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# A reading on de-territorialization's works of art for the Internet: places, localities and the Internet as a territory<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

1. *This article proposes to build up a relation between living conditions and the possibilities the Internet is offering to dream about new territories and transgressions.*
2. *The Internet as the space to trespass physical frontiers; a media used for artists to*
3. *question geo-political boundaries and to create new meeting points.*
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

## INTRODUCTION

8. In a world that increases its trespassing controls at borders, the Internet
9. emerges as an ideal place that incorporates, if not real solutions, the illusion of
10. being interconnected and sharing a global experience of the world.
11. Facing the paradox between real and virtual frontiers, artists have devel-
12. oped particular proposals in which they question whether the problem of
13. transits, using Internet as a tool for exposing their inquiries, whether creating
14. micro-nations to construct an ideal place to live.
- 15.

## KEYWORDS

territory  
Internet  
politics  
re-territorialization  
webart  
glocal

1. This article is a result of the research done in a Master's degree at the University of Sao Paulo, Brazil, under the direction of Prof. Dr. Silvia Laurentiz and with the support of Fapesp.

In both cases the Internet itself suffers a direct confrontation: one being asked about its legal/moral limits as a medium used by artists and also as a place from which new dimensions of realism are being raised.

'Art is always a subjective matter', states Antoni Muntadas, and the premise is more than a requirement for works such as *Passport*, *Looking for a Husband with an EU Passport*, *Illegal Border Crossing*, *Pasaporte* and *Coyote*.

In these works the place is a subtle axis; nation's boundaries and international relations cry out for attention while personal intimacy is brought up to compose a wider spectrum of the subject.

This is shown in the artwork done during summer 2000 by Tanja Ostojic, where the artist created a series in which political boundaries are questioned.

After intending to get a proper visa and developing a series of performances around the subject, the artist took a step further and produced *Looking for a Husband with an EU Passport* ([http://damp.nsk.hr/arhiva/vol1/1126/7327/artefact.mi2.hr/\\_a01/lang\\_en/art\\_ostojic\\_en.htm](http://damp.nsk.hr/arhiva/vol1/1126/7327/artefact.mi2.hr/_a01/lang_en/art_ostojic_en.htm)), in January 2001. The project brings real necessities to the artistic scenario once she intends to get a new passport through a fake marriage arranged publicly on the Internet.

Without any doubt the need of the artist working in a country economically collapsed and torn by wars was to define her own position, her own identity and her own attitude towards the social reality. In a second level her naked body made public was deliberately presented without seductiveness and sensuality in the bare physicality of her flesh, taking a position of written invitation, but visual repulsion, it (her body) was thus performing the role of the political message.

(Zoran 2002)

Afterwards, the 60-minute performance *Crossing*, 28 November 2001, took place on the grass field in front of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, and consisted in Ostojic meeting with German artist Klemens Golf, who was the chosen one from the many candidates that responded to her advertisement and with whom she had a six-month-long correspondence. This first encounter between Tanja Ostojic and Klemens Golf was public and transmitted by the Internet, and it led to a secret and private wedding on 9 January 2002, in Belgrade.

As the artist states, 'I did [these] works embodying, with a bit of irony and (black) humor, the situation of dealing with the World while being Yugoslavian passport holder. Basically, these works show possible approaches in reflecting such humiliating every day life situations' (Ostojic).

Another approach to the subject is made by Andreja Kuluncic. This is the interactive online work *Passport* (<http://embryo.inet.hr/passport>), April 2001, which consists in picking out the colour of an imaginary child's passport. The artwork is a sort of combination of a questionnaire, statistical archive and a type of social game. On the socio-economic map of the world you can click on the colour of the region from where you wish the passport of your virtual child to originate, that is, of the child itself, as a projection of your own personal desires (Kalcic).

