Appendix 1 The segments of *Piazza virtuale*

Piazza virtuale consisted of 14 programme segments which were broadcast in a different combination every day. Some of them were on air for the entire duration of *Piazza virtuale*. But there were also some that were removed from the show after the first few weeks, such as *Record Stack* or *tazetta*. *Schule* (School), which was supposed to familiarise the audience with how *Piazza virtuale* worked, was also taken off the air after the first few weeks. *Marketplace*, a kind of TV flea market, had to be removed after a short time because it was considered unauthorised advertising on public television.

Other segments were still being developed in Kassel when *Piazza virtuale* was already on air, and only appeared after the first few weeks of *Piazza virtuale*, such as *Sarah und Daniel* and *Beichtstuhl*. *Moby Dick's Eye*, developed by the artist Hermann-Josef Hack, was only broadcast from the end of August, but then almost daily.

A distinction can be made between those segments in which interaction took place primarily via the telephone keypad with computers in the Van Gogh TV studio in Kassel, for example in the two music applications *Interactive Classical Orchestra* and *Rap 'em Higher*, in which samples could be triggered via telephone keys so that music could be made together, or in *Atelier*, where people could paint together. On *Coffeehouse*, which was the most frequently broadcast, the interaction consisted primarily of the conversations of up to four callers who were on air at the same time. With *Medialandscape* and the robot camera, there were mixed forms of interaction via the telephone keypad and by voice call.

At *Interact with Piazza People*, concerts, parties and performances were broadcast live from Kassel. However, this was rarely included in the show. The Piazzettas, which are the subject of Appendix 2, broadcast from cities all over Europe and from Nagoya in Japan.

A1.1 *Schule* (School)

(also: Useful Advice, School)

Broadcast dates (selection):

*13 June 1992, 11:03–11:20 (3sat), 29 June 1992,
21:07–21:15 (Olympus),
1 July 1992, 11:07–11:15 (3sat)*

Description:

On 13 June 1992, *Piazza virtuale* went on the air for the first time with this programme at 11 a.m. *School* was intended to familiarise viewers with the possibilities of interaction with the show, especially the use of the push-button telephone. They were guided by a digitally animated Professor Fox, who had been designed by the Viennese artist Fritz Grosz. With an Austrian accent, he introduced the technology in witty doggerel verses:

Du rufst an
und dann kommt's drauf an,
was dein Telefon alles kann.
Ist es digitale
kommst du direttissima auf die *Piazza virtuale*.
Ist's aber analog,
brauchst a Fernabfroag.
Gibt's überall zu kaufen,
brauchst gar nicht weit zu laufen.
Die hältst Du dann
an die Muschel dran.

(You call
and then it depends on what
your phone can do
If it's digital
you go directly to the *Piazza virtuale*
But if it's analogue,
you need a beeper
buy them everywhere, you don't have to walk far.
Then put it onto the receiver.)
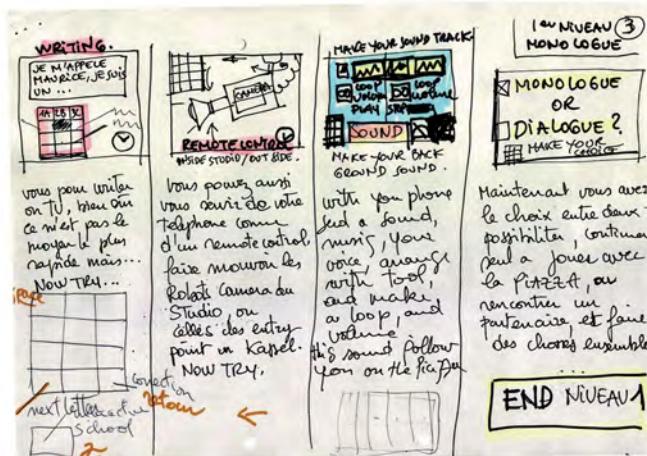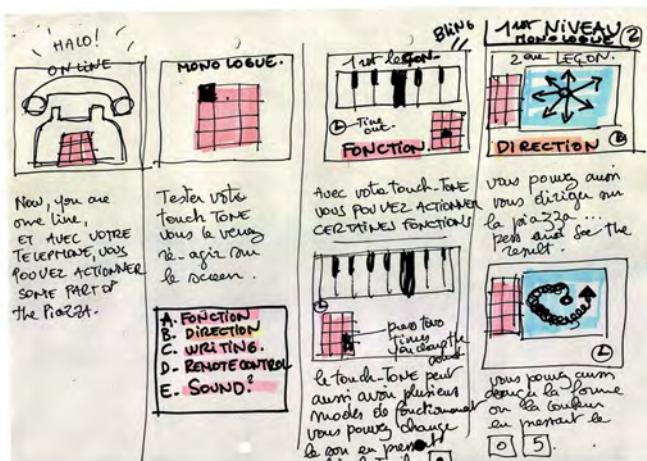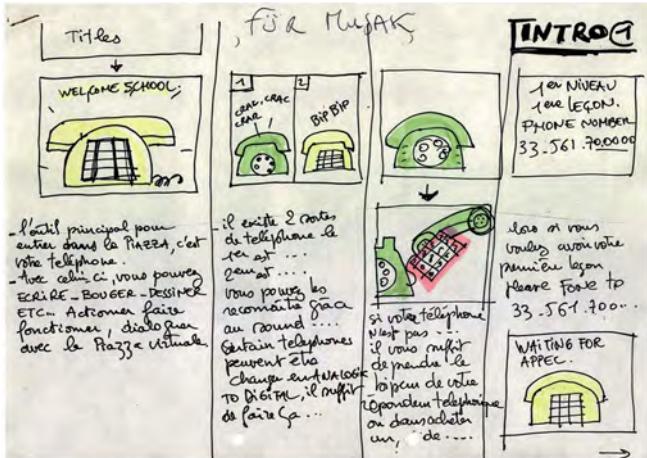
Storyboard for Schule (School) by Gerald Couty (excerpt)

Then the viewer was shown the various ways of interacting with the pro-gramme via the telephone. The interfaces differed greatly from the versions that could actually be seen in the show. The writing function, which appears in earlier versions, never made it into the final show.

("Now or never – your finger is the director.") Time and again the audience was reminded of the interactive nature of the show. At the end of the program-me, participants received a diploma as "honoured knights of *Piazza virtuale*".

In the first weeks, *School* was shown almost every day after the opening credits. On 1 July it was shown for the last time on 3sat, on FAB it ran a few days longer. (*tb*)

A1.2 *Coffeehouse*

(also: Women's Coffeehouse, Gay Coffeehouse, International Coffeehouse)

Broadcast dates (selection):

Coffeehouse
18 June 1992, 12:00–12:15, 19 June 1992, 11:45–12:15, (3sat), 5 July 1992, 21:07–21:45 (Olympus), 5 July 1992, 23:07–23:30 (FAB)

Women's Coffeehouse
20 July 1992, 12:00–12:26 (3sat)

Gay Coffeehouse
10 July 1992, 01:27–02:15 (3sat)

International Coffeehouse
3 July 1992, 04:00–04:30 (3sat)

Description:
Coffeehouse was the centrepiece of *Piazza virtuale*. No other format was so frequently on the air. It was shown in most of the broadcast blocks and so-metimes took up the bulk of the programming. The length varied from 15 minutes to over an hour. It was only when more and more Piazzettas went on air at the end of July that *Coffeehouse* was no longer broadcast daily on

3sat. The shows that were aired in the evenings via the *Olympus* satellite often consisted only of *Coffeehouse*.

The segment came closest to the concept of the "self-generating show" that *Piazza virtuale* was based on, as viewers could get involved by calling, faxing or chatting on the mailbox. The idea was to create an informal conversation with chance acquaintances and an occasion for exchange, as in a Viennese coffee house. This is already described in the earliest concept drafts of the show.

