

TRANSNATIONAL TEMPS PRESENTS: Eco-scope

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<http://terrancode.org/ecoscope>

EcoScope is a telematic forum concerning environmental issues. It is one of a series of projects by the international art collective Transnational Temps involving the environment, public participation, and tactical media.

It stands to reason that solutions to the various contemporary ecological challenges are more likely to emerge when the public is both well informed and practiced in articulating ideas about the environment. So EcoScope is designed to combine information with discussion. Its structure indicates the importance of participation in any meaningful solutions that can be imagined.

Although EcoScope resembles some existing graphical chat software, what separates it from others is the context it provides. EcoScope leverages scientific visualization, time-lapse satellite photography, landscape photography, and environmental journalism to provide a framework for conversation and discovery. Since its formation in 2001, Transnational Temps has developed diverse media art relating to the environment, extinction, public awareness, and the limits of

technological progress. Members of Transnational Temps are artists without borders, culture workers dedicated to imagining new maps and finding alternative routes to the future.

EARTH ART FOR THE 21st CENTURY

Making art that addresses the contemporary environmental situation is challenging. Attempts to bridge art and activism often fall short. Vague abstraction tends to arouse suspicion among activists, while connoisseurs find fault with almost any art that assumes a didactic or informative tone.

Despite theoretical pronouncements by Theodor Adorno, among others, that the merger of art and social purpose is doomed to failure, Transnational Temps estimates that environmental sustainability is not beyond the scope of aesthetic experience. Art is ever-changing, and the warming world of the 21st century needs a vigorous multi-disciplinary movement to invent a new ecological common sense. While most cultural and media institutions continue to neglect the deterioration of the environment, Transnational Temps has resisted this flight from ecology and reaffirmed the ground-breaking work of the 1970s. Like Robert Smithson's Spiral Jetty, which disappeared beneath the surface of the Great Salt Lake for thirty years, Earth Art has re-emerged in the new millennium.

Transnational Temps exists because global environmental problems now require human cooperation more than ever before. The lessons of environmental science are not just for school children. A hopeful future for the world's environment in the decades to come will depend on making consciousness about environmental problems far more widespread. The technical means of educating and informing people about global conditions have never been more abundant.

But efforts to advance international cooperation continue to be overshadowed by the commercial exploitation of the media. Myriad corporations drive a spectacular agenda that encourages distraction rather than action.

Standing in the way of a transformation of consciousness are various industries and a commodity culture whose priorities conflict with the best interests of life on Earth. The failure of the prevailing economic system to account for the value of the environment has led to a situation in which the planet is being destroyed so that short-term profits can be maintained. This is insanity!

Transnational Temps operates, therefore, at the crossroads of inter-related crises. “Art at its most significant,” wrote Marshall McLuhan, “is a Distant Early Warning System that can always be relied on to tell the old culture what is beginning to happen to it.” One of the artist’s greatest challenges is finding ways to sound an alarm that people don’t necessarily want to hear. Crisis forms a disturbing basis for aesthetic experience, especially when it’s personal. Because ultimately the sustainability of the environment is not someone else’s problem, it is a theme that can be overwhelming if it is not offset by humor, inspiration, curiosity, and hope. It’s not easy to open public dialogue about such matters. But it may help to begin somewhere.

Somewhat arbitrarily, Transnational Temps employs the postcard as a means to invite people to participate. Users of EcoScope can easily produce electronic postcards to invite others to visit the site. Making printed postcards is also an option. Each postcard is, in effect, a snapshot of the present state of the discussion. So the postcards give an indication of what to expect when visiting EcoScope. The cards are also an outlet for creative expression.

EXTREME HOME ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEMS

EcoScope inaugurates a series of Extreme Home Entertainment Systems which abandon the superficial “realism” of video gaming in favor of the topical realism of extreme weather, melting glaciers, and endangered species. Extreme Home Entertainment Systems embrace play, but they reject the passive configuration of the conventional home entertainment system. Active engagement should not mean extreme boredom. Transnational Temps aims to address critical social issues without boring people or overwhelming them with depressing statistics.

