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Beyond "East" and "West" through "The Eternal Network": Networked Artists' Communities as Counterpublics of Cold War Europe

Roddy Hunter

In memory of Norbert Klassen (1941–2011)

Introduction

This chapter considers how "networked communities" (Findeisen and Zimmermann 2015) of post avant-garde[1] artists in the Cold War period reconceptualised frontiers of mind and territory named "East" and "West" particularly in Europe. Preceded and overlapped by events such as the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the launch of *Sputnik 1* in 1957, the Televised Moon Landing of 1969, and as illustrated by Robert Filliou's 1968 conception of The Eternal Network, the 1960s–70s was an expansive period for the artistic counterculture (Roszak 1995) in both Europe and the United States of America in particular. Artists arguably resisted state-driven Cold War propaganda, on both sides, through intervening in communication systems such as postal, radio, telephonic and television transmission to develop their own horizontally distributive "distance art and activism" (Chandler and Neumark 2006, p. 4). This networked approach of "artists turning communication media into their art media" (ibid., p. 3) is also where "art, activism and media fundamentally reconfigure each other" (ibid.) as the post avant-garde aspires to become a countercultural experience of global, peer-to-peer communication. This also internationalised the social, cultural and political scope and function of a "second public sphere" to circumvent totalitarian colonisation of private and public realms of action, behaviour, thought and experience as particularly experienced by artists in East-Central, South-Eastern Europe and The Balkans. Examples discussed will include Robert Filliou's announcement of "The Eternal Network" (1968) and collaboration with György Galántai to present *Telepathic Music* (*Telepatikus Zene*, 1979) in Budapest, Mieko Shiomi's *Spatial Poem*-series of global events (1965–1975) and Jaroslaw Kozlowski and Andrzej Kostolowski's *NET Manifesto* (1971). The chapter concludes by indicating how the art practices of these networked communities in this period facilitated horizontal distribution, transmission and reception of concepts, images and ideas reflecting on the emerging reality of late 20th century Cold War society and as such became a medium of collaborative production as well as critical dissemination between East and West.

Sputnik, Cold War Technologies and New Network Architectures

The launch of *Sputnik 1*, the first artificial Earth satellite, by the Soviet Union on 4 October 1957 at Baikonur, Kazakhstan remains an important motif of the ideological context surrounding postwar US-Soviet discourse across former "East" and "West" in Europe and signified accelerated political, military, technological, and scientific development. In her prologue to *The Human Condition* (1958/1998), in which she also goes onto outline her theory of the public sphere, Hannah Arendt observes, "this event, second in importance to no other, not even to the splitting of the atom, would have been greeted with unmitigated joy if it had not been for the uncomfortable military and political circumstances attending it" (Arendt 1998, p. 1). This irony lies in humankind's achievement in conceiving of the wholeness of life on our planet and yet signalling the possibility of "escape from men's imprisonment" (ibid.) from within our failures in this same world. In particular, the Sputnik-era ushered exploration of planetary, satellite communication but primarily from the perspective and function of the military-industrial-technology complex from which it emerged. Kris Paulsen (2013) cites Lisa Parks's *Cultures In Orbit* (2005) to argue that while satellite technology "enabled instantaneous, real-time audio and visual contact between distant sites, joining them in a

simultaneous 'now'", it's use also "highlighted how the fantasy of a 'global present' was steeped in 'Western discourses of modernization, global unity, and planetary control'" (Paulsen 2013, p. 6). Parks talks particularly here of the first live, global satellite television programme titled *Our World* broadcast from the BBC in London on 25 June 1967 which emphasised "the difference between life in the various hemispheres, … making it clear that the 'industrialized' and 'free' North and West stood against the 'hungry' and 'developing' South and East" (ibid. p. 7). Also relevant to note here is Park's observation that the Soviet Union withdrew from the broadcast in protest at Western political support for Israel in the Middle East which led to the similar withdrawal of Poland, Hungary, East Germany and Czechoslovakia (2005, p. 27). Paulsen concludes that either way:

> Viewers watched the hosts of the show connect the "here" of the television studio, to the various "there" of the satellite uplink sites. The viewers were neither here nor there; they were on the outside looking onto a "global now" that did not include them. Televisual transmission may have achieved transcontinental instantaneity, but its multi-directionality did not include the audience in any of its vectors.
>
> (Paulsen 2013, p. 10)

Reinhold Martin reflects further that "Sputnik and its American counterpart, Explorer, were also the very product of the medium of publicness that was the sine qua non for both (or all) sides of the Cold War impasse: the modern state" (2013, n.p.). This, taking the perspective of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (2000), meant the "categories of 'public' and 'private,' linked historically with state socialism or social democracy on the one hand, and liberal republicanism on the other, simply connote two different means to the same end: the reproduction of capital" (Martin 2013, n.p.). Notwithstanding the differences in the political organisation of societies in the former "East" and "West" of Europe, Sputnik signaled a moment of technological acceleration leading to a countercultural realisation that "cold war technocracy itself had granted its opponents the power to see the world in which they lived as a single whole" (Turner 2008, p. 83). The United States of America in its desire to establish an "imaginary construct" or "Western fantasy" of "global presence" (Parks 2005, p. 23) had responded directly to the Soviet Union's successful launch of *Sputnik 1* by setting up the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA) whose work led to the Prototype of the Internet (ARPANET) being successfully tested in 1969. Prompted also by the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, Paul Baran's *On Distributed Networks* was published for the United States Air Force Project RAND in 1964 and proposed a digital data communications system able to withstand a nuclear attack through identifying and reviewing three modes of network architecture, namely centralised, decentralised and distributed. Each of these demonstrated how data can travel between interlinked nodes across a network. The centralised model represents a 'one-to-many' network where data originates from or transits a central server while the decentralised model is effectively "a distributed network of centralized networks" (networkcultures.org, n.d.) still reliant on central hubs connecting spoke "nodes". The distributed model, by contrast, represents a 'many-to-many' network where data flows between nodes in more unpredictable ways and as a communication system can withstand hostile interventions. The distributed network would prove essential not only for the Cold War superpowers in pursuing military supremacy through technological advancement but also for the planetary counterculture emerging in parallel during the same period who would seek to use any available communication media and systems such as postal, radio, telephonic and television transmission.

Network consciousness, Robert Filliou and György Galántai

It would take until 20 years after the launch of *Sputnik 1* that artists would explore live satellite broadcast on a planetary scale, when performances by Nam June Paik, Joseph Beuys and Douglas Davis were telecast to 25 different countries during documenta 6 in Kassel, former West Germany. The global reach of the broadcast matched the utopianism of Beuys' vision and chimed with a growth in planetary consciousness since images of Earth shot from space had appeared more frequently over the previous decade. The first colour photograph of Earth taken from NASA's ATS-3 satellite on 10 November 1967 signalled a paradigm shift in awareness of our planet as a homeostatic, interconnected, cybernetic feedback network system. "Network" here is as much, as Bruno Latour holds, "a concept, not a thing out there ... a tool to help describe something and not what is being described" (2005, p. 131). Network consciousness was arguably a tool to describe the systems orientation of cybernetics as "a vision of a world built not around vertical hierarchies and top-down flows of power, but around looping circuits of energy and information" (Turner 2006, p. 38). This was also not only a phenomenon of the former West, however, as Slava Gerovitch also describes "the cybernetics movement as a vehicle of de-Stalinization in Soviet science [seeking] a new foundation of … a computer-based cybernetic criterion of objectivity as overtly non-ideological, non-philosophical, non-class-oriented, and non-Party-minded" (2002, p. 8). We also know that Rezső Tarján led the Research Group for Cybernetics within the Academy of Sciences (Kibernetikai Kutatócsoport, KKCS) in Budapest as early as 1957 and so conditions of knowledge of the new discipline was becoming widespread. This notwithstanding Norbert Wiener's *Cybernetics: Or Control and Communication in the Animal and the Machine* was not available in the Soviet Union until 10 years after its 1948 publication as "the political theorists of the USSR were unable to reconcile the implications of cybernetic theory with Marxist-Leninist doctrine" (Ascott 2003, p. 163). Highlighting the weakness of "vertical hierarchies" of the modern state would also be useful to post avant-garde artists seeking to circumvent command and control power structures. From an artistic perspective, the intermingling of systems orientation, network consciousness and new directions in contemporary art were becoming as present in the former East as well as West through, at least, artists engaged in networked artistic activity from the 1960s onwards.