In an early storyboard, there are designs for a segment entitled "Hyde Park", an obvious reference to Speakers' Corner (incidentally, an alternative title that appears in some early show descriptions) in the London park of the same name. These sketches suggest that here, in addition to the callers, the audience at the Entry Point cameras should also be involved in political debates. Possible topics mentioned include the "war in Kabul" or a conference in Paris. Information on current political topics was also to be available; originally, elections were also to be possible: "People elect the leader of the day and also the opposition leader by phone", another storyboard says. The possibility of counting votes by phone did not exist anywhere in *Piazza virtuale*. The callers' willingness to engage in political discussions also proved to be much lower than the makers of *Piazza virtuale* had apparently expected. The actual topics of conversation were much more mundane, and often there was no topic at all.

By superimposing the telephone number of *Piazza virtuale*, the audience was invited to call in. Up to four callers were on the air at the same time. In the broadcast blocks that ran on 3sat, the calls were automatically cut off after five minutes. With the Olympus broadcasts, callers could stay on the line as long as they liked and were willing to bear the telephone charges for a long-distance call, which were high in Germany at that time. This often resulted in longer and more substantial conversations, which attracted regular callers. Because the Olympus broadcasts could be received throughout Europe, there were also callers from abroad. The 3sat programme also occasionally had its own format with the title *International Coffeehouse*, but here the callers were usually Germans who were repeatedly encouraged to speak in English.

In the 3sat programmes, the callers changed regularly. Therefore, there were hardly any opportunities for deeper conversations. The speechlessness that occasionally arose in this situation is reminiscent of Henry David Thoreau's famous judgement on the telephone in *Walden*: "We are in great haste to construct a magnetic telegraph from Maine to Texas; but Maine and Texas, it

may be, have nothing important to communicate." The randomly connected callers often had nothing to say to each other either, asking only for names or places of residence, or clumsily trying to make conversation by asking about the weather or favourite bands.

It was these programmes that earned *Pizza virtuale* the title "Hello TV". Many callers, who had often called dozens of times before getting through, usually answered with "Hello". Some of them were so surprised or scared at being on TV that they hung up immediately. Those who stayed on the line were confronted with other callers with whom they had to find a common topic of conversation in a short time. Sometimes they succeeded, but often they simply greeted "everyone who knows me". Because of the delay between statements and their transmission on television, the conversations were usually jumbled. Often there was also a tense silence, dead air. Occasionally, the members of Van Gogh TV, who were in charge of the broadcast, tried to stimulate conversations. At the beginning of the broadcast, Blixa Bargeld, the singer of the Berlin band Einstürzende Neubauten, was the host in the studio in Kassel for two days.

Often, however, the callers were left to their own devices, unaware of any code of conduct for their behaviour in front of a television audience and un-prepared for communicating with others. A precursor of this kind of communication among strangers was the CB radio of the 1970s and 1980s, to which the callers occasionally refer and whose conventions they partly adopt when, for example, they address each other by city names or use radio terminology such as "over". Also similar to *Coffeehouse* were the "telephone party lines" of the 1990s, where one could call a phone number and then be confronted with a similar random selection of potential interlocutors. The chats in mailboxes and online services like CompuServe as well as the Internet Relay Chat (IRC) on the early internet also brought strangers together – just as Facebook or Twitter do today, where acquaintances, hashtags and algorithms put users in touch with like-minded people. Since 2009, Chatroulette has offered the possibility to be randomly connected with strangers on the internet.

At weekends and during holidays, children were often among the callers who sat alone in front of the TV and called the phone number on the screen out of boredom or curiosity. The anonymity of the callers – as in online chats or telephone lines – also often produced behaviours that deliberately tried to torpedo this form of communication. Callers played music, whistled, pur-posefully triggered deafening feedback by holding the phone receiver up to
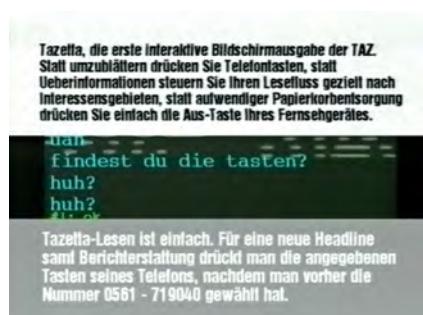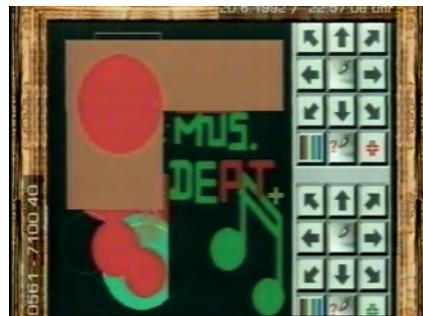
Screenshots of the segments Atelier, Disco Fever, Coffeehouse and tazetta (from top)

the TV speaker, or disrupted conversations by tapping phone buttons and making other noises. And of course there was burping, swearing and insults. This is where practices emerged that are now known as "trolling": the systematic disruption and denial of "meaningful" communication.

Unlike the social media of today, however, *Piazza virtuale* was strictly moderated from the very beginning. In consultation with 3sat employee Anne-Kathrin Brinkmann, the broadcasting management threw callers off the line who did not comply with a – never precisely defined – code of behaviour. These exclusions were made recognisable to the television audience by displaying a digitally animated "Censored" stamp. "We are obliged by law to censor various things", says Karel Dudesek in a feature about *Piazza virtuale* produced for the private broadcaster Premiere (today Sky), "and we are happy to do so. Because through censorship we also generate energy and creativity ... Viewers are also concerned with why we censor: ... advertising, pornography, extreme political directions." In practice, however, the criteria by which callers were thrown off lines were not always so clear. In this context, debates about freedom of expression, power of definition and censorship arose at *Piazza virtuale* that continue to this day.

Apart from the calls, there were two other ways for the audience to get involved in the *Coffeehouse* programme. The lower third of the screen showed a chat taking place in a computer mailbox – probably the first time in the history of international television that an online chat was shown on television. A window on the top left of the screen showed faxes that had been received, although they were not always legible due to their relatively small size on the screen. Between these three levels, intertextual communication processes occasionally occurred.

Early on, versions of the format for women and homosexuals were scheduled alongside the regular *Coffeehouse*. Only *Women's Coffeehouse* made it onto the show more often, *Gay Coffeehouse* was aired only once. Much of *Woman's Coffeehouse* consisted of attempts to maintain the promise of the title. Even though male callers were immediately faded out, a good part of the communication consisted in the female callers defending "their" show against the men who called in. Male callers pretended to be women, were discovered, their calls were cut off; the female callers were often left only with the role of guardians of the communication space granted to them.

With *Gay Coffeehouse* there was also the problem that the callers could not be reliably identified. The callers were repeatedly told by the station

management that the show was only for gays and lesbians, which was usually met with mockery, horror or homophobic comments. Even during the conversations among the callers, the topic comes up again and again briefly, but mostly with remarks in the style of "Are you all back-loaders here?" The few statements that positively portray homosexuality or invite sexual acts seem to be the result of a desire to provoke. However, individual callers also complain that the desired exchange about homosexuality did not take place. Furthermore, it was almost exclusively men who called in; women hardly ever took part in the *Gay Coffeehouse* programme. (*tb/jw*)

A1.3 *Interactive Classic Orchestra/Rap 'em high*

(also: The Classical Orchestra, Interactive Orchestra/ Disco Fever, Rap 'em higher)

Broadcast dates (selection):

Interactive Classic Orchestra
13 June 1992, 12:15–12:30, 14 June 1992, 04:15–04:45, 14 June 1992, 12:15–12:30, 15 June 1992, 11:50–12:00 (3sat)

Rap 'em High (Disco Fever)
13 June 1992, 11:30–11:45, 14 June 1992, 02:30–03:00, 14 June 1992, 11:30–11:45, 15 June 1992, 12:10–12:30 (3sat)

Description:
"Make music with your telephone!" This maxim was displayed at the beginning of *Interactive Classic Orchestra* and *Rap 'em High* (or *Disco Fever*). In multifrequency dialling, the keystroke signals of a telephone are converted into audio frequencies that can be further processed by computers in order to make music.