If the familiar commerciality and escapism of interactive media products establish certain expectations among audiences, such as that online experiences must be entertaining, so be it. EcoScope entertains. Despite the seriousness of the proposed subject matter, EcoScope injects a dose of fun. Users can adopt graphical avatars such as monkeys, dolphins, and tigers; or channel surf from Mount Kilimanjaro to the tropics; or organize a sit-in on the edge of a stratospheric ozone hole.

Unlike the highly individualistic feats of extreme sports, Extreme Home Entertainment Systems explore the potential of collaboration. In the interactive, online media of EcoScope, spectators are challenged to communicate. The coercive control

permeating typical corporate media offerings may lead to more predictable results, but young people, especially, are eager to find ways to subvert and circumvent this dull regularity. Web 2.0 participation is rendering “reality television” obsolete for a generation that prefers to do more than just watch and listen.

Extreme Home Entertainment Systems differ from games in that there are no artificial victories to be found. In many respects, the goals are undefined. EcoScope advances a writerly textual condition in which participants provide most of the site’s content. This openness is offset by a framework that is by turns documentary and journalistic. As both avatars and scenery draw attention to a physical world at risk, the user-directed discourse is tilted subtly towards analysis rather than fantasy. The entertainment system is thereby re-conceived as a mechanism for collaborative resistance, a tool for escaping the virtualization of the real.

SUPERPOWER vs INDIFFERENCE

EcoScope is the the latest in a series of media art projects begun in 2001. Inspired by New York Times correspondent Patrick Tyler’s observation that there remain two superpowers – the United States and world public opinion – Transnational Temps began to focus attention on public opinions about the environment. Leveraging workshops, residencies, and exhibitions, the collective has developed both a body of recordings, and strategies for presenting and distributing them. From events in Portugal, Uruguay, Greece, and the United States, to Terranode 2005 in France, and Aqunode 2006 in Turkey, Transnational Temps has recorded many statements and incorporated them into both installations and online media. These activities have brought digital media art into the landscape and into the public sphere. Because each event has incorporated site-specific nuances, topics have varied from place to place. Rather than conducting interviews, people have been asked to discuss what, if anything, concerns them about the environment. The recordings can be heard via streaming media at Terranode Radio (radio.terrancode.org).

EcoScope continues this interest in the superpower of public opinion, and like Terranode and Aqunode it encourages people to express their views about the environment. To advance the general project of representing global attitudes toward the environment, EcoScope also maintains a public archive of all the discussions that occur.

In some respects EcoScope resembles an open microphone because anyone can use the platform to say anything about anything, anonymously. Experience with similarly open online interfaces suggests, however, that a compelling interactive context will lead many people to make thoughtful contributions. Thematic channels were therefore designed to suggest relevant topics for analysis and debate.

DEFORESTATION CHANNEL

In the Deforestation Channel the dynamic background imagery represents successive levels of deforestation in Bolivia from 1984 to 2000, as recorded by NASA satellite photography. The time-lapse visualization reveals the limitations of casually observing environmental changes. The ease with which humans grow accustomed to changes, like the disappearance of forests, underscores the value of photographs and databases as aids to memory. How well can a person know a forest from seeing aerial photographs, though? The metaphor of the “scope” suggests an instrument that will enhance vision. But a satellite-assisted way of seeing forests is no substitute for knowing a forest by being in it, or living near it.

Most citizens of the advanced industrialized nations, lacking direct sensory experience, have lost contact with both flora and fauna in a prolonged estrangement from nature. In this age of genetic engineering, it's increasingly difficult to differentiate natural and synthetic. For most people, direct experiences of nature and wildlife are as brief as they are limited. Even the word “nature” evokes little more than nostalgia for unexplored land, a wilderness free of the centuries of human domination and remodeling. Contact with other forms of life has been reduced to a mediated experience, an optical re-run, a demographically targeted event sandwiched between commercial messages. While television is an unlikely route back to nature, reliance on technology to help understand the complexities of habitats and ecology is almost universal.



