

# THE SOUILLAC CHARTER

for

## ART AND INDUSTRY

### *A Framework for Collaboration*

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*A new communication space is growing from a merger of video, computer and telecommunication technologies, coalescing into a system - roughly called the network - searching for its own logic and a cultural, social and political identity. What this space will mean to society is not yet clear, its final content is uncertain, and how it will effect culture open to healthy speculation and necessary experimentation before its final specificity is defined.*

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# The Souillac Charter for Art and Industry

**Souillac, France**  
**July, 1997**

This summer a small group of specialists from art and industry met in Souillac, France to draft a charter proposing a dialogue between artists and the telecommunications industry, with governments and international organisations, on the importance of artistic creativity and the new forms of expression available through advances in telecommunications.

The group was further aided with contributions from an on-line forum of 70 additional specialists organised with the **International Telecommunication Union** during spring 97. Those contributions are available at the web site <<http://www.cicv.fr/>> under the heading "prospectives".

The Charter was presented during **Telecom-Interactive '97** opening the discussion on the future of telecommunications from a cultural point of view and on the need to integrate the newest forms of communication and cultural expression into all aspects of our societies.

The project was organised by the **Laboratoire de Langage Electronique**, Paris and the **Information Society Observatory** of the **London School of Economics and Political Science** with the **Centre International de Création Vidéo** and the **Ocean of Know** and in collaboration with the **International Telecommunication Union**, the **Council of Europe** and **NYNEX-Bell Atlantic**.

We wish to thank the **city of Souillac** and the **Region Midi-Pyrénées** who strongly supported this initiative.

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## SUMMARY

The network is a new interactive communication space becoming more and more important in society today.

Surprisingly, the two sectors most concerned by building the space have been artists and the telecommunication industry.

Finding a way to increase collaboration between the two would accelerate the development of the network.

- The artist is a researcher expanding the potential of the tools.
- Industry interfacing with art could mean more innovation.
- Governments and international institutions can help that happen.
- The Souillac Charter presented here is a blueprint for beginning.

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**This proposal is**

A framework for dialogue and mutual recognition for artists working with communications technologies and the private sector creating the technologies and an interface with governmental and international bodies directly concerned with telecommunications.

**It is not**

A proposal for sponsoring or marketing.

**Results & Benefits**

Art and Industry collaborating can help:

- to understand each other's basic imperatives
- to create products which are more relevant to the user and the citizen
- to create processes of communication better representing society
- to stimulate the innovative use of networks
- to challenge and define management strategy to suit user needs
- to create new forms of content
- to develop new communications languages (software and operating systems)
- to understand art as fundamental research rather than applied arts, decorative or design
- to build new forms of cultural expression.

# INTRODUCTION

*Surrounded by numerous, nearly ubiquitous buzz words like convergence, revolution, diversity, or universality, the new tools of communication are easily hailed as utopian or inevitable. Yet despite, or inspite of, these vague characterisations, artists continue to extend the circumference and possibilities of technology, nowhere more than in the area of telecommunications. A fundamental aspect in the future of culture is a serious and sustained investment in the imaginative use and development of creative content in the networked world. So much of the content of the network re-collects and reproduces the forms of the past that the time has come to shift our assumptions, expand the horizons, nurture experimentation, challenge existing techniques and support imagination as pivotal to the creative life of a culture enveloped in technology.*

## ART AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

### **Art is a form of communication & the artist, a communication specialist**

#### **The artist anticipates change in society and in communications**

When the conditions of communication change, the artist is often the first to be engaged in understanding how and why these changes occur and through his or her work can develop the communications tools, content and language to accelerate the change and demonstrate it to others.

Art is an attempt to understand something of the human condition from the subjective world-view of the artist by providing through it new perceptions. The collection of those world-views is an important part of what we call culture. The artist reflects the evolution of the psychological atmosphere of his or her era, often anticipating the changes coming in society.

## **Contemporary artists have a deep involvement with technology**

Throughout the century artists explored new technologies through their work - simply taking up the tools as they became available - using them in ways very often far from the intent of the original product. Many developments in the vernacular of sound and image communication can be traced back at least in part to artistic inspiration. The artist pushes to extremes the communication tools chosen, inventing new tools in the process. The sum of artistic production in a particular medium usually makes statements about the direction that medium is taking, but industry has often been unaware that this type of artistic exploration has led to much invention in both content and hardware in the use of the new tools.

## **The history of artists and communications**

From the very beginning of telecommunications artists were intimately involved in the process of invention. It should not be forgotten that Samuel Morse, the inventor of the telegraph, was a painter. More to the point, in our century other artists have extended the communication potential of existing tools through their personal experimentation. Scriabine invented the concept of multi-media with his Synesthetic light and music concerts in the 1900's. Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, a founder of Bauhaus, did the first painting over phone lines in 1922, Man Ray, the first transmitted fashion photographs in 1926. Appolinaire and Edgar Varese proposed theatrical works for the radiophonic space of the 1920's and 1930's.