The first project sketches of Van Gogh TV already envisaged the production of interactive music programmes where the audience would be able to control synthesisers. Technically, the concept seems simple in retrospect, although the implementation proved to be quite complex at the time and required some self-built hardware: the touch-tone signals of the individual callers' dial buttons were processed in a first computer, which transmitted them to an Atari, a com-

puter popular for music production at the time. The Atari in turn processed the signals further. While the Roland drum computer could then be controlled directly via a SCSI connection, commands for the samplers, which also came from Roland, were sent to a second Atari via the music software Cubase.

Interactive Classic Orchestra was on air from the first day of broadcasting and used the instruments of classical music. To the sound of a harpsichord, the opening credits first present the title of the programme, with a red curtain in the background. At the bottom of the screen, four smaller repetitive video clips appear, showing the spinning moon, passing clouds and surf in short continuous loops. Afterwards, a graphic entitled "Soundcheck", showing four telephone keyboards, illustrates which line controls which instrument or feature. In addition, callers who have been put through can practise here and try out the virtual instrument assigned to them, as in a real sound check.

After about 30–45 seconds, the actual show begins: The background shows live footage, mostly shots of Friedrichsplatz or the entrance area of the Fridericianum in Kassel, reminiscent of surveillance cameras. At the bottom of the picture, the number to be dialled for possible participation is shown throughout. On the left-hand side of the screen are the video loops familiar from the soundcheck, but this time arranged one below the other.

The audience "plays" on instruments via three of the available four lines. Violin, trumpet and a piano are used. In addition, a fourth line activates one line from one of four different poems, which then appear one below the other in the middle of the television screen next to the loops described. In this way, alongside the music, new poetry is constantly generated by and for the audience. The verses come from German and occasionally French originals, which regularly alternate with each other. In individual programmes, however, instead of lines of text, catchwords are occasionally inserted.

In addition to the instruments, one line is reserved solely for the singing skills of a caller. Callers who do not sing but merely speak are usually immediately admonished by the Van Gogh TV staff and reminded of the concept of the programme or immediately kicked out. The usual censorship notice that appears on the screen in the form of a red warning sign has its own design here, showing a clef instead of the inscription "Censored". After blocks of three to five minutes in length, the "Soundcheck" screen appears again and new callers can dial in to engage in musical activity. One broadcast contained between three and ten individual blocks.

The second programme dedicated to interactive music-making was also part *Piazza virtuale* from the very beginning. Initially started under the title *Disco Fever*, it was dedicated to rap. After just one week of broadcasting and only seven editions, it was renamed *Rap'em High* on 20 June 1992. Van Gogh TV aimed to motivate the audience to create their own raps on the phone instead of just using the instruments.

In the opening credits, animated human figures dance in front of backgrounds of neon, psychedelic colour patterns to electronic music. Friends of the Van Gogh TV group were filmed for this sequence, including video artist Rotraut Pape. Subtitles in English explain to viewers who still have dial phones that they need to call a separate number and use a touch-tone beeper to participate.

The instruments here consist of snare, bass, keyboard and a sound effect imitating the "scratching" popular in rap music, i.e. the rhythmic movement of a record under the needle of the record player. To support the audience, an additional beat is played. The broadcast image shows the four available instruments as small, animated 3D graphics in the lower part of the screen: drums, keyboard, bass and scratching. The display status "offline" or "online" underneath indicates which lines are currently busy or which instruments are being operated.

In the centre of the image are camera shots from the Kassel studio, which are often manipulated with effects such as distortions and picture-in-picture. Similar to the verses activated by callers in *Classical Orchestra*, in *Rap'em High* the animated dancers shown in the opening credits react to the keyboard signals of the audience's phones and move across the screens to the music.

Callers sometimes countered the ban on spoken language with the tactic of simply singing questions about the names or origins of the interlocutors instead of talking to each other. In the 27 June show, for example, a sung dialogue develops between the callers Gabi and Gerd, in the course of which they ask each other about their hometowns and general state of health. Before that, Gabi had already greeted her mother and all her friends, also in a sing-song voice. Such "breaches of the rules" were not punished. Instead of performing their own lyrics, the singers often make do with simple "la" sounds or singing children's songs. For instance, Gabi presents her interpretation of "Brother Jacob". In the *Interactive Classic Orchestra*, the poem fragments or catchwords that are inserted are sometimes repeated as a song.

Overall, there is hardly any harmonious music-making by the participants. Rather, callers move seemingly randomly across the keypad of their phones, the resulting cacophonies characterising the proceedings. Due to the lack of contact, there was little possibility to agree to make music together. Thus, the callers hardly responded to the sounds of the others and played their respective instruments rather "wildly" and incoherently. Furthermore, especially in the early days of the *Piazza virtuale* there were occasional failures of individual synthesisers, so that instead of the intended instrument, only the normal beeping of the telephone keys could be heard. (*jw*)

A1.4 *Virtuelles Atelier* (Virtual Studio)

(also: Das Virtuelle Atelier/Atelier)

Broadcast dates (selection):
17 June 1992, 22:45–23:30 (Olympus), 18 June 1992, 11:30–12:00, 19 June 1992, 11:15–11:45 (3sat)

Description:
Analogous to the interactive music programmes within *Piazza virtuale*, the show also featured a format dedicated to the visual arts. In the *Virtual Studio*, the keystroke signals of the audience's home telephones were used to create paintings on the television screens with various painting tools. Due to the layout and hardware, the number of participants was limited to two callers.

Surrounded by a picture frame, text panels at the beginning of the programme explain in detail the concept and use of the "virtual studio". They explicitly refer to the "Beuysian idea", which is "even surpassed" here. This refers to Joseph Beuys' famous postulate that every human being is an artist – but with *Virtuelles Atelier* every caller becomes a "documenta artist": "Millionen Künstler zur documenta IX" (Millions of artists at documenta IX) it says in the opening credits.

Further text panels explain the controls of the "interactive artists' meeting place": the star key is used to select the colour, the 0 to select the desired tool. The early concept drafts show that originally 286 colours were assumed in the software's palette instead of the 32 that were ultimately available. In addition to a round or angular brush of varying thickness, various alternatives are available: rectangle and circle (filled or empty), lines as well as a spray

or airbrush functions. Overall, the user interface, operation and selection options are reminiscent of graphics software of that time, especially Microsoft's *Paint* (formerly *Paintbrush*). Of course, at the beginning of the 1990s many of the viewers had probably never used a computer, let alone one with a drawing program.

Within the golden frame remaining on the screen is the interface. The "canvas" for painting and drawing is placed on the left of the screen and takes up two-thirds of it. On the right-hand side, arranged one below the other, are the two consoles, each of which serves as a control for one of the callers. Pressing a button changes the menu that is accessed: colour selection, control of the direction as well as the selection of the painting utensils. The use of the console and its tools is accompanied by individual sounds, such as a spraying noise for the airbrush function. Short trumpet jingles are also played irregularly as a sound effect.

The programme had its premiere on 17 June as part of a broadcast via the Olympus satellite, and was shown for the first time on 3sat on the following day. Afterwards it remained a regular part of the programme until the last day of broadcasting. In the first weeks, it was not technically possible for the participants to talk while they were drawing. This option was not added until August 1992. 3sat representative Kathrin Brinkman noted in a memo that there should not be another conversation format à la *Coffeehouse*. She suggested that callers to the *Atelier* should be asked to talk exclusively about the drawings being created. In the end, however, there was no such strict intervention by the moderator. In retrospect, it is even noticeable that the participants talked very little with each other and instead concentrated more on the application of the programme.

In contrast to the interactive music formats, where the participants ended up creating mostly noise, *Atelier* lead to more meaningful results. Admittedly, there were also participants who mostly tried things out and randomly explored possible functions. However, there was also active, joint production of artworks. For example, in the show on 17 September 1992, coloured shapes were used to draw the Japanese and German national flags. Often, participants drew letters and words to convey short messages or to have fun. In the very first issue, for example, the term "Depp" (moron) was emblazoned on the screen after painstaking drawing work.