The Deforestation Channel and the Ozone Channel feature satellite imagery (smaller option)

FIX NEWS CHANNEL

Since global warming and other atmospheric conditions, such as acid rain, are difficult to perceive, journalism could do a lot to direct attention to critical problems. Yet too often journalism about environmental affairs in the mainstream media has lacked persistence and urgency. In place of investigative reporting, there has been a rise of ultra-sensationalistic news programming. Spotty environmental news coverage has been ineffective in mobilizing behavioral and policy changes equal to the challenge of global warming.

At the same time, the Internet has made access to environmental news easier. The Fix News Channel brings together a wide variety of news sources, and it offers a hyper-linked headline for each article. It connects visitors to resources they can use to educate themselves about climate change, environmental policies, endangered species, renewable energy, and scientific research. The Fix News Channel reflects current events and gives a timely and adaptive quality to EcoScope. While it is no match for the production qualities of real television newscasts, it does sketch an up-to-date alternative newscast in which environmental news is always the lead story.



The Fix News Channel is two way: readers can add news items to the Fix News database and comment on existing articles

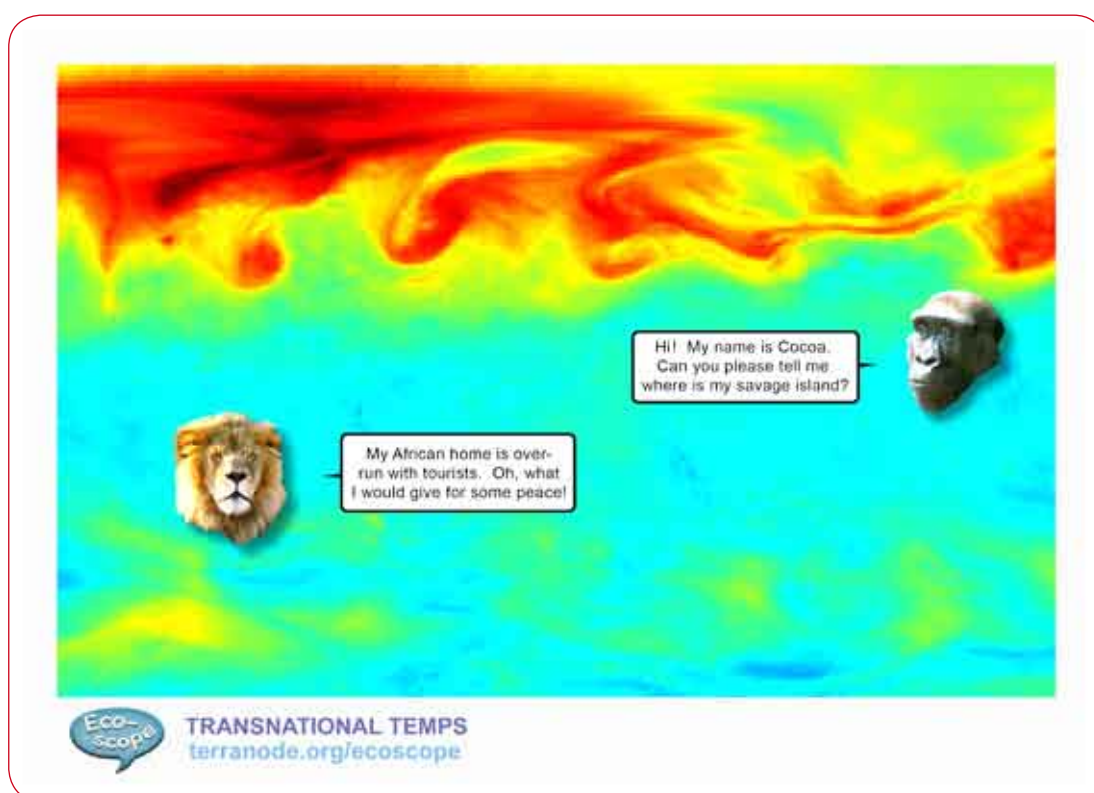
OZONE CHANNEL

For decades the scientific community has been publishing findings on a variety of troublesome trends, such as global warming, ozone holes, rising sea levels, deforestation, extinction, and receding glaciers. Some important actions have resulted, such as the Montreal Protocol, an international ban on ozone-damaging chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs).