The passport is a fetish of the world created in the twentieth century, objecting to the segregation of people at border crossings on the basis of the

1. colour of passports they hold in their hands, states Jergovic (apud Kalcic).  
 2. Contemporary societies incline towards pluralism and heterogeneity on the  
 3. one hand, and on the other there is an increasing significance placed on the  
 4. status of 'the holder of indigenous rights' in contrast with 'alien bodies'. In the  
 5. world of globalization, where travelling to some distant country every time  
 6. less implies going to a really different world, simultaneously, however, the  
 7. gap between wealthy and impoverished countries and their citizens' living  
 8. standards is getting deeper. Only 4 per cent of humankind travel by air, while  
 9. for many their movements are restricted due to economic or political-legal  
 10. reasons. A curious example of this is the joke about Marx, Jesus and Buddha:  
 11. 'if all three of them were alive today, only Marx would have a "desirable"  
 12. passport and be able to "walk" all over the world without restraint' (Kalcic).

13. 'The world is everything that is coincidence', stated Ludwig Wittgenstein  
 14. (apud Kalcic), and the colour of a passport acquired by chance, just as the col-  
 15. our of one's skin, cannot be exchanged, old for new, by web shopping.

16. British artists Heath Bunting and Kayle Brandon address similar issues in  
 17. BorderXing (<http://www.irational.org/borderxing>), a guide for crossing borders  
 18. illegally both for activists and for those lacking appropriate documents in Europe.

19.  
 20. I do consider myself a combatant. The artist doesn't just gaze. It's not  
 21. just the perception of reality that is up for grabs, it's reality itself.  
 22. (Bunting apud Tribe 2002)

23.  
 24. The artists patrolled the boundaries of the BorderXing project by limiting  
 25. access to some of the website's texts to authorized users, thus prompting site  
 26. visitors to consider how access to information and locations is controlled.  
 27. This way, BorderXing subverts not only the integrity of national borders, but  
 28. also our expectations that the Internet is a space of open access for all. On  
 29. a small scale, and including a Latin American perspective, a homonymous  
 30. work was done: Pasaporte (<http://claudiasandoval.com.br/passport.html>),  
 31. Claudia Sandoval, 2008. As a fake online contest whose award is a falsified  
 32. passport for all voters of the winning team, the contest opens the discussion  
 33. to the problem of arbitrary possession of a passport, taking the participant  
 34. to the reflection about carrying passports from countries like Cuba, Russia,  
 35. Colombia, France and the United States.

36. Is the Internet so open and anonymous that it can be used as a tool for art  
 37. and support illegal actions? The proposal appropriates not too widely explored  
 38. scenarios like the blogs to produce art. Art invades here social platforms in  
 39. order to create interactions through low-tech tools. A document is raised col-  
 40. lectively to expose which passport the participants of the current social con-  
 41. text would wish to have. This way, new perspectives are contributed to the  
 42. complexity of the contemporary overemphasized preference to choose place  
 43. to live according to economic and political countries' situation.

44.  
 45. The wish for translocation is done, either due to discontent with the  
 46. existing social milieu, or because of the syndrome of contemporary  
 47. (postmodern) nomadic yearning and the need to go beyond the restric-  
 48. tiveness of their country or continent.  
 49. (Kalcic)

50.  
 51. The paradox of an increasingly interconnected world by new technologies  
 52. is here compared to the ever-more-restricted laws to impede citizens from

disadvantaged countries circulate freely through privileged ones. The proposal pretends to call attention to what Santos (2000) pointed out about ultra-exhibition of hegemonic centres while peripheries are left aside, that is, are isolated, becoming more invisible.

Finally, Coyote, Claudia Sandoval, 2009, (<http://claudiasandoval.com.br/coyote.html>), is an artwork in the shape of a manual to cross the North American border. Through interviews with illegal aliens in the United States the work pretends to question the limits of art in relation to legality as an inconsistent concept of contemporary society.

To some the coyote epitomizes perfidy, to others it symbolizes imagination, independence and a powerful will to survive. In the border area between the United States and Mexico the term coyote also refers to a very special type of human being: the traffickers of immigrants, who for a fee offer their knowledge of how to cross a state border without the usual paperwork.

(Schneider 2002)

Coyote stands as a manual to avoid the horror offering parallel ways to confront it and cross it successfully. The work faces illegality in the current cultural context that permits and repulses aliens depending on the occasion.

## II

We live a constant process of de-territorialization not only for the open access to different cultures the Internet has permitted, but also for the transit the capital looks for between countries to get a better profit.