A1.5 Medialandscape

Broadcast dates (selection):
17 June 1992 11:30–12:00, 22 June 1992 12:00–12:15,
13 July 1992 12:15–12:26, 11 August 1992 12:15–12:24,
8 September 1992 11:50–12:10 (all on 3sat)

Description:

Medialandscape was probably the most enigmatic of all the *Piazza virtuale* shows. Nevertheless, it was aired almost daily. The show was based on the idea of triggering short sound and image sequences with keywords from the online chat. The screen design showed a brown frame surrounding a rectangular field on which green letters move through the picture on a dark background, apparently showing fragments from articles from the newspaper *die tageszeitung* (see the description of *tazetta* for background on the cooperation between Van Gogh TV and the paper). At the bottom of the picture is the computer chat, familiar from other *Piazza virtuale* programmes. A computer in Kassel reacts to key words from the chat. If one of the chatters writes "Hello", for example, this word appears on a narrow vertical bar below the window with the chat and triggers short sound samples or video clips. These change over the course of *Piazza virtuale*.

For example, in the 8 September 1992 show "Hello" leads to the playing of a digital animation in which one face morphs into another while being partially obscured by the word "Hello". In a broadcast on 11 September the same cue results in a short sound clip: "Hello, and welcome to the show!" Many of the acoustic samples seem to come from feature films. The videos show simple digital animations and black-and-white footage shot around the Fridericianum in Kassel, with still images appearing now and then. Sometimes the reference to the keyword is clear, for example when the word "Leute" (people) shows the queue at the entrance to the documenta. Other references are less easy to decode.

During the show, people can continue to call in. The participants on the chat often seem intent on disrupting the conversations with annoying samples. In particular, a short yodel triggered by the keyword "jodel" (to yodel) is sometimes repeated over and over. Thus, a certain interaction between callers and chatters takes place, albeit primarily through a kind of provocation that would be called "trolling" today. It is striking that the cue words in this

segment provide the callers with a topic of conversation: people often exchange speculation about keywords that trigger samples.

Salvatore Vanasco, who developed this segment together with programmer Wolfgang Werner, says in our interview about *Medialandscape*: "It was the first project where software played a bigger role. Before, software was only used to control machines or for synchronisation. Here software suddenly became a creative tool." (*tb*)

A1.6 *Interactive Marketplace*
(also: Market, Markt, Marktplatz)

Broadcast dates (selection):
13 June 1992, 11:45–12:15, 15 June 1992, 03:15–04:15,
17 June 1992, 12:00–12:15, 2 July 1992, 22:15–22:45 (Olympus)

Description:
CD Video Room to Rent
Used Washing Machines Television Sets
Boyfriends Girlfriends Bycicles [sic!]
You can find it all on this interactive Market Place.

This is how the viewers of the *Interactive Marketplace* broadcast at *Piazza virtuale* were greeted in the credits. The show begins with a short computer animation of a drive along a road from the driver's perspective, which, according to a passing signpost, leads to the *Piazza virtuale* and continues through two gates to a rudimentary 3D animation of an urban square. The clip is reminiscent of the various versions of the opening credits of the 1980s German music video show *Formel Eins*, and the music also has a certain proximity to the music that accompanied these opening credits, namely Jaap Eggermont's *Formula One Theme*, Harold Faltermeyer's *Formula One* and *The Race* by Yello, all three sample-based, electronic instrumental pieces. Some other elements of the track are also reminiscent of hits from that time, for example Izhar Ashdot's remix of Ofra Haza's *Im Nin'alu* or *Jump Around* by House of Pain.

The opening credits then show short, repetitive video clips reminiscent of GIF animations, while it is explained in writing and in English that this is a programme where the audience can buy and sell; the various methods of par-

ticipating by telephone, fax, chat or videophone are explained. The address of the broadcasting containers and a map of downtown Kassel are also shown.

The segment disappeared after a short time from the *Piazza virtuale* on 3sat because it violated the public broadcaster's advertising guidelines. On 3sat, it was only shown six times, but on the first days of broadcasting it was shown in every programme, which indicates the important role that it was intended to have in *Piazza virtuale*. The fact that Van Gogh TV even included a show that so blatantly violated the rules for public television shows both the great freedom the group enjoyed during the planning of *Piazza virtuale* and their poor understanding of public television in Germany.

After 17 June 1992, the *Interactive Marketplace* was no longer broadcast on 3sat, but only on the Olympus satellite, for which the rules of public television did not apply. Since the audience there was much smaller than for the television broadcasts, however, there were fewer viewers for the show and it disappeared from the schedule altogether. It was broadcast for the last time on Olympus on 5 July 1992; it was shown on the local Berlin station FAB until 11 August 1992. On 3sat, most of the broadcasts were 30 minutes long; on the other channels the length was between 15 and 45 minutes.

However, the few broadcasts on 3sat show its potential. From the beginning there are callers who really try to sell. Among other things, video cameras and fax modems, cars and musical instruments, radios and skates, model aeroplanes and other toys are offered. There are also callers who are asking for something. Technical equipment, especially computers and computer components are offered particularly often, which also says something about the audience that was attracted to the show. Services and events are also advertised: On 14 June, a Natascha from Ratingen advertises a music festival in Düsseldorf. Some users who use the programme for a kind of TV personal ad introduce themselves with details about their appearance. From today's point of view, the willingness with which the callers reveal their private telephone numbers on TV is astonishing.

The structure of the screen is comparable to that of other *Piazza virtuale* programmes such as *Coffeehouse*. The TV monitor shows incoming faxes in a rectangular, horizontal window at the top left, the image of a live camera with pictures of the surroundings of the broadcasting containers or of the access point on the right and the online chat below, which takes up almost the entire lower half of the screen. The latter is hardly used for sales offers, whereas in the few broadcasts of *Interactive Marketplace* on 3sat, a good num-

ber of faxes with sales offers came in. Some of the sellers using this method seem to be at least semi-professional traders who, among other things, offer CDs and software on their own fax paper with logo and company name.

Four square icons, representing the four callers who are on air, use a colour gradient to show how much time is left for the callers. The blocks slowly change colour from red to green during the 100 seconds available to each caller, an unusual colour choice given the traditional meaning of these colours (red = stop, green = start). Like the screen design of virtually all programmes, the design of *Interactive Marketplace* is more reminiscent of a computer desktop than a conventional live television broadcast because of the various windows. Looped animations of cars, watches, fruit, money or slogans such as "Buy!" or "Vendre" keep moving across the screen.

The show takes up the model of the classified newspaper ad, but also antedates future e-commerce offers such as eBay or craigslist, which developed in the early days of the World Wide Web. At the same time, the programme also demonstrates the limitation of not being able to store and retrieve information in the television format that became possible on the web. If you don't write down a phone number quickly enough, you can't make contact; sales often fail because providers and interests can't communicate beyond the broadcast. Often callers try to reach sellers who have already hung up or whose calling time is over. However, some of the callers actually arrange for further private sales negotiations by phone.

Other callers are not interested in trading on the TV marketplace and simply want to talk. In the resulting babble of voices, the sales offers are often lost, and at some points a "market manager" from the control room intervenes to urge the callers to sell. However, the fact that this segment, unlike *Coffeehouse*, has a set theme seems to enliven the conversations during the show.

There are also examples of pranks and trolls in this early phase of *Piazza virtuale*. For example, one participant introduces himself as "Piotr from Katowice" and offers bicycles in a pseudo-Polish accent – apparently a reference to the theft of bicycles after the opening of the Eastern Bloc. In another episode, one of the participants in the chat presents his soul for sale; he is bid, among other things, a packet of cigarettes or a number of free wishes in return. A mother-in-law and ten pairs of used underpants are also offered.

Immediately, the channel is also used to make dubious offers. For example, one fax advertises "multi-level marketing" with a fax number and the handwritten slogan "Money like never before! Ask me how" ("multi-level marketing"

is also popularly known as the "snowball system" and is now advertised by shady characters on YouTube and other social media). Here it becomes clear why 3sat did not want a sales show, although such shows can be entertaining even for those who do not participate in the trade (think of the success of shows like *Bares für Rares* in Germany or *Storage Wars* and *Pawn Stars* in the USA).