Each day EcoScope automatically produces maps using new ozone data so that discussions in the Ozone Channel can be superimposed over the most current visualization of ozone levels in the atmosphere. Artistic forays like this into scientific visualization can play a role in communicating research findings. The ozone images are a reminder of the vulnerability of the Earth's atmosphere to human activities.

Unfortunately when scientists sound a note of alarm, it does not necessarily translate into political action. Consequently, it has become increasingly important to bridge the gap between specialized knowledge and public awareness.

The Ozone Channel addresses a perceptual problem associated with issues like global warming and ozone depletion. Since direct experience of atmospheric ozone is impossible, scientists use advanced instruments and computer models to understand these matters. For non-scientists the problem of perception is compounded by the mediation – and outright distortion – of scientific findings. Public understanding of climatic conditions is influenced by many unscientific things, such as industry efforts to downplay the risks of fossil fuel dependency. This perceptual gap has been exploited for decades.



The Ozone Channel: blue and purple values indicate what is often called a 'hole' in the ozone layer

Transnational Temps respects the work that concerned scientists are doing, but when repeated warnings by scientists about global warming prove largely ineffectual, a tactical media strategy is needed that will complement the conventional approach of the science community and inspire more passion for environmental affairs. Building enthusiasm for more sustainable lifestyles is a daunting task that may require new priorities and new approaches to communication. Without denigrating the value of

research and statistics, it appears there are limits to the effectiveness of an endless parade of reports, conferences, and bulleted presentations. Filling databases is probably not the best ways to win the hearts and minds of non-scientists.

Paradoxically modern technology and science have enabled unprecedented access to everything from outer space to subatomic space. From satellites to nano-sensors, perceptual prostheses have never been so sophisticated. And yet most citizens are far from taking part in the scientific explorations occurring beyond the fences and firewalls of research universities and private laboratories. The privatization and commercialization of information have introduced a more closed scientific world. Still, the passion of the 18th-century Encyclopedists to share knowledge has not been entirely extinguished. Climate science deserves credit for its openness. The Ozone Channel is made possible by free atmospheric ozone data from the U.S. National Environmental Satellite, Data, and Information Service.

GREETINGS FROM ECOSCOPE

There is a world to be gained. But sometimes it seems everything related to environmentalism is marked by division and dithering. The time to move decisively has already passed. Polar ice-shelves are slipping into the seas.

While efforts to date have failed to persuade enough politicians to act rationally to preserve the environment and slow climate change, developments like Ecomedia suggest that some of the discursive ice in the cultural sphere is beginning to break up. As troubles like drought, displacement, arable land, and extreme weather threaten to radically alter the human condition, it is becoming obvious that environmental issues must be addressed. Transnational Temps aims to stimulate discussion, break down stubborn boundaries, and develop new ways to share perceptions and act collectively.

Have you seen with your own eyes the emerging crisis of the environment? A new “coalition of the willing” is needed – an alliance of the millions of people who see beyond the myopic priorities of SUV marketing. Join scientists, artists, activists, and ecologists. Participate in this new platform and lend insight to the ongoing discussions. Have a look through the EcoScope!

TRANSNATIONAL TEMPS

FOR THE OCCUPATION OF SCIENTIFIC MODELS ON THE WEB!