In order to compensate for what has been evolving in the outside world, that is, the increasing loss of territory, new territories have been created with the use of tools like the Internet (Lemos 2007a: 7).

This way, re-territorialization's processes appear in new virtual landscapes such as Republic of Lomar, presented by Laurent Cleenwerck, a Frenchman of 35 years and which was conceived from the interest in the imaginary nations in the literature and inside the arts. [www.republic-of-lomar.org](http://www.republic-of-lomar.org) counts with 7000 citizens from 80 countries and the motivation for creating it was to demonstrate that a virtual State can also obtain recognition and work as an alternative for geographical citizenship. The artist also offers passports to refugees and exiled ones: 'People wanting to leave their countries because of unsatisfactory regimes' (Cleenwerk apud Lemos 2004).

Liz Stirling's Lizbekistan ([www.lizbekistan.com](http://www.lizbekistan.com)) is also a virtual nation that was created as a protest against bureaucracy in few countries, and as an exercise of citizenship. For Stirling a virtual nation is a great opportunity to perceive the reasons why people get together and the meaning of ideas such as community and nation. Since the micro-nation was created, 450 passports have been emitted. The project ended in 1999.

Ladonia.net (<http://www.ladonia.net/>) is a small territory of one kilometer, located in the south of Sweden but which only exists on the Internet. Ladonia was a proposal conceived by the artist Lars Vilks, and according to Reuters 3000 Pakistani people are applying for citizenship (Lemos 2004).

Other examples are The Kingdom of Talossa ([www.talossa.com](http://www.talossa.com)), a constitutional monarchy founded by Robert Ben Madison in 1979 in Milwaukee

1. inside his room, as well as the case of Empire of Leblandia (<http://leblandia.republika.pl/>), commanded by the emperor Marcus Lebenciusz The Great (Lemos 2004).

2. The territory designed by webart in these social scenarios is an imagined one, a particular way of appropriation of diverse dimensions of life (Lemos 2007: 3–6). The territory is possible today only by the hand of imagination, a term that conveys the social phenomena of the 'community of feelings' (Appadurrai 2004: 20), as well as the 'invisible collective' (Crane apud Appadurrai 2004: 20). If the place is the meaning for belonging (Tuan apud Moreira 2007: 6), it is a demand to locate participants of the global scenario inside a place if it is pretended to include them in a fair participation in the network (Moreira 2007: 8). This is the reason why, contrary to the idea of loss of place and compared to the belonging to a globalized world on the Internet, it is becoming more relevant to define the meaning of the new localities, not only for geo-political worries, but also as a significant position from which artists should situate themselves to create.

### 18. CONCLUSIONS

19. In a context that prefers production to effective connection, in which outsiders are related to new technologies even because they do not want or cannot participate in them, becoming more invisible and tending to disappear (Garcia dos Santos 2003: 10), it is crucial an approach from art in charge of a critical labour.

20. In a context like Latin America, in which only 33 per cent of the Brazilian population has access to the Internet (IBOPE and IBGE 2009), it is important to include political points of view in a discussion about the place and diverse new technologies' appropriation, including the production of local artworks.

21. As a way to promote diversified uses of new communication technologies, it is required to fulfil the scenario with opposite positions of conflict, in order to describe properly the complexity of our contemporary social context. This way art is called to constitute a significant tool to expose different contemporary sensibilities.

22. Artists from peripheries have the opportunity to use the Internet as a new arena from where it is possible to diminish the lack of connectivity between zones forced to stay in silence (Mosqueira apud dos Anjos 2005: 18), obtaining a voice.

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I am a Columbian currently developing research for a Master's Degree in Multimedia Arts at the University of São Paulo, Brazil. I was invited by Fabrica, Benetton's Research Center, for a short period in 2007 to be part of their photography department, and I have participated in exhibitions in Brazil such as Salao de Abril (2008) and at the Festival of Electronic Art, FILE (2009) with my work? Living Cemetery? I have offered lectures at events such as ABCiber in Sao Paulo, 2008, and at the Universidad del Valle in Colombia (2009), exposing parts of the research in courses at USP.

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