Though no scientist, and quite possibly a technophobe given his distrust of "high-tech gloom" (Thompson 2011, p. 49), Robert Filliou co-created "The Eternal Network" or "La Fête Permanente" (in its non-equivalent French) with George Brecht in 1968 as a *network-as-artwork* that could enable collaboration, exchange and dialogue across space and time in the interest of "permanent creation".

In a lecture in 1977 Filliou explained further:

> … the way I see the *Network*, as a member of the *Network*, is the way it exists artistically through the collective efforts of all these artists in Europe, in North America, in Asia, in Australia, and New Zealand – everywhere. In Africa also … each one of us artistically functions, in the *Network*, which has replaced the concept of the avant-garde and which functions in such a way that there is no more art centres in the world. Nobody can tell us, as Terry Reid put it, where the place is – where we are is where the things are taking place and although we may need to meet at times or gather information at certain places – the network works automatically. But this artistic network itself – it may help to think of it as being part of the wider network where artistic activity just becomes one of the elements of the human network, and I would include in it all our fellow travellers, other animal and plant species. This world/earth experience is part of this wider

> network which you can take or leave but certainly has been important to many of us working with these concepts and ideas.
>
> (Filliou 1995, p. 80).

More than solely a means of distribution or medium of production, for Filliou "The Eternal Network" became a conceptual context for spontaneous and "permanent creation": a horizontally distributive, participatory space-time of uninterrupted creativity, which would overcome the dialectical relationship between "art" and "life", affirm both "work" as "play" and "art" as "organised leisure" to critique both alienated labour and alienated art. "The Eternal Network" is then a conceptual *artwork-as-network* through which the related concept of "permanent creation" can be experienced and understood.

Filliou's belief in these principles led to an itinerant practice lived through the dissemination of "The Eternal Network" geographically and conceptually. Born in Suave, France in 1926, he lived for various periods in the United States of America, South Korea, Egypt, Spain, Germany, and Canada and travelled more widely still across Europe and Asia. While living in Düsseldorf, he won a DAAD scholarship in Berlin and exhibited work in Jürgen Schweinebraden's gallery in East Berlin. His experience of former Eastern Europe was otherwise limited, however, but significant in particular to György Galántai's development of the Artpool Art Research Center in Budapest. Filliou travelled with his collaborator Joachim Pfeufer to Budapest from Berlin in 1976 to exhibit their *The Real Space-Time Poïpoïdrome No. 1.* (*Poïpoïdrome à Espace-Temps Réel No.1*.) at the invitation of art historian, curator and networker László Beke. In being an "ambulant" structure, Filliou thought of the Poïpoïdrome as an artistic environment and nomadic centre for permanent creation able to manifest itself across a range of sites, situations and importantly communities of artists. On the occasion of its exhibition at the Young Artists' Club, Budapest it also produced a social space for the city's post avant-garde artists to gather. One of these was György Galántai who although impressed by the event would only develop a correspondence with Filliou from September 1979. In March of that year, Galántai had announced the formation of Artpool by circulating a poster-catalogue of his own 1978 exhibition through the international mail art network stamped with the message "please send me information about your activity." Filliou's response was a postcard asking Galántai to make a poster made to exhibit at the entrance of the Young Artists' Club, which read:

> TELEPATHIC MUSIC no. YOUNG ARTISTS' CLUB
> fond remembrance
> warm wishes
> handshakes
> ROBERT FILLIOU – September 1979.
>
> (Galántai and Klaniczay 2013, p. 36)

