rolf Sachsse and Katerina Koskina. However, the results were not seen on the show.¹⁹

Boris Nieslony still runs the artist network Art Service Association (ASA) and is active as both a performance artist and curator. In addition to his artistic career, Bernd von den Brincken works as a publicist and IT consultant, Stefan Römer as an artist and lecturer. (*tb/jw*)

A2.11 Ljubljana



Organisers: Egon March Institute (EMI)

Production unit in Ljubljana: Radio Student, KUD France Preseren (location), Kanal A (local TV station), produced by Marko Kosnik

Performers: Ema Kugler, Mojca Dimec, Mojca Kumerdej, Lidija Bernik, Franc Purg, Sebastjan Staric, Bojan Stokelj, Mare Kovacic, Silvo Zupancic, Marko Kosnik

Contact studio: Snezana Levstik, Jure Longyka

Local transmission: Peter Levart, Miran Divjak, Miran Kajin, Borut Savski
Intellectuals: Jelena Lovric, Silva Meznaric, Rade Serbedzija, Slavoj Zizek, Damjan Bojadziew, Gorazd Suhadolnik, Radko Polic, Goran Jankovic, Haris Burina, Rastko Mocnik, Petar Lukovic

¹⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁹ See Welch, Chuck (ed.), *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology*, Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995; Wohlrab, Lutz, *Mail Artists Index*, <https://mailartists.wordpress.com/>

Broadcast dates:

16 September 1992, 12:10–12:30 (3sat); 20 September 1992, 01:26–03:30

Description:

Piazzetta Ljubljana was organised by the media and performance artist Marko Košnik, who operates under the moniker Egon March Institute (EMI). Košnik was a founding member of the Slovenian band Laibach in the 1980s. Laibach in turn was part of the artists' collective Neue Slowenische Kunst (New Slovenian Art, NSK), which was formed in 1984. In cooperation with the student radio station Radio Študent (RŠ), the Piazzetta Ljubljana contributed two shows to *Piazza virtuale*. For this purpose, they used the premises of the local cultural centre KUD (KUD France Prešeren Arts and Culture Association). In addition to being broadcast on 3sat, the show was broadcast on the newly founded private television station Kanal A in Slovenia.

At that time, the armed conflict between the former states of Yugoslavia was at a peak. In the first broadcast on 16 September, intellectuals and artists from the country, which had disintegrated into individual republics, made short statements about the ongoing war. These were largely delivered in Slovenian by telephone, with short summaries in English in the modem chat in the lower half of the picture. The prominent philosopher Slavoj Žižek was on the phone and discussed his view of the religious and historical dimension of the conflict. The statements were accompanied by glimpses of on-site performances via the videophone.

In the second broadcast on 20 September, the journalist Petar Luković, who worked for the news magazine *Vrijem*, spoke by telephone from Belgrade. At that time, regular telephone calls between Ljubljana and Belgrade were not possible because of the war, and the callers had to be connected via the studio in Kassel. In a press release three days earlier, the Kassel broadcasting management pointed out the great significance of the show.

Contact with *Vrijeme* and Luković could be established beforehand thanks to the contacts of the prominent sociologist and political activist Rastko Močnik. Močnik also briefly commented on the war in the course of the second broadcast. Petar Luković described it as the “craziest and stupidest in history” and explained the anti-government attitude of many citizens in Serbia and the propaganda of the Serbian government. The German callers were encouraged to ask questions. Most of them were interested in

the current crisis and asked about possible solutions. One caller complained about the refugees from Yugoslavia fleeing to Western Europe. (jw)

A2.12 Lyon

Organisers: René “Néné” Sanglard, Christian Vanderborcht,
École nationale des beaux-arts de Lyon

Participants: E. Barthomeuf, F. Cavaille, F. Coletti among
others



Broadcast dates:

9 July 1992, 11:00–12:00; 9 September 1992, 11:00–11:20; 12:10–12:30;
16 September 1992, 11:15–11:30 (all 3sat)

Description:

As part of his far-reaching artistic activities, Mike Hentz was a member of the Lyon-based artist group Frigo in the 1980s. The artists René “Néné” Sanglard and Christian Vanderborcht, who were also involved in the group and were responsible for the Piazzetta Paris, organised an additional Piazzetta at the art academy in their home town, the École nationale des beaux-arts de Lyon. The group also received support and sponsorship from France Telecom Lyon, the telecommunications company TDF and the regional authority for cultural promotion of Drac Rhône-Alpes.

In the first broadcast on 9 July 1992, paintings of young women supposedly from Lyon were inserted at the beginning. The audience was supposed to ask questions and write to the art school if they were interested in dating them. As with other French-language Piazzettas, there were considerable communication problems on the part of the German callers, although a participant in Lyon occasionally translated announcements into German. Later on, a painter was shown whose work of art was to be commented on. However, there was no response. Finally, an auction of virtual objects was held, to be paid for in imaginary money, not unlike the NFT (non-fungible token) sales of today. Bids could be made to buy imaginary things, such as an uninhabited island. The show concluded with an interactive music performance and a dance performance. The audience was asked to provide the

rhythm by making sounds on the telephone or to instruct the dancer in front of the videophone.

