Francisca Rudolph
ARTHI 4410: Latinx/Latin American Art and Crisis
Spring 2021

<center>net art in Latin America</center>

Introduction

The following research paper discusses net artist Brian Mackern's *netart latino database* (2000-2005) as a case study of net art in Latin America to explore what the broader social appropriations of available technologies in Latin American countries imply about cultural geopolitics. *netart latino database* is by no means a comprehensive survey of Latin American net art, nor is it really a database. Rather, this paper argues that the work's primary function is to draw attention to the missing history of net art within the larger art historical cannon.

The paper first provides an overview of net art as an artistic and social movement. We then question the nature of *netart latino database*; its function as an archive, a database, a work of art, a curatorial project, a collection, etc. We dissect and question what the artwork and the artist suggest through the three components of the work's title, namely, 'net art', 'latino', and 'database'. Lastly, we zoom out to speculate on the future of creative and artistic uses of technology in Latin America, namely, how new media cultures and digital technology influence art from the angle of cultural geopolitics.

This paper draws from essays in the catalog created about the *netart latino database* as well as from other essays by scholars who discuss the art work at length.

Overview: *NALD*, ASCII, and net.art

netart latino database, hereinafter referred to as *NALD*, is a hand-coded text-only website that contains hundreds of links to artworks by Latin American artists. The "database"[1] was conceived by Uruguayan artist, Brian Mackern, in the year 1999 and was actively updated until 2005. Mackern's practice as a developer and designer of digital and hybrid net-based art projects delves into areas defined by "memories and remembrance, urban geographies and affective cartographies, noise, remix, glitch and errors. His work, which is mainly concerned with processes and structures which go across digital and physical environments, explores interface design, soundtoy creations, real time video-data animations, netart, soundart and digital archaeology."[2]

The artwork is a simple single-page website with net.art[3] characteristics typical during early HTML development in the 1990s. The site contains a variety of links to external sites of just about every Latin American net art work that the artist could find. Upon entering the site, the first thing that appears is Mackern's reconstructed version of *Inverted America* (*América Invertida*) (1943), a pen and ink drawing depicting South America upside down, an image that was originally designed by Uruguayan artist and prominent Latin American art theorist, Joaquin Torres Garcia. Each country on the map is labeled with its corresponding two-letter domain name; .pe for Peru, .mx for Mexico, etc. This notation

---

1 As per the artist's wishes, "database" is always in quotes when referring to the *NALD*
2 Brian Mackern, "Artist CV," untitled cv // brian mackern // netart or notart?, accessed May 25, 2021, http://netart.org.uy/brian.html.
3 Bosma describes 'net.art' (with a period) as a specific era of net art that began roughly around 1993/94 through the early 2000s

Francisca Rudolph
ARTHI 4410: Latinx/Latin American Art and Crisis
Spring 2021

references each respective countries' "country code top level domain" (ccTLD) which are most recognizable as the two letters after the last period in a domain name. Each ccTLD on the map links directly to a lower section of the webpage with a list of net artworks that Mackern has identified with each particular country (the user can also scroll down from the map to view these lists in alphabetical order by country). *NALD* also includes links to online discussions, newsletters, and publications meant for further user engagement.

Mackern claims to have had two premises for creating the *NALD*: to "map specific creative projects on the Internet in the Latin American context" and to create "a response to the late yet powerful rise of the academic discourse on net.art and its incipient history".[4] *NALD* was also in many ways a response to the fact that it was constantly the same theoretical works of net.art that were featured at the center of net.art circles. There were the icons that "first, best and most intelligently constructed the legend of net.art and its artists,"[5] however, Mackern realized that when academia began to hone in on net.art from Latin America, they continued to refer to the same icons and theory instead of reflecting on and furthering the discourse. As internet critic and theorist, Josephine Bosma likes to describe it, the *NALD* "is the history of net art in a Latin American context, which developed almost in complete isolation from the rest of the world, yet in the same timeframe as, for example, European and American net art."[6] It is safe to say that Mackern agrees with this description as he always said that he felt that the work of Latin American net artist was underrepresented and that he felt left out of the net art histories. We will talk about why in the following section.