“shared eco-cartography”

In 2004, the New York art group S.W.A.M.P. created the *Spore Project 1.1*, a work we consider very interesting as far as its allusion to the devastating effect which the world economy can have on the planet's natural resources. The idea is simple: the automated irrigation of a plant is directly connected to the stock market value of the company that sells it. If the company's financial activity is positive - growing - the plant gets watered; if the company loses value, the plant does not receive water. This ironic creation puts its finger on one of the biggest problems faced by humanity today: the incompatibility between the economic interests of world markets and the preservation of the plant. The imbalance between the use and renewal of natural resources must be visualised; both actions must be contemplated as inseparable parts of a single element. *Spore Project 1.1* gives us some interesting clues regarding the measures that are within our reach that we can take. The meeting between the use of communication technologies combined with environmental data and the representation of the flow of the world economy can help us to understand the arithmetic relationship between the parts and aid us in seeking a balance between them. We have to use the numerical technologies that help to visualise this type of complex relationship so that they help to increase our perception rather than decrease it, as sometimes happens. It is necessary to reconnect man to the (limited) natural resources of his survival space, the space inscribed within the limits of the Milky Way.

Most of humanity has nothing more than a superficial perception of the environment. As westerners, we must admit that we lack direct sensory experience, that we've lost all contact with fauna and flora and are moving farther away all the time from what we call nature. The very name “nature” conjures up a longing for that virgin space untouched by the human hand which is today practically non-existent, given the fact that for centuries man has continuously tried to dominate and remodel the environment, long viewed as a hostile place. Obviously, in the age of molecular contamination, it is tricky to talk about the “environment” since most of us have very

limited experience with the elements and ways of life, experience that is reduced to the information that is fed to us by the media, the vague generalist culture and the “superficial information” sources.

Paradoxically, technology and science can provide us with a subatomic and cosmic exploration of our environment. From nanocaptors to satellites, man’s perceptive prostheses have never been so sophisticated. And despite this, we are still far from taking advantage of even part of the knowledge stored in the files of university theses, research projects or private laboratory databases. Why are we not in a position to use that knowledge and what role do scientists play in its dissemination? What format could the irradiation of knowledge take and what circuits of distribution could be used? Surely if we want to supervise the fair use of natural resources and ensure a proper balance, we must inevitably strengthen our physical and intellectual links to the environment.

Works such as the Diderot and d’Alembert encyclopaedia pursue not only a rational analysis of the environment but also the deployment of technology to pave the way toward the industrial age. Each cog, each tool, each procedure was described in the most minute detail to ensure the effective transmission of knowledge. Knowledge of the resources available during that age was the key to progress toward a better future. Today, the objects that characterise progress are opaque, incomprehensible and compiled under an impenetrable carcass; manufactured products and services are disassociated with the environment. We live in a world where products have apparently lost their connection to the raw materials, to the resources in their original state (and not only the products, but we ourselves....).

During the emergence of modernity, the encyclopaedias of the eighteenth century were notable for their desire to share knowledge without restriction, but today privatisation and the mercantilism of information have compartmentalised the world of knowledge. The Diderot and d’Alembert encyclopaedia excelled due to fusion of creativity and science in an attempt to transmit knowledge. It is that fusion which we need to recover.



Encyclopédie Diderot, genealogical distribution of science and art (detail, 1769)

At the end of the nineties we started to hear about transversal practices between Art-Science-Technology. Some experiences, such as the Cibervisión festival organised by MedialabMadrid under the direction of Karin Ohlenschlager and Luis Rico in 2002, tried to bring together in the same dialogue space the sphere of contemporary artistic practices and scientists with a markedly innovative slant to their proposals, both coming from domestic and international arenas. The virtue of this attempt at transversal dialogue lies in the fact that it rises above the habitual media image that reduces the artist to a “pseudo scientist” or the scientist to a “biocreator”, a maker of manipulated living beings. Cibervisión was an exemplary project where we witnessed the renovating synergies that can be expected from this type of proposal. But this type of transversal concern does not often accompany the general trajectory of art, which insists on exploiting the image of the artist and which needs to satisfy market needs with the production of marketable works of art.