The 9 September show began with a Japanese Butoh dance. Callers could control the camera in Lyon and the facial expressions of the performers. From Kassel, Salvatore Vanasco translated the commands. Piazzetta Lyon did a final show with the Piazzetta in Nagoya, Japan, on 16 September, where they tried to count in as many different languages as possible. For this purpose, people of different origins stood in front of the camera in Lyon and counted from zero to ten in various languages. (jw)

A2.13 Macworld Berlin

Organisers: Apple Inc., Eric Gersh, Karel Dudesek

Participants: Karel Dudesek, Axel Roselius, Dorit Schmidt-Purmann among others



Broadcast dates (selection):

2 September 1992, 11:30–11:50; 3 September 1992, 11:45–12:00; 3 September 1992, 12:10–12:30; 4 September 1992, 11:45–12:00; 4 September 1992, 12:10–12:30; 5 September 1992, 11:35–11:55

Description:

Between 2 and 5 September 1992, the computer manufacturer Apple held the Macworld in Berlin. In cooperation with Apple staffer Eric Gersh, Van Gogh TV took the opportunity to design a stand for the fair. The organisers were aware of the pioneering character of the television experiment and were happy to participate in *Piazza virtuale*. Gersh, who had visited the Kassel studio in person shortly before, contacted Van Gogh TV in a fax dated 14 July 1992 to clarify organisational questions as well as to praise their work: “Your experiment with real-time interactive television is truly groundbreaking. I am happy for the opportunity to have Macworld Expo Berlin associated with it. ... Macworld visitors will be able to access the Piazza through picture phone telephone, modem and fax from the Piazzetta at Macworld Expo Berlin.”

The visitors in the exhibition hall mainly used the opportunity to greet their relatives and friends via the videophone. Karel Dudesek acted as a host in most of the broadcasts. Two programmes took place in conjunction with

Piazzetta Paris, whose coordinator and presenter Christian Vanderborgh was tele-present. The latter exchanged views with the contributors on camera in Berlin about new interactive applications of computers, but there was rarely any conversation with the German callers. The 4 September edition offered a humorous performance. Karel Dudesek presented the 3sat viewers with a fictitious gas-powered Macintosh computer from Apple called "MacGas".

On 5 September, *Piazza virtuale*'s Axel Rosselius hosted. He chatted with a musician named Stefan, who was a guest in person and about whom no further details were given; he also talked to the callers about interactive media applications in the arts, especially in music production. (jw)

A2.14 Milan

Organisers: Decoder Collective

Participants: Sabine Reiff, Gomma (Giacomo Verde), Fabio Malagnini (Studio Entropia), Graphics and interactive music: M. Canali and R. Sinigaglia, Music: Sigma Tibet, HELS, Funky Trouble



Broadcast dates:

27 June 1992, 01:30–02:30, 28 June 1992, 01:30–02:10 (3sat)

Description:

The Italian hacker and media art collective Decoder, which also published a cyberpunk magazine of the same name from 1987, organised an interactive art and music festival at the Squat cultural centre in Milan in June 1992 and did two broadcasts on *Piazza virtuale* during the course of it. The event was sponsored with hardware by the computer manufacturer Commodore. There was a live performance by techno duo Sigma Tibet.

The first broadcast was introduced by a telephone conversation between members of Van Gogh TV. In Kassel, Salvatore Vanasco sat in the studio and welcomed Mike Hentz, who had travelled to Milan. There, the audience was immediately drawn into the conversation in order to establish a connection with the German callers, who were encouraged to speak English. In addition to exchanging small talk, the premises in Italy and the Decoder collective were introduced via videophone.

During the second broadcast, pictures of a party were transmitted from the Squat. The telephone receiver with the connection to Kassel was passed around again, but this time it remained with a rapper most of the time. The latter kept asking for electronic beats, which Van Gogh TV willingly played. However, his chanting in Italian was increasingly lost in the babble of voices of the German callers. (jw)

A2.15 Moscow



Organisers: Art Technology Institute Moscow
Participants: Kirill Preobraschenski, Olga Lwowna Swiblowa, Leonid Bajanov, Tatjana Didenko, Sergej Shutov among others

Broadcast dates:

*11 September 1992, 11:03–11:33; 18 September 1992, 11:03–11:30;
 19 September 1992, 11:03–11:30*

Description:

Piazzetta Moscow was coordinated and moderated by Russian media artist Kirill Preobrazhensky. It was sponsored by the Moscow International Art Fair (MIF) and the Stolichny Bank, one of the first private banks in the country. The three broadcast dates were each dedicated to an aspect of art or the international art market. In preparation for the broadcast, Van Gogh TV member Mike Hentz had travelled to Moscow at the end of April 1992 to support the participants in the Piazzetta and to hold talks with sponsors.²⁰ He had met Preobrazhensky two years earlier at the Summerfestival in Amsterdam and through him had established connections to the art scene in the then Soviet Union. Before Piazza virtuale Kirill Preobraschenski had been a cameraman for Hotel Pompino.