Before continuing to analyze NALD in greater detail, it is important to establish a basic understanding of its context as a work of net art. American non-profit organization, Rhizome, which included artworks like *netart latino database* in their curatorial project, Net Art Anthology (2016-2019)[7], defines net art straightforwardly as "art that acts on the network, or is acted on by it."[8]

Much like most kinds of media art, net art has been difficult to define because of the differing views regarding how to interprets the interactions between the internet[9] and contemporary art. Net art has certainly been narrowed down to simply art work that takes place on the internet, however, in her book, *Nettitudes* (2011)[10], critic Josephine Bosma argues that net art was never just about work that was experienced on the internet, she rejects that net art can be collapsed to medium specificity, with internet as the medium, because such a definition omits a history, albeit a brief one, of non-digital, non-electronic art (such as Heath Bunting's *Project X*, which involved writing URLs in chalk in public places).

---

4 Brian Mackern, "Netart Latino "Database"," *netart latino database*, trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 146.

5 Ibid, 159.

6 Josephine Bosma, *Nettitudes: Let's Talk Net Art*, Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2011: 117.

7 "Retelling the History of Net Art from the 1980s to the 2010s," Net Art Anthology, accessed May 26, 2021, https://anthology.rhizome.org/.

8 Rhizome. "What Is Net Art? A Working Definition." Rhizome, June 13, 2017. https://rhizome.org/editorial/2017/jun/13/what-is-net-art-a-definition/#:~:text=To%20accommodate%20this%20diversity%20of,by%20institutions%2C%20or%20%22net.

9 I write the word, "internet" in lower case since this paper discusses it as a cultural practice rather than a framework for technological communication.

10 Bosma's *Nettitudes* is one of the most recent critical books that explores the field of net art. The first text in the book attempts to provide an explanation of net art and its misconceptions.

Francisca Rudolph
ARTHI 4410: Latinx/Latin American Art and Crisis
Spring 2021

As Bosma describes it, "the art created in online environments is not separate from the physical world at all...even purely Web- (or other software) based works have very real histories and connections in physical, social, political, and cultural realms..."[11] According to Bosma, net art also concerns work that is inspired by new offline realities inspired by online cultures. Thus, Bosma's definition of net art is art "that is created from an awareness of, or deep involvement, in a world transformed and affected by elaborate technical ensembles, which are, in turn, established or enhanced through the Net."[12]

Artistic Director of Rhizome, Michel Connor, slightly shifts the focus of Bosma's definition toward the impact of the internet on artwork and the larger field in which it circulates.[13] In a 2015 blog post on the Rhizome website, Connor quotes his colleague, Dragan Espenschied, who is the Preservation Director at Rhizome, to highlight the point that digital culture is comprised of practices instead of objects. That is, the internet is more than a technical infrastructure, it is a public space in which different actions can take place.[14] Moreover, the greatest ability of the digital medium is its opportunity for the manipulation of content rather than just its mere reproduction. Art involved in the internet and, for that matter, all digital media art, must live in perpetual adaptation in order to withstand the inevitable decay of the technology that first supported its creation. Speaking in respect to digital art, artist, scholar (and this author's favorite new media theorist), Jon Ippolito, claims that such works can only survive the tests of time through variability; "for digital culture, fixity equals death."[15]

Following this logic, new media artist Gustavo Romano says that "one way of understanding net.art is to see it as performances or actions in the public space – the virtual public space of the Internet"[16] (Romano's work is featured in *NALD*). Therefore, net art is not so much about the internet (what it is), but more about its impacts (what it does). Net art must be seen within the different forms of network culture, which is evidenced by the fact that the *NALD* is actually manifested in three ways: installation, book, and website.

In 2008, the *NALD* was acquired by the Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo (MEIAC), a museum in Badajoz, Spain belonging to the Ministry of Culture, Tourism, and Sports (Consejería de Cultura, Turismo y Deportes) of the Government of Extremadura (Junta de Extremadura). The *NALD* website is currently hosted through the MEIAC servers at the hyperlink, http://meiac.es/latino/index.html[17], where anyone with an internet connection can access it. What is more, Mackern basically transferred the website to a physical book of the same name that was published by the MEIAC in 2010. The book includes essays by Spanish curator, Nilo Casares; Argentinian artist and curator, Gustavo Romano; Lila Pagola; Spanish curator, Laura Baigorri; Giselle Beiguelman; and

---

11 Josephine Bosma, *Nettitudes: Let's Talk Net Art*, Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2011: 122.

12 Josephine Bosma, *Nettitudes: Let's Talk Net Art*, Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2011: 25.

13 Michael Connor, "Notes on a Definition of Net Art Based on What I Remember from a Borrowed Copy of Nettitudes," rhizome.org (Rhizome, July 17, 2015), https://rhizome.org/editorial/2015/jul/17/notes-definition-net-art/.