The postcard is part of a series that Filliou used from 1973 under the title *Telepathic Music* as another demonstration of permanent creation. The 1979 postcard was an archival and performative document simultaneously recalling the 1976 meeting, a score for an event (make a poster, write on it, hang it on the wall) and a "telepathic exchange" between artists in the East and the West. Filliou himself appears in a photograph on the reverse of the postcard and is described as "The Father of the Eternal Network". The postcard was his 1977 contribution to the Image Bank Postcard Show, an international network project by Michael Morris and Vincent Trasov aiming "to create a collaborative, process-based project in the hopes of engendering a shared creative consciousness." (www.belkin.ubc.ca/archives/morris-trasov,

1995, n.p.) The 1979 postcard could be perceived as Filliou's recognition of Artpool as a new node emerging in "The Eternal Network", understood at that time synonymously as the international mail art community. Filliou's request inspired Galántai to launch Artpool Periodical Space (APS) as an artistic-archival-curatorial practice through which to align his activity with the spirit of permanent creation and "The Eternal Network". Further activities of APS became Artpool's main curatorial-archival framework between 1979–1991 as antecedent or early manifestation of the "active archive." (Galántai and Klaniczay 2013, p.15). The Active Archive – as an institution and open artwork – still develops through exchange and is realised in multiple formats such as exhibitions, events, publications and the web.

Mieko Shiomi: Poetry as a Spatial Cartography of Events

Robert Filliou was a participant in artists' networked practices as well as the conceptual architect of "The Eternal Network". Sometime between March and May 1965 – almost 15 years before *Telepathic Music* in Budapest – he participated in Meiko Shiomi's *Spatial Poem No. 1: Word Event*, the first of which would become a series of "nine global events" in her *Spatial Poem*-series (Shiomi 1976). Invited by Shiomi to 'write a word or words on the enclosed card [sent by post] and place it somewhere'(Ibid., p.1), Filliou wrote "love joe shiomi" and placed it "in his wallet [so it could be in a] random location wherever he is", while Čestmír Janošek wrote "SHIT" ("HOVNO") on a card at Jiří Kolář's Vinohrady address in Prague, and Kolář himself wrote "WORD" on his and placed it "on a small shed for starling." (Ibid., pp.2-9) In another part of the city, Herberta Masaryková wrote "eleven instruments" on hers and placed it "in the third pigeonhole" of her desk at Prague 1, Maltezske 15. (Ibid.) Meanwhile, in Kiev, George Drofa sat at his writing table at Pechersky spusk 18 and wrote:

> cosmonaut
> izba
> samovar
> parasha
> chumak. (Ibid.)

Working with responses such as above but also from Spain, Scotland, England, France, Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, former West Germany, Japan, USA and elsewhere, Shiomi made a three-dimensional cartographic object and later included a mapping of these textual events in in her artist-book, *Spatial Poem* of 1976 along with the eight other events in the series, namely, *Direction Event* (1965), *Falling Event* (1966), *Shadow Event* (1972), *Open Event* (1972), *Orbit Event* (1973), *Sound Event* (1974), *Wind Event* (1974), and *Disappearing Event* (1975). These events were mapped onto plan views of the northern hemisphere with Europe on the left-hand page, North America on the right-hand page, leaving East Asia – and particularly Japan – toward the centre of the two-page spread.

Filliou, Kolář and Masaryková also participated in *Spatial Poem No. 2: Direction Event* occuring simultaneously around 10:00 pm Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) on 15 October 1965, when Shiomi asked "what kind of direction were you facing or moving towards?" (Ibid., p.1) Filliou "was on top of Marianne Staffeldt in Villefranche, France" (Staffeldt confirmed she "was under Robert Filliou" similarly). (Ibid, p.10.) Masaryková was "fetching a cup of black coffee from her kitchenette to her desk in Prague", (Ibid.) Kolář "was going back to his apartment" (Ibid., p.13.) while Bohumila Grögerová was "sitting at his [sic] desk facing North-East; for a while [looking] to the right through the window toward South-East" (Ibid.) also in Prague. *Spatial Poem No. 3: Falling Event*, between 24 June–31 August 1966, featured Jindřich Chalupecký, Ladislav Novák (Czechoslovakia), Vytautas Landsbergis