The preparations for Piazzetta Moscow were difficult. For example, there was no possibility of accessing a satellite via official television channels or government agencies for the purpose of transmission, as Kirill Preobra-

²⁰ Interview with Kathy Rae Huffman, 18 June 2018.

schenski explained in our interview.²¹ Many artists were sceptical about the project because of its experimental character. Only after a long search was a company found to provide the necessary hardware and infrastructure for satellite transmissions. Due to the great technical effort and lengthy preparations, the original plan to have a regular broadcast slot for the entire duration of the *Piazza virtuale* had to be abandoned. As a result, only three broadcasts from Moscow took place in the last two weeks of *Piazza virtuale*.²²

The first broadcast on 11 September had to be shortened due to problems with the satellite transmission. In the Kassel studio, no video signal could be received from Russia for two-thirds of the airtime, and at times there was no sound signal either. A discussion about “art and money” with the callers of *Piazza virtuale* was announced. It was only in the last 10 minutes of the 30-minute programme that the transmission worked. However, a planned performance on the theme of “Money and Food” did take place: the artists in Moscow covered a slice of bread with petroleum and Russian banknotes in front of the camera. This was intended to draw critical attention to the disparity in wealth between Eastern and Western Europe.

The second issue was dedicated to the topic “Money and Power”. The discussion focused on the art market in Russia and Germany. For this purpose, two artists of Russian origin working in Germany were connected by telephone, and local artists were guests in the Moscow studio. In Kassel, Mike Hentz acted as host. A translator can be seen in the upper right half of the picture, speaking English, German and Russian. In an interactive performance, the moderators in Moscow asked the German callers for help in finding a man called “Rudolf Schneider”. A person with this name was finally located by a caller in Oldenburg.

In the third broadcast, the difficult situation for artists in Russia was explained and discussed with callers. Under the title “Pocket Art”, the participants in Moscow and Kassel were asked in a concluding performance to show the contents of their pockets.

In retrospect, Kirill Preobraschenski emphasised the euphoric mood during the production of *Piazza virtuale* and the possibility of working with new media. As a video artist, he participated in exhibitions in Milan, Prague and St Petersburg and took part in documenta 12 in 2007. The filmmaker and

21 Interview with Kirill Preobraschenski, 10 July 2019.

22 Interview with Mike Hentz, 22 February 2019.

artist Olga Lvovna Sviblova, who also participated in Piazzetta Moscow, is a director and curator, founded the House of Photography in Moscow and directs the Multimedia Art Museum there today. (jw)

A2.16 Nagoya



Organisers: Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai (NHK – Japan Broadcasting Corporation)

Participants: Eiichi Kubota (Programme Director NHK), Tatsushi Ogata (Translator in Kassel) among others

Broadcast dates:

16 September 1992, 11:15–11:30; 17 September 1992, 11:00–12:30 (3sat)

Description:

Japanese public broadcaster NHK did two Piazzettas towards the end of the project in September 1992. NHK’s programme director at the time, Eiichi Kubota, was the producer of the show. Curator Kathy Rae Huffman, who worked with Van Gogh TV, held preliminary talks with Kubota in Tokyo in February 1992. He was very interested in working with her from the start, but asked Van Gogh TV for details of the technical implementation. In March of that year, Van Gogh TV sent him a video cassette with a technical demonstration of the project.

An ISDN videophone, fax, modem and conventional telephones were located in the entrance hall of the NHK broadcasting centre in Nagoya. The location was also referred to as the “basilica” in the programme. On 16 September, the first broadcast took place in cooperation with the Piazzetta in Lyon. The concept was to count in as many languages as possible. In addition to short conversations between the callers and the respective participants on the spot, the count to ten was done again and again in different languages.

The following day, on 17 September, the main broadcast of Piazzetta Nagoya took place. Instead of the usual time slot, the Japanese Piazzetta was on air for the entire broadcast on that day. The transmission of the videophone from Nagoya was almost continuously visible on the screen. For *Atelier* and *Classical Orchestra*, the usual monochrome backgrounds were replaced by these images. The text inserts and panels of the programme were in Japanese

or subtitled. The Japanese filmmaker and video artist Atsushi Ogata acted as translator in Kassel. He primarily mediated for the Japanese audience. The German callers were encouraged to speak in English, which Ogata translated.

One segment from Nagoya called *Basilica* showed Vincent van Gogh's famous self-portrait from 1889 as a computer graphic. However, individual parts of the face, such as eyebrows, nose and mouth, were missing, which served as the basis for an interactive game. These body parts were moved by commands from the callers to their correct location. In *Coffeehouse*, the German callers exchanged views with the Japanese participants about their respective experiences with *Piazza virtuale*. The Japanese callers praised the concept of the interactive television experiment, but also wished for improvements in view of the sometimes chaotic circumstances.