14 Ibid.

15 Jon Ippolito, "Jon Ippolito: Death by Wall Label," Jon Ippolito | Death by Wall Label (Still Water Mesh, August 21, 2008), http://vectors.usc.edu/thoughtmesh/publish/11.php?collaboration.

16 Gustavo Romano, "Madonna, Water Maps and Botanical Gardens," *netart latino database*, trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 24.

17 Alternatively, one can visit *NALD* at this link http://netart.org.uy/latino/ which (as of 5/5/2021) still hosts it though Mackern's personal artist website.

Francisca Rudolph
ARTHI 4410: Latinx/Latin American Art and Crisis
Spring 2021

Brian Mackern himself. The book, as described by Bosma[18], is "printed on extremely thin paper that is quite difficult to handle" and contains an insert printout of the original *NALD* as it appears online. She describes the insert: "This print out is done on old-fashioned, nearly obsolete dot matrix printer paper, the kind with the little holes along the sides, and connected at the top and bottom of conjoining pages, creating a long paper roll that one could easily get tangled up in."[19] The third format of *NALD* manifests as a physical installation, which I was able to visit at the New Museum during their exhibition called "The Art Happens Here: Net Art's Archival Poetics" in 2019. The *NALD* was presented as a physical object; a dot matrix printer that slowly and repeatedly printed the list of the links included in the website, in the same fashion that was included in the book. Visitors were welcome to interact with the piece by taking home any piece of the print out. For the purposes of this essay, I will primarily be discussing the online version of the *NALD* while supplementing much of the research with the text available in the book format.

Mackern rendered his inverted map of Latin America in the ASCII graphic design technique, a form of text-based visual art. ASCII, which stands for American Standard Code for Information Interchange, is a character encoding standard that uses numeric codes to represent characters. It was first used commercially in the 1960s for telecommunications equipment and was more or less the standard for showing computer text online until 2007 when it was surpassed by UTF-8 encoding. Nonetheless, most modern character-encoding standards are still based on ASCII, they just support additional characters beyond the original 7-bit codes.

ASCII art's popularity is primarily thanks to the fact that it is a lo-fi practice that creates images using only text characters available from a total of 95 characters. Mackern recalls that "ASCII sketches had always been a useful tool for designs in net contexts that operated very slowly."[20] He chose to use this "poor" (low-tech) design resource to create his "database" as a subtle reference to the minimal technological resources and available in Latin America compared to Europe in the early 1990s. Pagola rightly claims that "above all, ASCII rendition of the map is an icon for the artists and audiences attempting to decipher the cultural geopolitics surrounding Latin American net art."[21] Thus, Mackern's ASCII inverted map also speaks to geopolitical concerns; it deliberately reframes the European imperialist perspective on cartographies by resisting the "contours of the continent."[22] We will further discuss the geopolitical implications of the ASCII inverted map in the third section of this paper.

On preserving the memory of context

---

18 I was unable to obtain a physical copy of the book, yet all of the text is available in PDF and all page numbers in citations are based on it: https://www.digitalartarchive.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Virtualart/PDF/301_netart_latino_database.pdf

19 Josephine Bosma, *Nettitudes: Let's Talk Net Art*, Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2011: 121.

20 Brian Mackern, "Netart Latino "Database"," *netart latino database*, trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 155.

21 Lila Pagola, "netart latino database: The inverted map of Latin American net.art," *The Art Happens Here: Net Art Anthology*, New York: Rhizome, 2019: 403.

22 Claire Taylor and Thea Pitman, *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production*, New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013: 45.

Francisca Rudolph
ARTHI 4410: Latinx/Latin American Art and Crisis
Spring 2021

Today, the *NALD* leads to mostly broken and dead links that manifest as 404 errors (unfound sites) or sites with the old domain for sale. Mackern claims that he retains the broken links on the *NALD* as part of his archive to serve as a reminder of what was lost. So many of the links are now broken that the experience of navigating the site can become, as Pagola describes, "frustrating and contradictory, offering more questions than answers."[23] One begins to wonder what the "database" would have been like in its heyday.