By the 1960's, "Experiments in Art and Technology" (EAT) brought together engineers and artists (including Billy Kluver, Robert Rauschenberg, Lucinda Childs, John Cage) in collaborations and performances that broadly used radio and telemedia. The musician Robert Moog invented the audio synthesizer in 1964 and Nam June Paik, the Korean artist, the first video synthesizer in 1967. By the 1970's and 80's, the widening use of communications media (by Steina and Woody Vasulka, Otto Piene, Laurie Anderson, etc.) represented a watershed in which increasingly available technologies became catalysts for performance and experimentation now cascading over the 1990's (the French artist, Piotr Kowalski, developed an on-line direct translation system between French and English in 1996). The drive to create in the fields of electronic media and networked environments has wholly transformed the boundaries between communication, imagination and technology.

## **Original use of communications technology**

Artists, because of their need to communicate and by the nature of their personal research, have much to contribute to the development of hardware and software as highly technically skilled investigators. Today is a turning point where issues of the present and issues of the future become more entangled than ever, and as artists involve themselves more and more in communications technologies, the relationship

between art and those technologies accelerates. To further the understanding of the techniques, their implementation and possibilities, the urgency of the arts accrues even more importance.

### **The link with industry is premised in collaboration**

Deeply reliant on a critical relationship with memory, history, and subjectivity, the artist probes the conditions of contingency, and as a result breaks the boundaries of expectation and ruptures prediction. This call for collaboration proposes that information industries regard artistic experimentation as at least one source of ideas as to how the new communication spaces will be built and the tools of communication best utilised. The charter aims to define the terms more specifically and recommends the development of a working set of relationships in which mutual and dynamic interchanges can take place.

### **Closer collaboration is in the interest of everyone**

The issues raised by the arrival of the newest forms of communication and their solutions are not to be found in any single sector, but must be found in collaborative and multidisciplinary endeavours in order to resolve the inevitable blocks to change. The point of departure for this collaboration is the mutual recognition on the part of all that a profound transformation is taking place in our society due to a radical shift in communication potential. All actors concerned should examine ways of collaboration and co-operation to assure the most beneficial use of this new potential for all of society.

## SECTION 1

### WHAT ARTISTS CAN CONTRIBUTE TO INDUSTRY

*Artists working with the new communications technologies are not merely continuing the tradition of artistic creativity, but are also participating in the construction of the new communication space. Their efforts should interest industry since the larger overall objective, building the new space, is shared by both. That space is international, interactive and virtual.*

In order to function at an optimum the artist must work in a climate of open-ended investigation without bottom-line short term goals. The necessary condition of autonomy is contrary to the short term objectives of corporate culture, but essential to the spirit of investigation which is the evolving process of an emerging art work, process or movement.

Artists work with different technologies with many different aims, but their combined investigation can ultimately lead to innovation for the networked communication space in many categories:

- **New forms of interactivity**
- **New visual languages; how we see and understand what we see**
- **New applications of sound; sound as space**
- **New interfaces: man/man, man/machine**
- **New approaches to the architecture of the space**

It is difficult to account for the overall innovation resulting from artistic creativity since there are as many approaches as there are artists, but there are aspects which can be taken into account within the context of the proposed collaboration. In his or her role of communications researcher, the artist deals directly with unknown aspects of the evolution of the new communication space.

#### **1 "The advanced user"**

Artistic use of communications technologies is a source of experimentation and investigation outside the normal boundaries of industrial activity, but complementary to it through the ultimate expression of the advanced user.

Art is the densest form of communication in that it contains the entire world-view of the artist, and as such is the perfect tool for the exploration of this new



communications space, pushing it to its limits, expanding its communication potential and evolving its cultural specificity. Art challenges the communication potential of any form of expression to its maximum.

## **2 The "unspecific" approach**

The artist's approach is open-ended exploration of communication potential. The engineer responds to specific problems with specific solutions. The artist's approach can then be considered as unspecific. The artist can provide innovation in the process of creating relevant and useful communications tools through his or her experimentation in a wide variety of directions without any immediate practical application. This process brings about diversity in systems, equipment and applications from processes usually intended for one purpose and dramatically demonstrates other potentials (and limitations).

## **3 Cultural diversity**

The collective response of artists to a set of communications tools provides a wide range of responses to the potential of those tools. This is due to artists' individual approaches, their diverse cultural backgrounds, differing national characteristics, generational differences and the multiple artistic forms available in either the plastic or the performing arts.