Van Gogh TV went to Tokyo in 1993 at the invitation of NHK to create an interactive television programme in the style of the *Piazza virtuale* for three days as part of the show *Sim TV*. (jw)

A2.17 Paris

Organisers/Group/Initiative: Christian Vanderborght
(Coordinator)

Participants: Frank Barte (Technical Director), Karim Baupin, Arnaud Mayet, Jacques Bigot among others



Broadcast dates (selection):

9 August 1992, 12:05–12:30; 11 August 1992, 12:00–12:15; 15 August 1992, 12:00–12:27; 18 August 1992, 12:00–12:15 (3sat)

Description:

Piazzetta Paris was coordinated by media and performance artist Christian Vanderborght. It took place at the Cité des sciences et de l'industrie, a large science museum located to the north of the Parc de la Villette. With over 30 broadcast dates, occasionally together with other Piazzettas, it was the most active international Piazzetta. Vanderborght was already involved in Minus Delta t projects in the 1980s. Thanks to his contact with Jacques Bigot, an employee of the Cité des sciences et de l'industrie, the museum was persuaded to become a partner. Bigot, in a memo to the museum management, empha-

sised the possibility of trying out new media technologies, and eventually got the project off the ground.²³

Broadcasting started at the beginning of August 1992. Each show had a different presenter, including Christian Vanderborcht on the video phone, who talked in English to the mainly German callers about the weather and the general state of affairs. In this early phase, the visit of Van Gogh TV member Mike Hentz, who was a guest in Paris on 8 August and took part in the conversation live on camera, and at times acted as sole moderator, stands out.

From the broadcast of 11 August onwards, however, Piazzetta Paris started to broadcast performances and moderated discussions. First, callers were asked to tell their favourite joke in English. For many German callers, however, the language was a hurdle. In the next show, the audience was asked to direct three performers in front of the videophone in Paris to perform contortions with their bodies, which was announced as “body humour”.

The broadcast on 13 August was dedicated to the memory of the composer John Cage, who had died the day before. A Dada-like musical performance was staged in his honour using electronically generated loops. During the two following shows, a head was partially shaved. The segment *Late night music and drinks* was just that: four men sat together smoking and drinking, playing more or less harmoniously on a keyboard and occasionally singing French children’s songs.

The following broadcasting block, which started on 19 August and was conceived as a series, seems like a caesura. The audience was invited to discuss political and social topics, especially the significance of the Western world at this time. Conversations about the weather as well as the use of the word “Hallo” were now explicitly forbidden. For the most part the image was divided into a split screen. In addition to the host in a smaller window at the bottom right, a larger window in the middle alternately displayed catchwords to be discussed on colourful backgrounds. The terms were, for example, “drugs?”, “alcohol?”, “east?”, “aids?” or “politics?” There were short, lively discussions, for example about the war in the former Yugoslavia or protection against AIDS.

The next broadcasts were again more artistic in nature, with media art and found-footage material by the artist group Ars Technica. Among these was a video loop of a rotating head that referred to the work *Anthro/Socio (Rinde Facing Camera)* (1991), which the American conceptual artist Bruce Nauman

23 Interview with Jacques Bigot, 9 May 2019.

presented at documenta. For two broadcasts, the TV screen was shared with Piazzetta Köln, which contributed performances, some with musical instruments, as well as media art and sculptures.

In a final series of shows with a set subject matter called “L’amour de l’art de l’amour de ...” (The love of art for the love of art for the ...), there were to be “conversations about art and media”, especially about the interactive television work of Van Gogh TV. As a result of stricter moderation, this discussion did take place, albeit mostly about the fundamental meaning and nature of art. On 12 September the topic was body art and cosmetic surgery. To the accompaniment of superimposed images of such procedures, callers discussed their attitudes to cosmetic surgery and tattoos.

The last show was organised in conjunction with the Piazzettas of Lyon, Macworld and Geneva. The joint programme seems surprisingly topical from today’s perspective, because it was about the future of the European Union. The Geneva host was supposed to discuss asylum policy and fundamental human rights issues in particular, but the callers scarcely participated.

One last appearance by Christian Vanderborcht was again rather Dadaist. As a sign of the emerging digital age, he called for communication exclusively in binary code, i.e. using only the English words “zero” and “one”. He himself seemed to combine the two words rather arbitrarily, without using actual words translated into binary code. The callers and Salvatore Vanasco, who was connected from the Kassel studio, enjoyed the idea and happily threw in the two words in a random order. (jw)

A2.18 Poitiers



Organisers: Jean-Louis le Tacon (coordinator), Sylvie Marchand (coordinator and moderator) Bernard de Litardière (Coordinator), École régionale des beaux-arts de Poitiers (today: Les Beaux-arts, Ecole d'arts plastiques de Poitiers)

Participants: Sebastian Gass, Eric Corvez, Guillaume Grimontprez, Marion Valiere among others

Broadcast dates (selection):

27 July 1992, 12:00–12:15; 28 July 1992, 09:25–09:40; 29 July 1992, 12:00–12:15; 30 July 1992, 09:10–09:30 (3sat)

Description:

The Piazzetta in Poitiers was organised by students from École régionale des beaux-arts de Poitiers, led by French experimental filmmaker and video artist Jean-Louis le Tacon. He had been co-founder of the Département Images Composites (Department for Image Composition). The group was sponsored by France Telecom, the information technology company Teleport de Poitiers and the science and technology centre Espace Mendès France.

The three subsequent broadcasts had the motto “Painting the countries of the callers”. The host was film maker and artist Sylvie Marchand. She spoke in English with the participants on the phone about their homeland, while an artist on site painted the country of origin of the caller in a colour the caller had requested.