The *NALD* was built over the course of about five years. Mackern states that he catalogued works of Latin American net art starting in 1999/2000 until 2004/2005.[24] He describes his selection of content as "partial and arbitrary" yet highly personal as it featured links that interested him both personally and as an artist.[25] In his words, "nearly all of the links were carefully considered and weighed, explored with thoughtful deliberation. They were both my personal Net-surfing recommendations and a mapping of the network in which I was moving at the time, a map of relationships and of works of reflection and collaboration."[26] Mackern also made sure to update any changed URLs during this time, but he did not remove any entries when links became inaccessible.[27] For the most part, *NALD* was compiled by Mackern alone, however, during it's five years of "active life," the "database" included a form (which remains on the page but likely does not function) through which visitors could recommend sites.

Mackern ceased to update the website in 2005 mainly because the advent of web 2.0 on a global scale brought about new arts practitioners. He found that art works were becoming increasingly similar to others. Web 2.0 also blurred the line between what he understood to be concepts of 'netart works' and 'net artists'; much of the work came to revolve around artists who wanted to expand their careers as 'net artists' by merely rehashing old ideas, so Mackern became disinterested in the lack of new ideas.[28] All in all, Mackern realized that "net.art 1.0 had lost its raison d'être, and so had *netart latino 'database'*."[29] After he stopped updating the site, Mackern wanted to keep everything the same, "as a fossil, with a very high percentage of links that give 404 errors or redirect to the 'playgrounds' or 'sandboxes' of design company websites." [30] In this way, the website has become a monument to the ephemerality of Latin American net art, "the 404 errors themselves serving as testament to the barriers these artists faced to sustain their work."

Despite its archival qualities, the *NALD* is more than just an ordinary database; it is far more conceptually-driven. Scholars who have written about *NALD*, including Pagola and Romano, have speculated on its categorization as a curatorial project and as collection, respectively. The crux of the

---

23 Lila Pagola, "netart latino database: the inverted map of Latin American net.art," *netart latino database.* trans. Polisemia. Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 43.

24 Brian Mackern, "Netart Latino "Database"," *netart latino database*, trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 156-57.

25 Ibid, 155.

26 Ibid, 156.

27 Lila Pagola, "netart latino database: The inverted map of Latin American net.art," *The Art Happens Here: Net Art Anthology*, New York: Rhizome, 2019: 403.

28 Brian Mackern, "Netart Latino "Database"," *netart latino database*, trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 162.

29 Ibid, 163.

30 Ibid, 164.

discussion is whether *netart latino database* is, in fact, a work of art, which Mackern subtly nods to through the first line of the *NALD* website: 'netart or notart?'

In her essay featured in the printed version of *NALD*, Pagola compares the "database" to similar projects of the time (*arteuna*, *findelmundo*, and the Digital Media Symposium) that aimed to support local networks in order to question whether *NALD* was solely a curatorial effort or if it was more of an artwork in and of itself. Pagola takes the significance of the 404 errors beyond that of mere archival materials, but as sources that help us consider the larger contexts that shape Latin American net art. She concludes that the categorization of *NALD* as a curatorial project is insufficient; "the NALD is a kind of manifesto by the author, who speaks through the works and 404 errors."[31] Therefore, the significance for net artists who were featured in the project is precisely that what remains on the site today still contains the narrative of what was once there. Moreover, *NALD* "goes beyond the mere intention to temporarily point the way to a series of works for promotion and dissemination in the manner of a museum on the web,"[32] it provides an opportunity for practices, rather than objects, to change in time and space. It is the ultimate instance of net art as it is comprised of the manipulation of content as opposed to its mere reproduction.

It is imperative to point out that most net art, and art that is shared publicly over the web in general, is hardly seen by large groups of people, especially by those who are not part of net art circles. As Bosma puts it, "there is a huge amount of online art that practice that has never made it to the public eye at all, and of which much has disappeared without a trace." In fact, her review of *NALD* in *Nettitutdes* is meant to provide an idea of "how much art has unjustly never found its way amongst the channels, pages and floors of the institutional art world." Mackern's personal intention for starting the *NALD* rings of a similar logic; he wanted to call attention to preserve for posterity a moment of net art in Latin America.