A sales show is in all the early concepts for *Piazza virtuale*. Already in a short report of a meeting between Karel Dudesek and Rolf Lobeck on 8 July 1991, the title "Shopping Centre" is found on a list of show ideas under "Karel's Suggestions"; and in an early programme draft from 16 August 1991, there is another list of ideas which includes a "Bazaar". As can be seen from various notes, a programme called *Markt* or *Market* was among the first to have its interface designed, along with the music shows and even before the drawing programme *Atelier* and *Medialandscape*. As soon as the programme goes on air, details such as window size or the opening credits are further refined. (*tb*)

A1.7 Record Stack

Broadcast dates (selection):
15 June 1992, 11:30–11:35; 12:00–12:10 (3sat),
17 June 1992, 21:30–21:45 (Olympus)

Description:
The credits inform the audience at the beginning of *Record Stack*: "The breaks on *Piazza virtuale* are also interactive. Please leave your ideas or suggestions on our electronic answering machine. Our team will try to realise your ideas during documenta IX in Kassel." This was one of the more experimental segments of *Piazza virtuale* and was broadcast seven times on 3sat and Olympus in the very early days. It no longer appears after the broadcast of 26 June, and was thus only included for less than two weeks.

Record Stack is a "remediation". This term, coined by Jay David Bolter and David Gruisin, means that a newer medium emulates an older medium – in this case an answering machine that is imitated in a television show. With the touch-tone phone, one could activate a recording function to record a 15-second voice message, like today's "voice messages" in apps such as WhatsApp or Telegram. It was also possible to retrieve previously recorded messages.

The design of the screen is simple. A strong yellow dominates the left side of the screen, which – together with a hand with telephone receiver shown as a grid model – looks like the cover of Kraftwerk's album *Computerwelt*. Three smaller, rectangular fields on the right side are in pastel shades and contain instructions for the use of the application. Compared to other format, the interface is emphatically didactic. The only animations that exist appear on the keyboard on the screen when someone dials a number; if a message is recorded, the reels of a stylised cassette rotate. A black bar appears in the middle of the screen to indicate the time remaining when recording a message.

Compared to the design of other interfaces, *Record Stack* appears unfinished and "undesigned". While most other screen designs suggest a certain spatial depth through shadow effects, surface patterns or the various screen windows, this interface appears completely flat. Since scroll bars and the menu bar of a Macintosh computer appear repeatedly at the top of the screen, one suspects that one is seeing the graphic interface of an application on the computer on which it was programmed – not the interfaces designed with the software Screenmachine, as in the other programmes, where attempts were made to give the disparate elements a coherent look. The musical accompaniment consists of a sequence of synthesiser chords in the style of electronic ambient music popularised in the early 1990s by artists such as Aphex Twin and The Orb. Actions on the keyboard are accompanied by short sound effects.

Obviously, *Record Stack* was intended as a forum for the audience, where the viewers were given opportunities to share their ideas about the further development of *Piazza virtuale*. Unlike the conversations between callers in *Coffeehouse*, here was a possibility of direct interaction with the makers of *Piazza virtuale*. Since people could record their suggestions, they also had a different significance than the fleeting conversations in the other programmes.

This platform, which is reminiscent of the discussion forums and web boards on the internet or apps like Clubhouse, was, however, hardly used for this purpose by viewers. During broadcasts via the Olympus satellite, callers occasionally report the reception quality, many of them from abroad. In part, the callers also respond directly to the contributions of others – as is the case with today's social media. Some viewers formulate praise or criticism for *Pizza virtuale*. But there were few concrete, implementable suggestions for the development of the show.

As in the other formats, some of the callers greet viewers or acquaintances or give their phone number to be called at home. Others complain about

high telephone costs. Of course, the jokers who simply shout "Blah Blah Blah" into their phones, make noises or play radio music are not to be missed. But many callers also seem to be simply trying out the technical possibilities of the format and listening to other people's messages.

In the short time that *Record Stack* was on air, it was not able to establish itself as a forum for viewers or even create real interaction with the audience. In any case, it would hardly have been possible to make substantial suggestions in the 15 seconds available. Therefore, the programme did not function as a real feedback channel; comparable possibilities were only opened up later on the internet. *(tb)*

A1.8 *Sarah und Daniel* (Sarah and Daniel) (in early concepts: Romeo and Juliet)

Broadcast dates (selection):
11 July 1992 21:07–21:30 (Olympus), 20 July 1992 23:04–23:15 (FAB), 24 July 1992 11:30–11:45 (3sat)

Description:
Sarah und Daniel was a programme where viewers could have two characters interact with each other by phone. From a technical perspective, these were very short video clips that could be triggered by the different phone keys. The phone's star key could be used to switch between different "moods" of the two characters, and then trigger different utterances with the number keys. The statements of the two figures, lasting only seconds, belong to four thematic areas: "love", "everyday life", "quarrel" and "reconciliation". The mode in which they speak can also be read under the pictures of the two protagonists. The callers who operated this programme could not speak at the same time, but two other callers could and were expected to comment on the behaviour of the two characters. In the opening credits they are called upon to provide "partner advice" or "exchange of experiences, comfort, criticism and what have you".

The callers act like a kind of digital puppet master. The form of control is reminiscent of the interactive CD-ROMs that experienced a brief boom in the early 1990s. Established artists such as Laurie Anderson, Peter Gabriel or The Residents developed interactive applications for the ultimately short-

lived medium. Especially the American firm Voyager Company (which later became the DVD label Criterion Collection) commissioned elaborate productions. As multimedia versions of interactive fiction and hypertext literature, they often contained dialogues triggered by external signals similar to *Sarah und Daniel*.

The two characters were played by two Van Gogh TV staffers: Sarah Khan, who was responsible for administration and sponsorship, and Daniel Haude, who worked on hardware development. Sarah Khan's part was shot in the Karlsaue park in Kassel, while David Haude was filmed in an interior room. Both can be seen in black-and-white rectangular windows in the upper part of the screen against a colourful background that takes up half of the screen.

Depending on the content of the conversation, these backgrounds also change. When the topic is love, the background is red and shows a pair of highly stylised, crossed hands with wedding rings under Sarah's picture. When it comes to the theme of reconciliation, Daniel's background is yellow and decorated with a photo of a rose. When it comes to everyday life, under Sarah's image there is an isometric computer sketch of an iron against a green background, and under Daniel's a screw.

Not only do the images perpetuate gender stereotypes, but so do the utterances of the characters, which are of little depth, not only because of their – probably technically conditioned – brevity: "You're so great!", Sarah sighs and blows kisses. Daniel responds with, "I think you're really cute". In an argument, Daniel goes on the attack ("I'm tired of hearing that", "That's so typical!", "I cannot believe that"), while Sarah can only weakly threaten: "There are others".

The callers hardly made use of the opportunity to talk to the digital avatars or give them relationship advice. If anything, most of the direct reactions to what the characters say are sarcastic or ironic. At the same time, there are often more personal conversations between the callers in *Sarah und Daniel* than in other shows. Since there are only two callers on the line at any time, there seems to be social pressure to engage in meaningful conversation. Possibly stimulated by the topic of the show, there is occasionally downright flirting.

The segment was broadcast for the first time on 11 July 1992 via the Olympus satellite. The next broadcasts were also on Olympus or on the local Berlin station FAB. Possibly it was initially to be tested technically and in terms of audience reaction in front of smaller audiences, as these two channels rea-

ched fewer viewers. It was not until 24 July that *Sarah und Daniel* was broadcast for the first time in the morning show on 3sat, where it was seen by considerably more viewers. In the following week it was shown regularly on 3sat, then only a few more times on FAB before it disappears from the programme completely, only appearing a few more times at the end of August in the long night shows on 3sat at the weekend. As a rule, *Sarah und Daniel* was on for 15 to 20 minutes. In total, the show ran a good 40 times.