We need to recognise a new mode of transdisciplinary creation outside of the traditional art circuit and within the diffuse areas of hybrid artistic practices inherited from the social art of the sixties, Fluxus, Arte Póvera and continuing down to a sector of contemporary artists who, encouraged by the spirit of their predecessors, control telecommunications tools. Far from the model of the auratic artist, they are the groups that make up the *avant garde* of creation on the borders between art-science-technology-activism and ecology. What other role could these groups play than that of developing the tools that enable us to access and understand the knowledge that

belongs to all of us? The contemporary networked artistic practices that dominate telecommunications technologies are a platform of actions intended to open up this coveted transdisciplinarity to a very broad public.

FOR THE OCCUPATION OF SCIENTIFIC MODELS ON THE WEB!

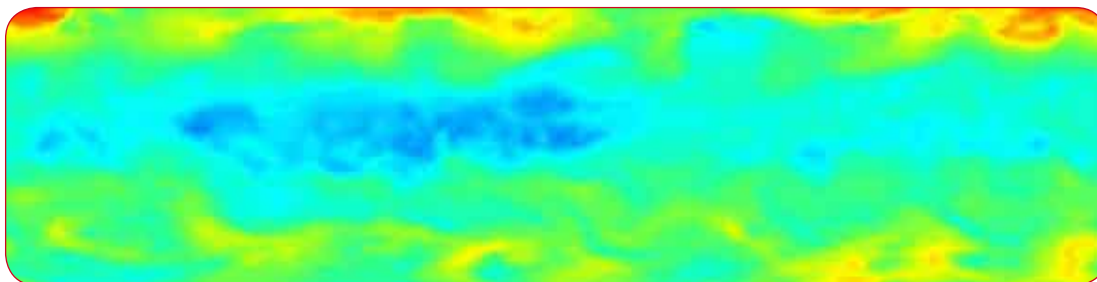
In the midst of this convergence of art, communication technology and science, in 2001 Transnational Temps formulated the proposal of occupying the website that offers information on the status of the ozone layer in the south pole, data from the N.A.S.A. T.O.M. satellite which are openly available. The idea was to “inhabit” or to “sit in” on the graphical representations - data models - cohabitating on the interactive maps with other Internet users in order to debate the causes and measures and look for solutions.

WANT DATA INSTEAD?
Select from the dates below to go to the FTP site for that information.

Spacecraft	Ozone	Aerosol	Erythemal UV	Reflectivity
 Earth Probe	1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005	1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005	1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005	1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005
 Meteor 3	1991 1992 1993 1994	**	**	1991 1992 1993 1994
 Nimbus 7	1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993	1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993	1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993	1978 1979 1980 1981 1982 1983 1984 1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993

Access to the databases of different NASA satellites.
<http://toms.gsfc.nasa.gov>

Numerous public databases containing the information sent by satellites and other types of information compilers form a *corpus* of data about our environment which is updated regularly. In the case of the T.O.M. satellite, the public data on the condition of the ozone layer enables us to model an updated graphic representation of the depression in the ozone layer in the south pole. The information is public (always has been) but the interpretation of the data is not easy for neophytes on the subject. A simple graphic interpretation of these data is a step in the right direction.



An example of modelling the ozone layer from FTP data.

We need to inhabit these data for various reasons. The first reason is because they are the context for the discussion we wish to open. The users position themselves on the problem which is the subject of the debate, in a space where neophytes and specialists converge, all on the same level, all on a democratic dialogue platform. Another advantage is the ability to convert these cartographic spaces into educational archives since there is a memory involved (one can review the discussions over a period of time). People interested in the subject can visit the links and read the information which others have provided in the past. A third aspect that reinforces the need to inhabit these new spaces is the unusual possibility of a community of Internet users massively and simultaneously occupying certain data that are worthy of public debate. In this regard, the proposal to occupy graphic interpretations, satellite images and other representations in the Internet space offers some very interesting possibilities. And let's not forget the time factor; not only can we occupy the two dimensions of a plane but we can also add time elements that enable us to include "phenomena" or processes. A meeting about the concentration of CO₂ that pollutes the air in the industrialised world's metropolises or on the dumping of millions of tons of toxic waste into the mouth of a river is to stand and demand, through the media, that more attention be paid to these sensitive issues.