In a way, it could be said that the *NALD's* presence at this point in time (2021) is that of a historical record of net art. After all, Mackern saw that the work of Latin American net artists was underrepresented in the 90s and especially during the net.art movement. He recalls that the creative online communities of net art that facilitated communication among artists were primarily based in North America and Europe, therefore reinforcing a closed discourse of net art that revolved around the "same six or seven examples."[33] More importantly, these online communities often connected offline to share their common knowledge, and thus, by tying their art work to the physical space, further reenforced a sense of belonging to a centralist discourse. However, according to Mackern, the net art communities in Latin America "did not exactly correspond to what the specificity of the Internet paradigmatically proposed: a global approach and the removal of physical borders, the idea of a different, virtual geography."[34] In other words, they sought to create a hybridized geography in which territories were inverted in such a way that there would no longer be a center and peripheries.

31 Lila Pagola, "netart latino database: the inverted map of Latin American net.art," *netart latino database.* trans. Polisemia. Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 44.
32 Lila Pagola, "netart latino database: The inverted map of Latin American net.art," *The Art Happens Here: Net Art Anthology*, New York: Rhizome, 2019: 403.
33 Brian Mackern, "Netart Latino "Database"," *netart latino database*, trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 149.
34 Ibid.

On the one hand, Mackern believed that Latin American net artists did not conform to the medium-specific use of the internet that was part of the central discourse. But on the other hand, one of the most significant problems the Latin American artists faced was that they all mostly worked in isolation and struggled to display a product of their work, since it was inherently ephemeral and process-based. The lack of necessary interaction between net artists working in Latin America was likely due to the vast geographical distance between the many regions as well as a lack of institutional interest in their work. This is all to say that these artists struggled with how to present the true value of all their creative interactions as a result of the absence of a strong social infrastructure.

The *NALD* is evidently a collection of net art that was deliberately curated by an artist. Like a curatorial project, perhaps it is its ephemeral quality (the multiple dead links), which points to each entries' personal memories, that "reveals, in the case of Latin America, the high mortality rate among sites that cannot be maintained due to vital lack of funding, and here we have one of the present functions of the *netart latino database*: to safeguard what was, because some of the sites archives have now disappeared."[35] Reducing the *NALD* to just a piece of the historical record, or a database, or an archive, not only leaves out the networks that are very much in constant flux, but overlooks the new geographies that were being imagined by net artists in Latin America between 2000 and 2005.

The *NALD* presents a context of artists who were experimenting with the alternative mappings of territories that this new technology, the internet, made possible. It illustrates the flaws of some net art and points to the progress that is still to be made. Today, the remains of the project demonstrate that the internet and the ways in which we interact with networks has not progressed much with web 2.0: the contexts created by the internet could in fact come from a colonialist definition, as Giselle Beiguelman points out in her essay, "Memory of the Futures with no Past." She describes the "not-found" responses to clicking on a link in the *NALD* as "unburied corpses" that disturb the experience of "feeling around the nomadic space for the memories that have been unlinked from the past and projected into the future, without going through the present."[36] Essentially, the *NALD* is more a work of art than an archive because it says more about the future than the past (it would also be an insufficient historical record of net art since the links were not dated to indicate when they were added to the "database"). The *NALD* is comfortable with the impossibility of organizing and controlling the pages to which it links, indicating that the large number of dead links are equally as significant as the ones that still exist.[37]

The question of whether *NALD* is an artwork or an archive, while not as important as the message of the work itself, is intriguing. The *NALD* is best described as a work of art because it is not only one artist's story of Latin American net art, but also a strong commentary on the effects of the internet on geopolitics in Latin America. While the book version of *NALD* can be read as a fairly comprehensive history of Latin American net art, the project as a whole is much more. *NALD* has greater conceptual implications for its larger networked practices in Latin America; the manipulation of content (ephemerality of links inherent to net art) blatantly show us the impacts of the internet in Latin

---

35 Nilo Casares, "On 7 January 2009," *netart latino database*, trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 99.
36 Giselle Beiguelman, "Memory of the Futures with no Past," *netart latino database,* trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 174.
37 Ibid, 176.