A fax from the Kassel broadcasting management dated 13 August 1992 shows that further broadcast dates for Piazzetta Poitiers were planned for 9 and 16 September. Why these were not realised is not known. Marchand later pursued a career as a film maker and media artist and earned a doctorate in ethnology. Today she runs the multimedia company Gigacircus in France. (jw)

A2.19 Prague



Organisers/Group/Initiative: Michael Bielicky

at the Academy of Fine Arts, Prague

Participants: Tomas Masin, David Saudek, David Christoff, Keiko Sei, Ika Kroeger among others

Broadcast dates:

17 July 1992, 02:00–02:15; 18 July 1992, 02:00–02:30; 24 July 1992, 02:00–02:30; 04:45–05:15 (*feed to Coffeehouse*), 25 July 1992, 02:15–02:45; 2 August 1992, 03:14–03:45; 8 August 1992, 01:25–01:45; 16 September 1992, 12:10–12:30; 18 September 1992, 11:35–11:50 (3sat)

Description:

Piazzetta Prague was organised by the German-Czech media artist Michael Bielicky, who came to Germany from the ČSSR in 1969 at the age of 15. Bielicky studied at the Düsseldorf Art Academy from 1984 to 1990 and was a master's student of Nam June Paik from 1987 to 1990, then his assistant until 1991. His video tapes and sculptures from this period show the influence of the Korean video art pioneer. He first met the members of Van Gogh TV at the European Media Art Festival in Osnabrück in 1987. In 1991 he became a professor at the Prague Academy of Arts, where he taught until 2006, and established a department for new media there.

In 1992, Bielicky had a small studio at his disposal at the Academy, equipped with a video mixer, an Amiga 3000 computer and several video recorders and cameras. The surviving correspondence with Prague repeatedly discusses different methods of sending video to Kassel; among other things, a satellite uplink and an ISDN connection are considered. In the end, however, the studio in Prague went on air with a Panasonic videophone that could only transmit still images in black and white.

In a memo from April 1992, Kathy Rae Huffman gives a positive assessment of the situation in Prague, both of the technical equipment and of Michael Bielicky's work. The Piazzetta Prague "will involve the leading members of the young artist generation in CZ, Pirate Radio people, philosophers and writers", the memo reads. The participation of the Prague cultural scene had been expressly required by Van Gogh TV, and the fact that this largely



Piazzetta Prague with David Saudek, Tomas Mašin, unknown, David Filip Christov, Dr. Peter Rezek and Michael Bielicky

failed to materialise led to conflicts between the group and Bielicky in the course of the collaboration.²⁴

In preparation, Kathy Rae Huffman visited Prague on 9 May, and on 27 and 28 May Mike Hentz presented the project at a press conference there and conducted “interactive training”. Also present at the press conference was the action artist and musician Milan Knížák, who had been the director of the Prague Academy of Arts since 1990. Knížák had become internationally known as a member of the Fluxus group. He supported the project and arranged for a budget of 30,000 crowns from the Czechoslovak Ministry of Culture; the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) contributed a further DM3000.

A small group of Bielicky’s collaborators, friends and acquaintances went on air seven times from the Art Academy between 17 July and 8 August. This included Tomas Masin and David Saudek, Bielicky’s two assistants, as well as the Australian David Christoff, whom Kathy Rae Huffman describes in a travel report of 11 August as “CZ/Australian young man is active in computer circles, and in the Prague avant garde”. In another broadcast, Czech philosopher Petr Rezek offers a “philosophical advice hotline” where people could call and ask philosophical questions. In one broadcast, the Japanese curator

24 Interview with Kathy Rae Huffman, 18 June 2018.

and activist Keiko Sei is in the studio, but she is introduced as a Vietnamese theorist named Yvette Min. Games with assumed and actual identity, with facts and fiction and with the possibility of deception in the media play a recurring role at the Prague Piazzetta. In one show, pictures of little penguin figurines on plastic foil are presented as a live broadcast from Antarctica, in another broadcast toy figures are claimed to be in Central Park in New York.

Piazza virtuale was broadcast at night on the OK3 channel from 6 July 1992 in the Czech Republic; it had been founded in the aftermath of the “Velvet Revolution” in 1990 as the third state television channel. In our interview, Bielicky recalls the thrilling experience of working on the Piazza:

I can still remember how we sat there, excited. We were shaking. We also drank a lot of alcohol to get us down. It was a crazy experience and crazy excitement. Everyone's pulse was pretty high. We were all in a kind of semi-trance. You weren't aware of all the consequences, you were suddenly in the middle of it. Suddenly you were broadcasting, suddenly you heard your voice. It was almost like a drug. And you didn't reflect much. You just did it.²⁵

At the beginning of August, however, the Piazzetta came to an end. The art academy was renovated during the vacation, the professors had to vacate their studios, and Bielicky was not interested in continuing under these conditions. During a visit by Kathy Rae Huffman, an open conflict arose with Bielicky, who did not want the Piazzetta to continue at another location in Prague. Kathy Rae Huffman looked for other interested parties, and there are several faxes to the possible organisers of a “Piazzetta Prag Radost” (Radost is a district of Prague), but they did not lead to any success. However, on the mornings of 16 and 18 September, 3sat broadcast another Piazzetta Prague organised by the Czech artist Ika Kroeger at Café Rock. Another broadcast announced for 18 September 1992 did not take place.