The version that was initially shown was not accompanied by music. It is only after a few broadcasts that a musical accompaniment – a repeating, string-like synthesiser pattern – is added. After that, nothing changes in the design of the programme.

Performer Sarah Khan is now a writer and has published several books, including *Eine romantische Maßnahme* (2004), *Die Gespenster von Berlin: Unheimliche Geschichten* (2009) and *Wochenendhaus* (2019); Daniel Haude has made a number of stop-motion films, including *Rattenskat* (1999) and *Quench* (2002). (*tb*)

A1.9 *Beichtstuhl* (Confessional)

(also: The Beichtstuhl)

Broadcast dates (selection):
30 August 1992, 05:45–05:55; 28 August 1992, 12:20–12:26; 1 September 1992, 12:15–12:26 (3sat)

Description:
Beichtstuhl was broadcast for the first time six weeks after the beginning of *Piazza virtuale*, although the idea appears in the very first proposals. The design of the show – especially the opening credits – change a couple of times while it is already on air. *Beichtstuhl* is broadcast for the first time on 31 July on FAB, where it is subsequently shown daily. It does not appear on 3sat until 5 August and is used infrequently and irregularly thereafter, usually for a broadcast time of between five and ten minutes. In total, *Beichtstuhl* is broadcast only ten times on 3sat in the morning and on the night-time shows at the weekend.

In the opening credits, which – acoustically accompanied by organ music and a Latin Our Father – show a stylised confessional, it is explained that callers now have the opportunity to confess their sins. Then the whole screen

goes black and a priest (voiced by Mike Hentz) asks for a confession while a telephone number is faded in. Initially, callers are repeatedly prompted with voice samples such as "Ich weiß, was Du meinst" (I know what you mean), "Und wie soll es weitergehen?" (And how do you want to go on?) or "Ist Dir das schon mal klar geworden, wozu du hier auf Erden bist?" (Have you ever realised what you're here on earth for?); in later programmes these interjections no longer exist. If a caller has confessed, they either receive absolution or are told "Absolution nicht erteilt!" (Absolution not given!). With these words, callers who do not want to confess but, for example, send greetings are also thrown off the line.

Unlike in the other segments, only one caller gets through, who then has the audience's entire attention. A good number of the callers actually do make some sort of confession. Most of them are rather harmless or humorous. Among other things, people "confess" to still sitting at breakfast at 11 o'clock, to not separating their trash or to calling from someone else's phone line. Other callers confess to alleged crimes such as the murder of a family member.

The anonymity of the internet has contributed to a polarising tone in online confessions today, often combined with agitation and threats. The potential already exists in this segment, but is rarely exploited. However, in the weekend night shows, where *Confessional* is not shown until four or five in the morning, there are also more serious or disturbing confessions; for example, a caller confesses that he approves of the right-wing extremist attacks on a hostel in Rostock housing Vietnamese contract workers. It remains unclear whether this is a genuine expression of political opinion or a deliberate provocation; it is now known on the internet as "trolling". (*tb*)

A1.10 tazetta

Broadcast dates (selection):
21 July 1992, 21:07–21:30 (Olympus), 27 July 1992, 11:45–12:00 (3sat)

Description:
A programme that looked somewhat unspectacular on television was, from today's perspective, one of the most forward-looking ideas at *Piazza virtuale*: at *tazetta* viewers could browse through the digitally retrievable newspaper

tageszeitung (*taz*). At that time there had already been a news service on the BTX online service of the Deutsche Bundespost for almost ten years and since 1990 also Teletext as part of the television service, where you could call up the latest news with the remote control. But with *tazetta* you could look at the content of the *taz* newspaper of the coming day in the early evening of the previous day. The segment ran only briefly in the second half of June 1992: once in the morning programme on 3sat, five times on Olympus and three times on FAB.

The few broadcasts show that the viewers who called obviously had difficulties in intuitively understanding the navigation via the telephone keys. However, the method used to move through the content on offer was already similar to surfing the web: basically, one moves from one link to the next, like an internet user clicking through a hypertext on the web. A resourceful user quickly begins to "scroll" through what's on offer, just like on a smartphone, and even finds the humorous *Gurke des Tages* ("Nonsense of the Day") column that still exists in *taz* today. Fragments from *taz* articles were also used as visual background material in *Medialandscape*.

The *taz* newspaper announced the new offering in a short article on the day of the documenta's opening: "As the first newspaper in Germany, our EDP has set up an electronic archive from which Van Gogh collects the next day's newspaper every night. So our subscribers can leave their newspaper at home when they make a pilgrimage to Kassel to see the art; they can read the daily newspaper on the *Piazza Virtuale*."

Manfred Riepe, *taz*'s TV critic at the time, warned in a piece that appeared later: "The media artists are providing (in)voluntary development aid for a media culture in which (inter)activity is an even more sublime form of passivity and powerlessness than mere gawking has been up to now." But that did not stop *taz* from continuing its involvement with new technology. On 12 May 1995, barely three years after *Piazza virtuale*, it announced its website: "The *taz* is the first national daily newspaper that can be read on the worldwide computer network internet." (*tb*)

A1.11 *Robocam*
(also: "Muskart Robotkamera", "Muskart the Robocam")

Broadcast dates (selection):
25 July 1992, 11:20–11:45 (3sat),
27 July 1992, 23:04–23.20 (FAB)

Description:
One of the most innovative and apparently also most popular segments of *Piazza virtuale* was the robot camera: a remote-controlled camera that callers could steer with their phones along a track suspended from the ceiling of the container studio in Kassel. Here, the concept of telepresence, which was discussed theoretically at the time, was translated into a concrete application. *Robocam* was introduced with "Werde dein eigener Regisseur" (Become your own director), which is reminiscent of YouTube's "Broadcast Yourself" slogan.

There is no indication that the inventors of this segment were aware of the historical references, such as the German television show *Der Goldene Schuss* (The Golden Shot, 1964–1970) with Lou van Burg. The question of whether TV shows of the 1990s that worked with robot cameras after *Piazza virtuale*, such as *Super!* on Sat1, were directly influenced by *Robocam* could also not be clarified.

The robot camera had been built by Hamburg artist Nicolas Anatol Baginsky, who had made a name for himself in Hamburg with his robot sculptures since the mid-1980s. His work in this field began when he equipped the Hamburg discotheque Fun Club and was asked to stage an "industrial performance" for it. Baginsky built a machine based on the principle of the double pendulum. From this approach, he developed increasingly technically complex robot sculptures, including a host robot for the TV show *Canale Grande* with Dieter Moor and a robot band that made its own music with the help of artificial intelligence. He also developed his own mechanical and electronic instruments, which were used for performances and in plays. He not only built the devices himself, but also programmed them. He came into contact with Van Gogh TV through Salvatore Vanasco.

The robot camera was a surveillance camera that could be swivelled horizontally and vertically and was mounted on a rail under the ceiling. Its movements could be directed using the acoustic signals of the telephone keypad, as in other applications of *Piazza virtuale*. The signals were sent to the camera

via infrared data transmission. The power supply came from the rail to which the camera was attached, so that it could move independently of cables. In addition, Baginsky had mounted a kind of "feeler" made of percussion clappers on the front and back of the device, which reacted to resistance and stopped the camera moving. This was to prevent the camera, which sometimes floated through the studio at head height, from injuring a staff member.

Technically, the concept was apparently difficult to realise. The robot camera was announced in the *Piazza virtuale* broadcasting schedules for 2, 3 and 13 July, but is only to be seen for the first time on 25 July, more than a month after the beginning of *Piazza virtuale*. The premiere (which took place in the early hours of the morning) was still marked by numerous technical problems, some of which would not be resolved by the end of *Piazza virtuale* – there are regular image disturbances at certain points in the camera's movement. At the beginning, the graphic navigation elements that are supposed to demonstrate to the audience how to steer the camera are still missing. Because you get a direct view of the studio via the robot camera, you can also observe the hectic hustle and bustle that occurs during its first use. Even after a month, broadcasts with the robot camera are occasionally interrupted because of technical problems.