American public space. As mentioned earlier, net art must be seen within the different forms of network culture so it would be careless to relegate *NALD* as merely an archive.

New art and technology in Latin America

As we have now seen, the networked culture of net art—the relationships that artists have with each other and with the public both online and offline—is central to the practice itself. In this section we explore how the internet and its relevant network cultures influence the cultural geopolitics of art. First, we must look at what net art from Latin America might mean.

Generally speaking, *NALD* makes use of the internet as a creative medium to try to explain what the internet was to future generations. But the work begs the question regarding the purpose of focusing on art originating specifically from Latin America; is net art from Latin America different than net art that originated from other geographical locations? In her contribution to the *NALD* print catalog, Pagola questions what it means for projects to be launched "from" Latin America: does *NALD* suggest a particular Latin American way of existing/acting online?[38]

Clearly, calling it "Latin American" art risks generalizing it as a vast and culturally diverse region and moreover, not all artists included in the *NALD* were working from Latin America nor were they all exclusively "Latino". Does this matter? According to Pagola, all artists included in the "database" are Latino. There is no doubt that defining Latin American identity is problematic, and scholarship on different forms of plastic art continue to deliberate on the subject. However, Laura Baigorri discusses the ineffectiveness of encapsulating a "Latin American" net art in her curatorial text titled "Artistas Latinos Making Global Art." Baigorri argues that, since one key aspect of net art is that it's intrinsically global, then perhaps it's not possible to keep producing discourses around Latin American art at all. So, no matter where the artist was or what language the material was in, when they made their work available online, it was part of the global metaculture of the internet, and is therefore is also Latin American.[39] This is comparable to what Mackern claims he and other net artists in Latin America were trying to construct in the late 90s: a geography without physical borders in which "territories were something entirely new: multiple, parallel, mobile and dynamic. Ubiquitous."[40] It seems that Mackern went to great lengths to avoid publicly defining a 'Latin American net art' in order to forefront the *NALD's* gestures of decontextualization that ultimately allowed for new contexts to be created within its network.

Pagola talks about a phenomenon common in Latin America: the "inaugural phase effect." In the case of the arts, the "inaugural phase effect" is the tendency for Latin American net art to continue repeating various discourses without continuity over time. This is precisely the rehashed discourse revolving around the same examples of net art that Mackern noticed when he began working on the *NALD*. It follows from the inaugural phase effect that technological innovations such as the internet, particularly when it comes to experiences that bridge art and technology, always seem to be "the first of

---

38 Lila Pagola, "netart latino database: the inverted map of Latin American net.art," *netart latino database.* trans. Polisemia. Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 39.

39 Laura Baigorri, "Artistas Latinos Making Global Art," Netart.org.uy, June 2006.

40 Brian Mackern, "Netart Latino "Database"," *netart latino database*, trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 149.

their kind in Latin America."[41] As we have seen in the previous section, this happens in Latin America partly because of the absence of a strong social infrastructure.

Perhaps the most discernable aspect of network culture that influences the geopolitics of 'Latin American net art' is what we refer to today as the 'digital divide.' Early net art groups acknowledged the fact that computer and internet access was not the same across the world so, in attempt to democratize the art world through internet, some projects were specifically designed to function with low bandwidth. High bandwidth websites were and are still considered to be superfluous as they take much too long to load in areas with bad connections. However, Bosma argues that inclusivity via low-bandwidth sites ignored the ways in which "low bandwidth and bad connections affected the *social* environment of artists in other non-Western parts of the world."[42] Possibly accentuated by vast geographic distance as well as its non-academic, underground practice, the fact that net art in Latin America lacked such a crucial social connection meant that many artists worked in isolation. As Mackern recalls, "We were a bit detached from ourselves and engrossed in what the specificity of this new technology and this medium had to offer, with little or no idea of legitimizing what we were doing."[43]