Michael Bielicky, who is now a professor at Hochschule für Gestaltung (HfG) in Karlsruhe and has created an extensive body of video installations, emphasises that his experience with *Piazza virtuale* influenced his artistic work. In his 1995 tele-performance *Exodus*, he used a satellite phone to broadcast video in real time from the Negev Desert in Israel and then documented his journey on a website. (tb/jw)

25 Interview with Michael Bielicky, 25 June 2018.

A2.20 Riga



Participants: Valdis Martinsons,
Liena and Edgars Muceniers,
Ojars Petersons, Aigars Sparans,
Hardijs Ledins and others

Broadcast dates (selection):

11 July 1992; 1:50; 21–30 August 1992 (every morning on 3sat, broadcast length between 20 and 60 minutes); 29 August 1992, 1:15–1:30; 2:30–2:45; 3:15–3:30; 4:00–4:15 (all on 3sat)

Description:

Among the Eastern European Piazzettas, Piazzetta Riga was the one that hosted the most shows. The main organiser was the Latvian artist Baiba Ripa, who had met Mike Hentz during a trip through the Eastern Bloc countries. Together with a group of friends, Ripa organised the Piazzetta in her home town. In addition to Mike Hentz and Minus Delta t, Baipa Ripa also had contacts in Germany's techno scene, including the Low Spirit label of the Berlin techno DJ Westbam. Documents and correspondence show that Mike Hentz was particularly committed to this Piazzetta; he arranged for a group from



Piazzetta Riga

Photo: Janis Deinarts



Baiba Ripa organized the Pizzetta in Riga

Photo: Janis Deinarts

Latvia to visit Kassel and was also personally involved in carrying out the broadcasts on site. On 22 August, *Piazzetta Riga* broadcast for one and a half hours; no other *Piazzetta* was given so much airtime.

The content of the *Piazzetta* was strongly influenced by the fact that Latvia had declared its independence from the Soviet Union a year earlier and a long suppressed Latvian nationalism re-emerged. The Russians and the presence of Soviet troops in Latvia were subjects of whole shows and the topic came up again and again in the street interviews organised by *Piazzetta Riga*. The economic difficulties faced by the country at the time were also addressed.

The technical infrastructure and telephone network were still very underdeveloped compared to most Western European countries. Therefore, most broadcasts could only be transmitted by videophone and with the slow-scan method, which could only manage still images in black and white. It was not until 22 August that moving pictures were sent to Kassel via satellite; the transmission was sponsored by Finnish Telekom. During the broadcast, the Latvian artist Indulis Bilzens, who lived in Germany and had previously worked on other Van Gogh TV projects, translated questions from German callers from Kassel.

On one occasion, the *Piazzetta* in Riga broadcast together with the one in Bremen, as Bremen was Riga's partner city and there were also personal connections through Latvian exchange students at the Bremen Art Academy.

On 24, 25 and 31 June, the Latvian group broadcast from a music festival in the coastal town of Jurmala, and on 8 and 9 August from a festival in Liepāja.

From 21 to 30 August, regular programmes of between 20 minutes and an hour were broadcast on weekend mornings at around 11:20. Riga is also represented in the show with shorter segments on weekend nights. The programmes were broadcast from various locations: from downtown Riga, including Independence Square, Cathedral Square and the square in front of the Parliament, where interviews were conducted with politicians and passers-by, from the discotheque Club 21 and from Gallery A. These shows each had their own themes, which often had an official air and were repeatedly attended by government representatives. Subjects included the relationship between Germany and Latvia. In this segment, the German ambassador Hagen von der Wenge Graf Lambsdorf made an appearance. Other topics were the minorities in Latvia, the continuing Russian presence in the country, medical care, the media and the telecommunications system in Latvia.

One show included street theatre and painting by Latvian artists and a performance by sculptor Ojars Petersons. In the last programme, travel tips for Latvia were given. Many Latvian interviewees tried to use the international broadcast to draw attention to their situation, ask for help from abroad, offer their services and invite people to travel to “a small country in Europe”. The shows on telecommunications systems or tourism often cross the line into surreptitious advertising.