(Lithuania), Miroslav Miletić, Branko Vučićević (Yugoslavia) as Eastern European nodes of Shiomi's network. *Spatial Poem No. 4: Shadow Event* (1972) was significant in introducing photographic documentation of artists projecting "the shadow of the letters SHADOW" of a transparent film sent by Shiomi to participants. László Beke returned an image of his "wife making a shadow of the SHADOW [in the 'feeble sunshine' of Budapest] on the wall [which] his two-year-old daughter wanted to catch but failed". (Ibid., p. 29.) In Brno, on 26 December 1971, Jiří Valoch experimented with projecting the shadow onto the wall of his friend Dušan Klimeš' house between 11:36–11:40am, on his wife's left thigh between 11:41–11:45am and on the Dec. 30, 1971 on his own breast for approximately 8 seconds at 11:12. Jiří Hynek Kocman also visited Dušan Klimeš' house on the same day and experimented with projecting the shadow out of the window toward the sky on a grey day for approximately 5 seconds. With the exception of dispatches from Drofa in Ukraine and Llandsbergis from Lithuania, all other former Eastern European artists responding to Shiomi's international call in these early editions were concentrated in East-Central Europe particularly former Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia as well as Hungary and to a lesser extent Poland. Many were also either concrete or visual poets, conceptual and performance artists. This is true of the rest of the *Spatial Poem*-series of global events whose other participants included Gábor Attalai, Imre Bak, Endre Tót, Péter Legéndy, Géza Perneczky (all in Hungary), Jiřina Hauková (Prague) and Jarosław Kozłowski (Poznań). It is curious now to reflect that all these intimate, sometimes inconsequential, actions take place in the "private sphere" of domestic settings and also anticipate formally our social media status updates of today. The aesthetic of simultaneity – in this case temporal proximity and spatial distance in the same instance – is important here but so is the observation that Shiomi's networked community still relied on a 'one-to-many' form of call and response despite the capacity of mail art to operate as a distributed, peer-to-peer model. Her geographical and cultural location from where she sends instructions and receives textual or visual documentation by reply becomes central, as does arguably her authorial voice. The spatial nature of the mapping, notwithstanding two events are intended to be simultaneous in time, also reinforces a sense of static location and distance between participants seemingly unable to develop any peer-to-peer network relationships without intermediary agency. Still, this critique notwithstanding, *Spatial Poem* is undeniably a remarkably forerunner of later networked art practices and although restricted to the Northern hemisphere did successfully conjoin artists in former West and East Europe.

A 'second public sphere', totalitarianism and *The NET Manifesto*

The suggestion of a "*second* public sphere" implies a plurality of publics and spheres and acknowledges the social actualization of public discourse as historically and materially conditioned. It is thus subject to 'structural transformation' (Habermas 2014) and "tied to particular economic changes taking place at the time" (Fultner 2013, p.3) whenever or wherever those changes take place. The public sphere, therefore, is not as fixed and constant as its bourgeoise variant might suggest or suppose. The public sphere as the location for social production of discourse has typically relied (Arendt 1998; Habermas 2014) on a notion of normative, universal and transcendent societal consensus and a distinction between "public" and "private" spaces, both of which are readily subject to critique from a range of perspectives, principally feminist, Marxist, postmodern and queer critique in turn (Fraser 1990; Negt and Kluge 1993; Hardt and Negri 2000; Villa 1992, Warner 2002). These critiques problematise, amongst other things, "the idea(l) of a coercion-free space of deliberation … the possibility of a unified consensus-based public realm … and a 'nostalgia' where 'appearance … constitutes reality'" (Villa 1992, p. 712). How any public sphere functions – and what and how it signifies – changes when considered from competing liberal or social democratic and state socialist perspectives. Most often and popularly, however, one