In order to be effective, communication systems should account for cultural diversity : network technologies can permit a wide range of expression to different cultural groups. The "advanced user" is aware of cultural specificity for relevant and useful services for the user.

**Network hardware and software development** should represent (send out) and read (receive) all languages across the globe. Artists can collaborate with industry to develop the relevant interfaces, languages and interactive content for each particular local, national and regional culture.

## SECTION 2

### WHAT INDUSTRY CAN CONTRIBUTE TO ART

*The objectives of industry are the expansion of existing markets and the creation of new ones. The speed of technological development necessitates a constant revision of the process of its development and its direction in the marketplace. Software, hardware and communications industries cannot afford to stagnate and seem to need a constant source of original and innovative ideas for visionary products, services, and activities. The real bottom line for any expanding and innovative industry is providing better services and products responding to real needs with a reasonable return for investment.*

*Industry can participate actively in the acceleration of the construction of the new **communications space** through the **work of artists** and the integration of that space into public use.*

#### 1 Technological Support to Artistic R&D

Industry can participate by **developing a partnership with institutions**, governments and international organisations to build the interactive network for artistic and educative exchange and by **reinforcing existing supportive relationships** whereby industry provides artists and arts organisations with technical support, maintenance, resources, networks, organisation and management of human resources.

Industry can provide infrastructure which includes **up-to-date hardware, software and networks, human resources** and good internal and external communications to help institutions and individuals engaged in this form of research.

The research needs to be carried out within **flexible and dynamic neutral structures that allow for collaboration** between different sized organisations. These may have different ultimate objectives, but are able to **work together towards common goals**. There can be consensus on the ethic of allowing for distance required for high-quality research.

## 2 Support Education and Training

Education and training in the communication technologies is already taking place in art schools, laboratories and research institutes.

This work should be recognised and substantially increased as a way of **promoting the new skills and professions emerging from this research**. Industry can **provide more technical training and support** to artists working with state-of-the-art communications technologies to encourage this development.

Industry willingly supports science or technical schools as programs understood and close to their own activities and **can cooperate further with artistic institutions**. This attitude is changing as more and more people from industry begin to understand the importance of the content in the development of the tools and recognise the level of innovation coming from artistic experimentation.

**Artist-in-residency programmes** can help artists in advancing the technical aspect of their research and allow both artists and engineers to benefit from the collaboration and its results. Conversely, engineer-in-residency programmes in art schools and art research institutions would help create a better interface and understanding of the needs on either side.

Industry should **work closely with educational institutions**, art schools, universities and training centres in **developing long-term educational programmes** to advance these objectives.

## 3 Participate in Information Exchange and Open Dialogue

The artists, as advanced users, have an important need to be informed of new developments in industry and for this reason an **open dialogue** and exchange would be useful in both directions. Industry can inform (advance notice) the artistic community about project development. Artists need to be aware of new developments to adapt creative environments towards what is physically possible.

A **code of conduct** should be developed to ensure a clear and concise agreement to collaborate taking into account the needs of both. This should be a next step for further defining ways of interacting.

In the meantime, use should be made of the existing tools of communication to create :

- **an open directory** to inform artists and arts organisations experimenting with communications technologies of new developments,
- **an index of artist activity** in the field
- **an online forum for dialogue between artists, industry and government.**

Such an online structure could disseminate artistic work and examples of corporate / artist collaboration to a wider public.

## **4 Guarantee Access**

General access to the network is a key concern to all and should be a guiding principal for all parties involved in building the new communication space in a manner that is socially, culturally and politically responsible.

*Access is not a marketing procedure but the principle that should guide the entire process, access to systems for the creator, to artistic experimentation for industry and to direct participation by the public. Included in this principle is access to cultural history and the development of the forms of cultural expression coming into being.*

### **Easily accessible**

*Technically:* not limited to specialists, a closed group of initiates, and mystifying to the general public

*Financially:* not limited to only those who can pay, or to distorted systems whereby the wealthiest multinationals pay less than educational or cultural institutions because of the weight of their business.

*Intellectually:* not limited to a privileged few where information becomes a guarded commodity available only through rank or riches.

### **Genuinely interactive (with no political or economic intermediaries)**

- between individuals
- between individuals and groups
- between groups
- between individuals and institutions
- between institutions.

### **Genuinely diverse**

Avoiding reducing all models of culture to a few social, cultural and political stereotypes answering to other political agendas.

### **Access to communications technologies in education**

Applying the tools to education not just as access to information, but as a series of interactive, international connections permitting the development of culture from the point of view of the individual, defining and deriving his or her culture from the extensive pool of information and contacts around. The new space is not an extension of the classroom but a different space with an educational vocation to be

discovered and developed through experimentation. Part of the challenge will be to not confuse entertainment with education, to assure intellectual depth and avoid creating one more media playground.