Within the team in Kassel, there was also criticism of the somewhat official character of these shows, where even the state-run trade company Interlatvia had its own segment. Mike Hentz, however, praises the Piazzetta Riga precisely for the fact that the organisers had made a real effort to include in the broadcasts not only the art scene, but people from all walks of life. In his opinion, the Piazzetta Riga had come closest to the concept of recreating a public piazza in the media: “Riga was for me [...] actually the most interesting cross-section of society.”²⁶

Piazza virtuale was so popular in Riga that a newly founded private station subsequently gave itself the name Piazza TV and continued the concept of call-in programmes. Baiba Ripa was later able to study in Germany through Mike Hentz and also took part in the University network that Ponton set up. (tb)

26 Interview with Mike Hentz, 22 February 2019.

A2.21 Sant' Arcangelo



Organisers: Santarcangelo dei teatri d'Europa
Participants: Andrea Succi, Gomma (Giacomo Verde)
among others

Broadcast date:

12 July 1992, 02:30–03:00 (3sat)

Description:

The Piazzetta in Sant'Arcangelo di Romagna took place during a theatre festival in the city. It was organised by Giacomo Verde, who was also in charge of the Milan Piazzetta. The subject of the show was “Geld und Leben” (Money and life), although the concept remained rather obscure. Thus, in addition to isolated shots of the participants, slips of paper with handwritten questions such as “Do you love money?” or “Money or life?” were shown.

At the beginning of the programme, only Italian was spoken by those present in the Kassel studio, because of the “Italian night” taking place there, but that led to vehement complaints from the German callers. This resulted in a brief, interesting discussion about the fundamental nature of interactive television programming. For example, one caller, who welcomed the project, demanded that there should be more moderation and clearer structures. It was only towards the end that the discussion turned to the meaning of money for the individual callers.

A2.22 Stuttgart



Name/Place: Stuttgart

Organisers: Discotheque “Das unbekannte Tier”

(The Unknown Animal)

and bar “Palast der Republik”

(Palace of the Republic) in Stuttgart

Participants: Jan von Krogh, Thomas Labusch among others

Broadcast date:

29 August 1992, 02:00–02:30 (3sat)

Description:

The Piazzetta Stuttgart was organized by the local club Das unbekannte Tier and bar Palast der Republik. The main organisers were Jan von Krogh, who was responsible for the technical planning, and Thomas Labusch, who ran the two bars. They had many ideas for the show, which were ultimately not realised. A multimedia production of the absurd play *Sonata for Three Gentlemen* by Jean Tardieu, an interactive talk show via modem and fax as well as a large closing fireworks display were discussed.

The group originally wanted to do four shows, but in the end only one was broadcast. On 29 August, at 2 a.m., they broadcast from Das unbekannt-Tier and made creative use of the location. A good-humoured presenter moved through the premises, interviewing discotheque-goers and bouncers. He also made himself available to the callers of *Piazza virtuale* as an “interactive guinea pig” by complying with their requests as long as they did not get out of hand.

The Piazzetta Stuttgart show was marked by technical problems. During the broadcast, Piazzetta Hamburg (Women and Technology) was also on air. Karel Dudesek, who was connected acoustically from the broadcasting centre in Kassel by telephone, directed audience questions to bouncers and clubbers. (tb)

A2.23 Vilnius



Organisers: East Lithuanian Television

Participants: Valdis Martinsons, Ieva Kausinyte among others

Broadcast dates:

*31 August 1992, 11:03–11:10; 1 September 1992, 11:03–11:23;
2 September 1992, 11:03–02:00 (3sat)*

Description:

The Vilnius Piazzetta was one of the Eastern European Piazzettas that Mike Hentz organised in a travel marathon lasting several months through various countries of the former Eastern Bloc. It was produced by East Lithuanian Television with support from the newly founded telecommunications company Lintel.

The first broadcast of Piazzetta Vilnius could not take place as planned because the sound signal was not received in Kassel. Instead, still images with views of the Lithuanian capital were shown via the videophone. Meanwhile, Karel Dudesek explained the geographical location of the Baltic States to the audience and chatted with the callers. A boy on the line temporarily took over the moderation with glee.

The second show started with a conversation with the German callers, then a German-speaking participant from Lithuania enthusiastically promoted the upcoming theatre festival in Vilnius and emphasised the spirit of optimism in the country. A concluding broadcast followed the same formula. Both the director of the newly founded Academy of Religion in Vilnius and employees of the two private radio stations, Radiocentras and M 1, each presented their institutions. Afterwards, they exchanged views with the audience on the telephone. (jw)

A2.24 Zurich



Organisers: University TV Zurich / F+ F School for Experimental Design (today: F + F School of Art and Design)

Participants: Hans Wermelinger, Wim Kolb, Borna Cisar, Costa Vece, Stefan Halter, Christian Ledermann, Ursula Palla, Daniel Hertli among others

Broadcast dates (selection):

4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 16, 23 August 1992 (3sat)

Description:

Piazzetta Zurich broadcast almost 20 times at *Piazza virtuale* between 2 and 23 August. The group was one of those that took the possibility of interaction with the audience particularly seriously and developed four different show concepts that focused on audience participation. Some of these concepts almost have the character of parlour games and were well received by the audience. However, viewers often tried to take these ideas to extremes that were not planned for by the Zurich group.

The group was initiated by Swiss art student Hans Wermelinger, who had met Mike Hentz during his studies and had also taken part in a University TV workshop in Hamburg.²⁷ Van Gogh TV was very interested in having Piazzettas in Switzerland, because 3sat could be received in more than 60 per cent of Swiss households.