is viewed through the other – diffracted, in a sense (Barad 2007) – through ideological prisms or spheres. Just as the private sphere is often defined and theorised in terms of not being the public sphere – that is to say, in terms of its absent than present qualities – so former "Eastern" Europe has been popularly and primarily defined from and by the former West in terms of its lack of freedom, association and expression. Artists in the "free" former West of Europe and the USA may by contrast have been dissatisfied in experiencing a blurring of "state, civil society, family and market" (The Centre for Civil Society 2006) which impacted differently on constructions of desire through the commodity economy and the emergence of the Situationist critique of the entailing *Society of the Spectacle* (Debord 1994). From whichever quarter, post avant-garde artists shared a common desire to disrupt geographically and politically bound discourse to arguably produce a subaltern counterpublic as described by Nancy Fraser as "a parallel discursive arena where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses, which in turn permit them to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs" (Fraser 1990, p. 67). In this sense, the suggestion of a "*second* public sphere" not only implies a multiplicity of registers, rhetorics, spaces, interpretations, actions and behaviors but also a range of counterpublics who themselves do not coalesce easily around any convenient oppositionality that would break down power structures into oversimplified binaries.

This is further complicated in the case of East-Central Europe as "the territory located between the Iron Curtain and the Soviet Union [and] that, due to the agreement signed between the Western powers and the Soviet Union at Yalta, found itself within the latter's sphere of influence" (Piotrowski 2009, p. 7). These territories and their societies were essentially subject to Soviet occupation and its attendant totalitarianism leading to the production of a new set of ideologically bound public behaviors and utterances, a state colonization of society and its public sphere and the concomitant abolition of privacy through routine domestic surveillance. In discussing the experience of artists in the Brezhnev-era Soviet Union of the 1980s, for instance, Ekaterina Degot described that "there was an illusion of the public sphere, rather than public sphere itself, isolated communities rather than society, collapse in communication rather than fruitful communication and economic conditions which will or might make political protest difficult" (2012, n.p.). Whether they were intent on political protest or not, "artists in socialist states [were compensated for] their paralysing social and geographical immobility … by a huge amount of free time" (Ibid.). Added to the absence of a western-style commercial gallery-based art market, these conditions led to the development of conceptual and performance art practices in domestic apartment spaces particularly. The issue of an audience was addressed often through employing photographic documentation. The situation of artists engaging in contemporary practices in the former Soviet Union and East-Central Europe had some similarities but differences too in terms of variants of "soft communism" practiced in, for example, Kádár's Hungary and expressed through Dubček's "Prague Spring." In addition, Adam Czirak has reflected that "the development of underground networks in the state socialist countries demonstrated that no public sphere can be closed in a totalitarian way and that no communication system can be utterly regulated" (Czirak cited in Bátorová, 2014, n.p.).

The development of such networks circumventing command and control communications systems in this period is already evident from regular East-Central European participation in Meiko Shiomi's *Spatial Poem*-series. Significantly, also, both Robert Filliou and Jarosław Kozłowski's involvement in Shiomi's correspondence network may arguably have influenced their own later network projects, "The Eternal Network" (1968) for Filliou and "NET" (1971) for Kozłowski, in conjunction with Andrzej Kostołowski. *The NET Manifesto* is a well-established reference in the contemporary art history of East-Central Europe (Kemp-Welch 2013; Nader 2007) because of its ever-present relevance to discussions of art and ideology,