From the end of July, the robot camera is on air almost daily, and it is also used regularly in the broadcasts on FAB. While in the beginning the robot camera is seen for 15 minutes or more, later it is used for shorter periods, often only five minutes at the end of a show. In the last few weeks it appears less often in the show, probably because more Piazzettas now have to be accommodated.

Robocam delivered images from the inner workings of the studio, allowing the audience a glimpse "behind the scenes" of *Piazza virtuale*. This anticipates how news programmes today occasionally show the editorial team in open-plan offices in the background. It included not only shots of the studio set-up, but also personal conversations with the makers of Van Gogh TV, who explained to the callers how to operate the camera. Often, however, there were conversations that went beyond the set-up of the studio and the broadcasting technology. In some programmes, the callers were asked for their opinion on *Piazza virtuale* and even for concrete suggestions for improvement.

Robotcam installed in Ponton´s media lab in Hamburg after documenta

Photo: altschaffel.com
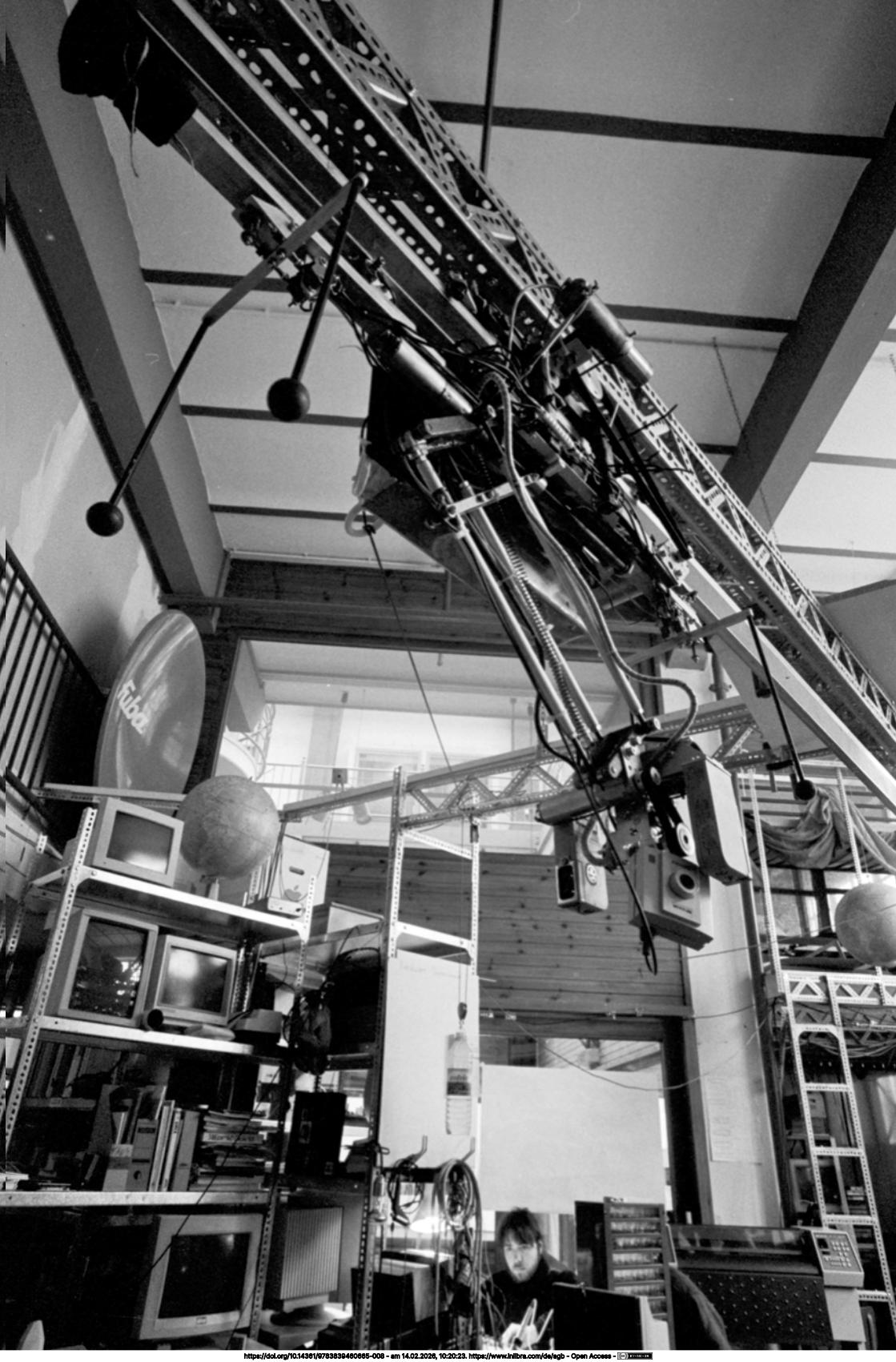
The more reliable the technical operation was, the more playful the handling of the camera became. Callers are guided through the studio containers by Karel Dudesek and other staff members. He explains the camera's movement possibilities and points out the various work areas, furnishings and staff as if he were showing a real visitor around. This creates a strong impression of telepresence and the viewer has an almost physical impression of the working situation and the spatial conditions in the container studio. After the end of *Piazza virtuale*, the robot camera was installed in the Ponton media lab in Hamburg. (*tb*)

A1.12 Interact with Piazza People
(also: Inter-ACT with Piazza People)

Broadcast dates:
26 June, 11 July, 18 July, 9 August, 16 August,
23 August, 26 August 1992 (3sat)

Description:
Interact with Piazza People was rarely seen on *Piazza virtuale*. It featured live performances by Van Gogh TV staff and their guests in Kassel. In the opening credits, the audience was invited to interact with the performers by phone or even come in person to the studio in Kassel. The shows, only six in all, ran mainly at weekends long after midnight.

Interact with Piazza People was the only segment of *Piazza virtuale* that took up the entire screen. The live images were merely framed by digital light bulbs flashing in different colours; in some, digital animations or images from the studio are added in the background via green screen. A telephone number can be seen at the bottom; two telephones signal that only two callers can get through on this programme.

The first broadcast on 26 June 1992 has two musicians performing with electrically amplified violin and electronic drums. There is no interaction with the callers. On 11 July 1992, an Italian group is featured, singing pop and folk songs. Some of the callers sing along on the phone, but there are also some others who try to disrupt the concert by making noises. The singers talk to the callers between the songs. This is followed by a solo performance using synthesisers and other electronic instruments. A caller raps along in Italian.

Screenshots from the segments Muskart Robotcam, Interact with Piazza People,
Moby Dick´s Eye and Sarah & Daniel (from top)

The techno duo C-Trans performs on 18 July 1992 using synthesisers and samplers; they involve the audience in their performance from the very beginning and explicitly ask them to join in. The callers partly respond to this, making noises, shouting and making percussion sounds on the phone. However, musical participation is hampered by the long delays, meaning that one cannot sing or drum along and basically only sound effects can be contributed. Occasionally, the musicians sample sounds from the phone calls and integrate them into their tracks.

On 14 August, the most ambitious collaboration of all the contributors to *Piazza virtuale* can be seen. The 90-minute programme was organised by *Piazza virtuale* press spokesman and art historian Ludwig Seyfarth and is entitled "Für die Vögel oder: Random beauty" (For the birds or: Random beauty). It is dedicated to the memory of John Cage, who had died two days earlier in New York and in whose honour "chance operations" are performed in Kassel and by some Piazzettas.

The longest *Interact with Piazza People* took place on the night of 15 to 16 August. In Italy, 15 August is "Ferragosto", the Assumption of the Virgin Mary and a holiday dating back to Roman antiquity that is celebrated throughout the country. Van Gogh TV member Salvatore Vanasco, himself a native of Sicily, invited Italian restaurant owners from Kassel to celebrate the holiday together in the courtyard between the studio containers. The restaurateurs cooked for the group and their guests. The celebration is broadcast live for almost an hour. There are musical performances by the restaurateurs and at a late hour the Hamburg techno act Sparkling Sun performs. Some of the local Italians in Kassel get into the music and use the techno sound as background music for greetings to the world and conversations with the callers.