In an undated report about a visit in spring 1992, Kathy Rae Huffman praises the many initiatives and points of contact in Zurich. However, the organisers, who were in contact with Van Gogh TV at the time, stopped working on the project, so Mike Hentz turned at short notice to Hans Wermelinger, who organised the Piazzetta with friends and fellow students. He was able to secure a small financial grant from the Federal Office of Culture and chose the artist space Atelierhaus, which served as studio. The space was located near the Zurich train station on Hohlstrasse. In the announcements and during the broadcasts, the audience was repeatedly invited to visit the studio.

Not only did the group have video cameras and computers, but they were even given their own ISDN connection for the broadcast, although this tech-

²⁷ Interview with Hans Wermelinger, 7 April 2020.



Piazzetta Zurich: Hans Wermelinger, unknown, Wim Kolb, Borna Cisar, Christian Ledermann, Pia Sigrist, Ruedi Fleischmann, Delio Chiavi, Ursula Palla, Monika Fleischmann, Daniel Hertli, Christoph Geiser (from left)

nology had not even been officially introduced in Switzerland at that time. Van Gogh TV provided the group with an ISDN videophone from sponsor Telekom for the transmission. The picture quality of the transmission in colour is therefore better than that of some of the other Piazzettas. There was also a specific telephone number for Swiss callers. The German callers sometimes made fun of the Swiss (“You want a Ricola?”); sometimes there are misunderstandings or protests when the conversation slips into Swiss German.

While initially only five broadcasts were planned, Piazzetta Zurich went on air regularly and much more often in August. Obviously, the various teams (for which separate “project leaders” are even named in a description

of the different shows) put a lot of effort into developing ideas that corresponded to the interactive nature of *Piazza virtuale*. In a letter from Hans Wermelinger, there is even talk of “scripts”.

One of these was *Do It Yourself*, where the audience could give instructions to the performers in front of the camera. Billed as a “Public Virtual Landscape”, the description says: “Before your eyes, living spaces are transformed, world maps are cut up into the individual countries and reassembled. World history is restaged in accordance with the meetings of famous figures.” The actual broadcast was more modest: for example, the Zurich performers had set up a table with Lego, toy cars and figures, which they moved back and forth following requests from the audience. The callers joyfully participated, there is hardly any of the usual personal conversation. Some callers try to push the scenarios to the limit and to break the given rules when, for example, one caller suggests knocking over the table on which the toys are set up. Similar processes can also be observed in the opening performance by Stefan Waier, who let himself be guided by the audience and was asked, among other things, to jump off a table.

Blick aus dem Fenster (View from the window) was another show cooked up by the Zurich Piazzetta. Here the callers are asked to describe what they see outside their windows – explicit reference is made in the description and also in the introduction to the parallels with the “windows” into which the screen is divided on *Piazza virtuale*. Studio guests describe what they see from the studio window that alternates with reports by the callers, some of whom give such detailed information about their place of residence that, with a little local knowledge, one could probably find them.

Two shows encourage the viewers to direct the camera: In *Rotkäppchen-Spiel* (Little Red Riding Hood Game) they are supposed to search the studio for the fairy tale character; in *Videokurier* (Video Delivery Service) they are supposed to search the studio for clues to a murder case. In some cases, a convincing detective-style cooperation develops between the callers, who speculate about possible hiding places or the meaning of their finds. The intensity of the audience interaction has a lot to do with the appearance and personality of the respective hosts, some of whom have a real knack for motivating their viewers.

Apart from these segments, each of which was aired almost daily for a week, there were also completely unscripted broadcasts, some of which provide a meta-commentary on *Piazza virtuale*. For the show on 16 August, for

example, the Zurich group recreated the studio in Kassel and pretended to be the broadcasting management before showing an ironic “Best of” selection: “The best yawn”, “The best general education” etc. In the last show on 23 August, the host tries to motivate the audience to discuss democracy and the media, to which some of the callers respond. (tb)

A2.25 Unrealised Piazzettas

A number planned Piazzettas were ultimately not realised. For example, the group had planned a show with the Computer Museum in Boston, and was in contact with a staff member there, Brian Wallace. In August 1992, this was announced in a press release as the “North American Piazzetta”. It went on to say that “the computer museum in Boston [will] intervene with interactive texts and pictures of museum visitors”. However, this show did not happen.

A similar live broadcast from the USA did indeed take place, but was not televised. This was a demonstration of the idea and the technology of *Piazza virtuale* at the SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group on Graphics and Interactive Techniques) conference held in Chicago between 27 and 31 July 1992. Van Gogh TV member Benjamin Heidersberger and other staffers were connected from the container studio in Kassel on 29 July and presented various shows, including the *Robotcamera* and *Coffeehouse* to the audience at SIGGRAPH in a demonstration lasting just under an hour. However, the original plans to send staff to Chicago and host an interactive programme with visitors to the conference as a Piazzetta on television was abandoned.

Mike Hentz spent months travelling in the various countries of the former Eastern Bloc to find interested parties to organise Piazzettas. While he was successful in Moscow, Riga, Vilnius and Prague, his contacts in St Petersburg and Warsaw did not bear fruit. Despite intensive efforts, especially in Poland, in the end no one could be found who was willing to take on the work of organising a Piazzetta. (tb/jw)



Ponton staffer Torsten Tapper soldering

Photo: altschaffel.com