We have agreed to refer to this type of on-line event as a "virtual sit-in" in reference to the massive encounters of groups in public spaces. This type of collective initiative should take form both in the public space and the numerical space, where it constitutes a new model of resistance favourable to the formation of organised networks of Internet users. These new networks could arise out of the confluence of different entries of public data on the permanent process of deterioration of our planet. The urgency of the matter is indisputable.



Example of a “discussion circle” on a satellite image of the mouth of the Mississippi. The interface can be situation on Google Earth or another specific application

We need to rethink the definition of numerical architecture and space to consolidate an ecological vision of virtual architecture built on real environmental data. Shared digital spaces should not be built - at least not exclusively - on empty metaphors (which are even inappropriate and inconsistent at times) that reproduce superfluous appearances and draw our attention away from the real state of affairs by falsifying our perception of the world (Sims, Second Life). Rather, it must be based on tangible and specific data such as global warming or molecular water pollution. The object is not to depress the population with alarming information but rather to build tools of understanding, analysis and intervention on questions that jeopardise the survival of species (including our own) and make us aware of the repercussions which our activities have on the earth that we are “consuming”. We believe that the application of metaphors in the creation of shared digital interfaces is the cornerstone to the creative renovation of shared digital spaces. Today, technology allows us to inhabit



Ecoscope Forum

At a time when the millions of Internet users from industrial countries are monopolising the emerging Web 2.0 telecommunication tools such as blogs, shared image and video servers, syndication tools, etc., it is crucial to develop a critical sense and an approach of intervention and social action by developing shared tools that contextualise the information on the subject of globalisation and the digital divide, the abyss that separates industrialised countries from poor countries enslaved by unscrupulous market economies. This attempt to keep the planet from sinking by occupying data, i.e., through our physical manifestation in the virtual representation of all that occurs, is a way of supporting, as citizens of the world, an initiative for change in favour of the preservation of biodiversity and a more intelligent and democratic use of the data and technologies within our reach.

FOR THE OCCUPATION OF SCIENTIFIC MODELS ON THE WEB!

ABOUT TRANSNATIONAL TEMPS

Transnational Temps is an arts collective concerned primarily with environmental sustainability. Using electronic media, aesthetic contexts, and events in the public sphere, Transnational Temps seeks public participation in addressing environmental issues. Founded in 2001 by Fred Adam, Andy Deck, and Verónica Perales, Transnational Temps has welcomed contributions from 'temp workers' on five continents. While each new collaboration has had a regional dimension, online media has been used extensively to invite participation and to project the activity of the collective across borders. Consequently, several Transnational Temps projects can be seen online.



terrancode.org

With Terranode and Aquanode, Transnational Temps has sought out diverse opinions on climate conditions in an effort to represent the common sense views of the public. In both cases the recording and presentation of these opinions bridges public space with the global sphere of networked media. All the audio recordings gathered in various countries are now available via Internet streaming at Terranode Radio.

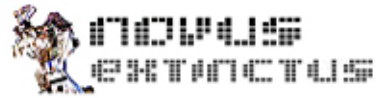


radio.terrancode.org

Two earlier works address pollution and extinction, respectively. Responding to the superabundant garbage that washes ashore on many beaches, Iconsfactory uses trashy icons to pollute the idyllic background imagery provided by popular operating systems.



iconsfactory.com



artcontext.org/novus

Novus Extinctus offers a critical look at the ideology of technical progress that pervaded the dot boom. It compares the scarcity of domain names with the growing abundance of taxonomic names falling into disuse because of extinction.

EcoScope is the product of years of dialogue and design by members of Transnational Temps, especially Fred Adam, Andy Deck and Verónica Perales. Andrea Parthemore contributed to production. Alex Spyropoulos and Stewart Ziff contributed to discussions. Ecoscope production coordinated in 2007 by Andy Deck.