**Related to contemporary culture and not a substitute for it**

Allowing new cultural forms to emerge from the interface of contemporary culture and the new space.

The process of deforming contemporary or traditional culture to fit the new space is to be avoided. Artistic creation with the new tools must be encouraged to permit the new space to be defined by that creativity in order to discover the specificity of its language and the depth of its communication potential.

**Experimental**

Open to new ideas, procedures, processes and uses, determined by their cultural, social or political utility, not just by their commercial return.

## SECTION 3

### THE PUBLIC SECTOR'S ROLE IN THE PROCESS

*The role of the public sector is to facilitate the development of the new communication space, evolving on one hand from artistic invention and on the other from industrial innovation. It should insure the integrity of the new space, its cultural and intellectual depth, protect the rights of all within, and aid in its cultural development. Public institutions should redirect scarce resources into this crucial field, provide incentives to industry to help in building interactive cultural systems, and promote on-line experimentation in the areas of art and education. Recognition of the essential role of the artist as a researcher in this new field is important to all sectors.*

#### **1 Government as guardian of cultural heritage**

Government and public sector institutions in many countries have played an important role in assuring that the arts, artistic training and education and presentation of the arts are maintained as an expression of that country's cultural heritage. The same attention must be paid to the arts in the new communication space. Cultural bureaucracies often neglect the new areas of creativity because they are too new to have cultural constituencies.

In many parts of the world governments have, and should continue to develop policies of guaranteeing continuity and diversity in the cultural processes. Government can act to make the public aware of cultural values. Governments can assure that the cultural content of the new space is representative of the cultural heritage of the country, its diversity and the newest forms of cultural expression being developed.

#### **2 Government's role in stimulating long-term economic growth : locally, nationally, supranationally**

Government differs from industry in that it can choose to take a long term view in funding of long-term artistic research and development of the network, the communications tools and of content. This research and development is not tied to product life-cycles and to industry's requirement of short-term return on investment. The public sector should fund long-term artistic R&D as a measure to stimulate economic growth locally, nationally and globally by investing in the cultural and information economy. It can also provide economic incentives to industry to encourage participation in this research and in physically building the network.

The cultural and information economy creates employment, wealth and global trade as the information economy increases as a part of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The creation of long-term economic rewards from this can be evident in less developed regions, areas of structural industrial decline and the Third World. These can harness the digital media economy to their own benefit without relying on costly infrastructural development and participate in what will become the cultural content of the network.

### **3 Education**

It is impossible to institutionalise the role of the artist in the kind of exploration being proposed because doing so would stifle artistic creativity through a too literal application of the role of researcher. On the other hand, art schools, transformed into an interactive collaborative system would by a way of encouraging this experimentation. Governments can create and support educational initiatives which allow for highly creative, as well as technically competent skillsets to develop for long-term benefits.

#### **Government institutions can**

- Create funding structures for independent research by artists in this field
- Encourage artistic research in the new communication technologies in the arts schools
- Promote the collaboration between art and engineering faculties to explore new forms of expression.
- Encourage nationally and internationally the physical construction of school networks
- Provide incentives for industry to collaborate with arts faculties
- Encourage industries across the globe to define their interests, needs and possible contributions to the educational field.

Industry, government bodies, both national and international, should work closely with educators to define new programmes and needs in these fields. In addition to training in the use of specific technologies by educational institutions and industry, educational institutions must be empowered to facilitate research, and to define the new social and cultural realities in their programmes.

Finally, art in primary and secondary education is more than an applied-arts activity: it is, and should be encouraged to be, a process of multidisciplinary understanding of communications. Art has been increasingly excluded from educational curricula as an unnecessary luxury rather than as an approach to bring greater understanding of society and the direction it is taking.

## **4 Direct regulation**

Government is responsible for regulating against abuse of dominant position of one player in the info-communications market. Although some nation states encourage the development of a dominant position of one of their market players in order to set a de facto world standard, this may be against the global public interest in developing original and diverse networks, content and access to and manipulation of content. Because technology develops at a faster pace than regulation, regulatory regimes should be structured to monitor closely any abuse of dominant position.

Governments and international regulatory bodies should also be particularly vigilant where monopolies attempt to leverage their dominant position into new markets and transparency in the decision-making process should rule in developments dealing with social and cultural discourse.

## **5 Indirect regulation**

The public sector can create favourable conditions for employment and job creation in the information economy by indirect regulatory measures, e.g. fiscal incentives for small to medium sized enterprises.

## **6 Intellectual Property Rights**

The copyright issue is central for the development of the interactive global network. Governments can act to resolve digital rights management on the global interactive network.



# THE CHARTER FOR ART AND INDUSTRY

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