network art practice and the second public sphere. Kozłowski and Kostołowski wrote the manifesto for network strategy in 1971, which was "mailed to 189 international artists who are invited to be co-curators of the proposed NET" (Chandler and Neumark 2006, 448). The Manifesto stresses, in particular, its "open and noncommercial" character, it's lack of a "central point, and any coordination" and emphasizes "private homes, studios and any places where propositions are articulated" as being nodes of the network (Perkins, 2006, p. 395). These three aspects are particularly prescient to the present discussion. The notion of non-commerciality in art practice is particularly interesting from the perspective of a state socialist context where one would not expect the gallery system to dominate artistic production, a term to which Kozłowski also objects (Kozłowski and Moskalewicz 2015). Nonetheless, by doing so, Kozłowski and Kostołowski engage here in a global discourse against commercial production which, perhaps ironically again, is underpinned by Western Marxist debates around aesthetics and value. However understood, it is clear that Kozłowski and Kostołowski are trying to build an alternative and unconditional economy of exchange where artistic and philosophical discourse becomes a global currency while the artwork itself resists commercial systems of reproduction. The lack of a "central point, and any coordination" (Perkins, 2006, p. 395) both relates to Baran's critique of control and command centralization and potentially augurs the decentralized peer-to-peer networks of now ubiquitous globalization. It would also seem to be a critique of authorship even, perhaps implicitly, the one-to-many model of communication employed by Shiomi in *Spatial Poem* in which Kozłowski would later participate. The insistence too upon "the private home" as beyond the ideological reach totalitarian society, even in Poland, as a node of an international counterpublic exchange network is relevant to discussions here about the social, cultural and political scope and function of a "second public sphere".

Conclusion

I've wanted to demonstrate that networked communities of post avant-garde artists in the Cold War period invented what Findeisen and Zimmermann described as "methods to do things in distributed collaboration" (2015, n.p.) and that Robert Filliou's notion of "The Eternal Network" is a useful conceptual context for understanding these operations. There has been a tendency at times to see the "The Eternal Network" less "as a tool to help describe something" (Latour 2005, p. 131) as more as a thing to be described, principally in infrastructural terms given its synonymity with the mail art network of the 1960s onwards. It may be as likely if anything that Filliou's conception of "The Eternal Network" was influenced greatly by his own participation in Meiko Shiomi's *Spatial Poem*-series of global events. Writing in 1975, noted mail artist David Mayor made the explicit case for developing networked communities through the postal system. He wrote "one alternative to the public media is the relative anonymity (sic) of the postal system" and further that

> just as "TV art", created by, among others, Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell (both Fluxus artists) has made use of, and commented on, the medium's tendency to "flatten" and devalue everything, so what is now called "mail art" is creating an awareness that, with the international nature of today's art, the postal system is potentially a very powerful vehicle for social change.
>
> (Mayor 1975, p. 32)

This social change, however, was often from an East-Central European perspective autonomous from obvious political appearance given the continual risk of ideological scrutiny and recuperation for propaganda purposes. These artists were in the main engaged in network practices to reclaim channels of artistic and philosophical communication, through resisting

totalitarian colonisation of the private sphere. A move from centralised to decentralised and then distributed network models becomes clearer in parallel with social and cultural advances in technology at the same time. Ironically, if we were to consider the logical conclusion of our own present day experience with big data exploitation of the internet as the apogee of decentralised network experience we find privacy once again virtually abolished and an over saturation of personal surveillance techniques. Interesting, also then, to hear Kozłowski remark that having discussed with South American artists "differences in our attitudes toward [Marxist] ideology" through the NET project, he was then, after 1989, "becoming Marxist … because I understand now much better the implications of the free market economy, how much it changes our perception of the world and how much it limits ourselves" (Kozłowski and Moskalewicz 2015). Now with the former East/West divide in Europe largely erased – although the question of cultural migrancy or nomadism dominates political discourse at the time of writing – and the impossible dream of a borderless, frictionless, deterritorialized world apparently realised by the internet, research into proto-network models of artistic practice become ever more important.

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[1] I prefer the term "post avant-garde" to "neo avant-garde" for two reasons. Firstly, "post avant-garde" reflects a position whereby artists have gone beyond the transgressive and oppostional function of the "avant-garde" and do not wish to re-iterate that which "neo avant-garde" risks endorsing. Secondly, in Filliou's thought, there is now too much that is unknown and so "if no one person can tell us what is going on [then] the concept of the avant-garde is obsolete" (1995, p. 80).