On 9 August 1992 there is an "Interactive Butoh Dance" in which the audience, if not the dance performance itself, can at least give instructions to the cameraman. Here, too, the audience participates. One of the callers tests the limits of this offer by asking the cameraman to film himself, which he does.

On 23 August 1992, at 3 a.m., the Austrian band The Ganslingers performs at the Olympus Party, for which regular callers to the show from all over Germany had come to Kassel to get to know each other as well as the Van Gogh TV staff. On 26 August, folklore ensemble Bibikon from Yaroslav in Russia performs. Although the group plays without responding to the callers' reactions, there are some surprisingly successful contributions by the audience, for example when a caller spontaneously falls into a kind of scat-singing that

fits the music. On the last day of broadcasting *Piazza virtuale*, most of the programme's staff introduce themselves in a kind of "end credits".

Interact with Piazza People is one of the most entertaining segments of *Piazza virtuale*, with at times surprising and successful interactions between performers and callers. That begs the question why it was not broadcast more often. The organisation of concerts and performances may require a certain amount of effort. However, considering the fact that many callers developed a certain familiarity with the makers of *Piazza virtuale* over time, there would certainly have been interest in interacting with them more often. (*tb*)

A1.13 Moby Dick's Eye
(also: Moby Dicks Auge)

Broadcast dates (selection):
22 August–14 September 1992 daily for one hour from 9 or 10 pm (Olympus) 11 September–20 September 1992 daily in the morning programme on 3sat with a broadcast duration of 5–20 minutes

Description:
Moby Dick's Eye was conceived and hosted by artist Hermann Josef Hack from Bonn. It ran every evening for three weeks with a length of one hour on the Olympus satellite and nine times in the morning broadcasts on 3sat. Hermann Josef Hack was influenced by the idea of "social sculpture" by Josef Beuys and repeatedly used participatory elements in his work.[1] Even before his collaboration with Van Gogh TV, he installed his "Idea Collectors" or "Deposition Traps" on board research ships, aircraft, research platforms, in public spaces and even on the D2 space mission, where ideas about the future and utopian ideas could be collected. He also gave space travellers and marine researchers self-designed colouring books.

As with Van Gogh TV, the founding of artistic organisations and the play with the iconography of companies, authorities and institutions is also an important concept for Hack. In 1991, for example, he founded the Global Brainstorming Project, which was intended to promote dialogue on questi-

---

1 Interview with Hermann Josef Hack, 18 April 2019.

ons of the future within the framework of art and for which he designed its own logo, stationery, postcards, stamps and brochures. From 1990 to 1997, he was the art commissioner of the Federal Ministry of Research and Technology in Bonn and therefore had contact with researchers at state-funded institutions as well as with Telekom, which has its headquarters in Bonn and through which he had access to then state-of-the-art technology – such as videophones – which were used in the broadcasts. He used these contacts as well as the prestige of his position at the ministry to aid in the preparation of his projects. Correspondence concerning the work of Van Gogh TV was conducted on ministry stationery, and in these letters it was frequently emphasised that the Ministry of Research supported the project.

Hermann Josef Hack had come into contact with Van Gogh TV through the gallerist Hans Jürgen Müller from Stuttgart, with whom he shared an interest in media as a communication tool for artistic projects. "I always found it exciting to open the back channel", he says in our interview about his understanding of "art as an act of communication", and this interest also characterises *Moby Dick's Eye*, which he conceived for *Piazza virtuale*.

In the show – as in Hack's following projects – dialogue via videophone was established between state-funded scientific institutions in inaccessible places, here primarily with the North Sea research platform off Helgoland, the Institute for Marine Research and the research ships *Gauss* and *Poseidon*. The callers could ask the scientists questions about their work and everyday life. Hack: "The idea of 'Moby Dick's Eye' was to bring the passive viewer together with interesting content, that adds meaning to his life and makes him a co-actor [...] [The viewer should understand] what the scientists are doing there. Does that have anything to do with me?" Hack himself is always present as a host during these conversations, introducing the participants, keeping the conversation going when there are no questions from the callers, passing on questions asked in the chat or providing background information. The broadcasting management in Kassel also takes part in the conversations. Although there are also viewers who try to chat on other subjects, the moderation usually keeps them to the given topic.

The callers' questions concern the research goals and the everyday work of the scientists. What do they learn from their work? Who pays for the research projects? What are the earning opportunities? How do the scientists spend their free time? Often topics are raised that concern the callers personally, such as the cleanliness of the water in the North Sea for their next

holiday or the question of whether North Sea fish are contaminated by pollution. Also, climate change is already being discussed at that time. One senses the effort of some scientists to make their work transparent to the audience without lapsing into scientific jargon. In the direct confrontation between laypeople and scientists, however, topics also come up that go beyond the scope of scientific technical questions, for example when a female caller asks about the number of woman researchers on board.

The interface designed by Ole Lüttgens refers to the iconography of the sea and shipping. In the centre of the screen there is a radar screen that turns into a blood-red whale's eye. The images from the videophones on the ships and from Hermann Josef Hack can be seen in small rectangles at the top left and right of the screen. At the bottom, as in other formats, the computer chat takes up a third of the monitor. The format was well received by the audience, and seems to have been popular with the staff of *Piazza virtuale* as well. In the notes of a staff meeting, *Moby Dick's Eye* is explicitly mentioned as a show that should be continued.

Hermann Josef Hack worked with Van Gogh TV again in 1994 at the Hamburg Mediale, where he produced six interactive television programmes in which the audience could again discuss with scientists via videophone. These programmes were also broadcast on 3sat. After that, he continued to work on telecommunication and satellite projects, such as the 1994 Polar Night event at the Siegburg Art Museum, where he established a videophone connection between researchers at the North and South Poles and visitors to the exhibition. In the same year, he organised a video conference between the crew of the research ship *Polarstern* in the Antarctic and visitors to the Museum Koenig, the museum of natural history in Bonn.

In Germany, Hack was one of the first artists to use the internet as a medium, such as in the internet project Virtual Roof or hack-i.de; he also dealt with the internet in paintings (*Internet-Barock*, 1998). Many of his projects addressing social problems reached a large audience through actions in public space and the mass media, such as the *Arme-Socken-Teppich* (Poor Sock Carpet, since 1998), which was knotted from the socks of unemployed people and laid out in front of Gerhard Schröder's polling station and the Federal Chancellery, among other places. For his *World Climate Refugee Camp* (since 2007), he set up miniature refugee camps made of over 1000 tents in the centre of European capitals to draw attention to the victims of climate change. (*tb*)

Storyboard for unrealized segment on politics by Gerald Couty

A1.14 Unrealised ideas

In notes and minutes from the planning phase of *Piazza virtuale* there are numerous ideas that were not realised. They include, for example, a cooking show and a show in which rumours were to be spread and relationships "outed", a show for children and one with art criticism, an events calendar and a show in which letters to the editor were to be read aloud. In one show, the content was to be decided by throwing dice and at one point there was the idea for an "interactive torture programme".

Many ideas aim to involve the audience in Kassel in the show more than *Piazza virtuale* eventually did. Some of these ideas made their way in modified form into *Piazza virtuale*. The "Ländersendungen" (country shows) possibly developed into the Piazzettas. And even if there was no "entry point picphone in public cafes and pubs (e.g. Venezia, just around the corner)", there were the Access Points with video camera and microphone next to the Van Gogh TV studio, which broadcast live at *Piazza virtuale*.

An undated note that was probably written during the immediate preparation for *Piazza virtuale* mentions some ideas that were apparently being worked on at that time: "Politics", "Theatre TV", "Art Discussion" and "A Story Told", none of which, however, appeared in the final show. A planned "writing format" only appeared in "School", but was not included in the broadcast. (*tb*)

Mike Hentz at Piazetta Riga
Photo: Janis Deinarts