Slow internet connections all over Latin America were not a choice but a reality. Mackern's decision to render his map in ASCII is a subtle reference to the alternative low-tech, compatible, and lightweight technological resources that were most common in the early 2000s. In the United States and Europe, ASCII art was (and arguably remains) associated with a lo-fi aesthetic, however, Mackern argues that the technique has a different meaning in relation to the conditions that shape the Latin American network. To quote Mackern: "is the 'low-tech' made in Europe similar to the 'low-tech' made in Latin America? They seem to be the same, but I think that some 'work' from 'shortage,' while others 'fashion' due to 'oversaturation'...Is this the same thing?"[44] The text-based ASCII map loads much faster than a JPEG or other file format of similar size which made the "database" more accessible to visitors who did not have access to broadband connections. Low-tech solutions are less of an aesthetic choice than a practical constraint for many artists in Latin America. This is a significant difference between the geopolitical North and South contexts. As Biagorri describes it, Latin American artists approach a technological shortage in a craftsman-like way, working hard to find the most aesthetic low-tech solution.[45] Moreover, the dead links are indicative of, as Ippolito describes it, "the twenty-first-century crackdown on shared culture" in which intellectual property laws clash with web 2.0 and ultimately make it extremely difficult for digital preservation (Ippolito calls this "a form of cultural genocide").[46]

41 Lila Pagola, "netart latino database: The inverted map of Latin American net.art," *The Art Happens Here: Net Art Anthology*, New York: Rhizome, 2019: 403.

42 Josephine Bosma, *Nettitudes: Let's Talk Net Art*, Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2011: 119.

43 Brian Mackern, "Netart Latino "Database"," *netart latino database*, trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 150.

44 Brian Mackern, interview by Benjamin Bibas, "Entrevista: Brian Mackern, Net Artista Urugayo: 'El Netart Latinoamericano Existe, Pero No Es Comprendido,'" Tour du monde du web (fluctuat.net, 2003), http://netart.org.uy/interviews/demain.htm.

45 Laura Biagorri, "*netart latino database*: the emotional mapping of the Net.Digalogue with Brian Mackern," *netart latino database,* trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 80-81.

46 Rinehart, Richard, and Jon Ippolito. Re-Collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015.

Thus, the combination of the ASCII map with the dead links spread all over the *NALD* site shows a severely divided past and future of Latin American network cultures.

In her essay, Pagola expands upon the difficult relationship between Latin America and the North. She says the net redefined their relationship by introducing a technological divide in addition to the physical one. As we discussed in the previous section, Mackern states that the "database" "was created to assert "that "our" story must also be told: that we have our own "heroes" and that many of the works touted as pioneering endeavors in other latitudes were also being developed simultaneously by us."[47] Lack of visibility is one thing, but in order for it to be an issue there must have been some sort of stigma in the North against Latin American net art. This problem is outlined beautifully in Gustavo Romano's contribution to the *NALD* book which argues that the theme of Latin America always exoticizes Latin America: "collections of Latin American art are often configured as guided tours through a dangerous and exotic universe. Latino, in this sense, is a word similar to barbarian – an adjective that aims to define a group based on negation, namely "the others". The "others" in America."[48] Unfortunately, attempts to bridge this gap have led to more manipulation of content and appropriation practices as per Romano's discussion on 'othering' that results in the common labelling of artists from the Latin American region as exotic or typical.

Although exoticization has been a prevalent topic of debate among scholars of art of and from Latin America, the subject of network domains has not been discussed at large in this light. On the internet, each country is represented by a country code top level domain (ccTLD). The marketization of ccTLDs could potentially be responsible for the underrepresentation and other effects of the digital divide in Latin America. The practice of using ccTLDs (as used in HTML to indicate the URL of a site) encodes websites within geopolitical contexts and is linked with the practices of mapping since conceptualizing websites as locatable under the logic of domain names enforces the ideological implications of mapping. Thus, *NALD* raises concerns about how the domain name system, which is an important part of internet architecture, uses the ISO (International Organization for Standardization) country codes that are colonial in nature as they favor the Anglocentric in the development of the internet. One example of this is the fact that linguistic choices made when the internet was being developed favored the English language (for example, ASCII is English dominated form of communication). In fact, Anglo-dependency is a characteristic of the internet that affects all non-English speakers,[49] including all artists in NALD (Mackern did his best to upload content to the "database" that was primarily in Spanish and has descriptions in English and some Portuguese).

Mackern's use of the country domain codes on the map also comments on one of the most debated issues in digital culture. This is the issue of establishing national domains in transnational space – the extent to which content online can be designated as belonging to a particular country. This speaks to how national culture can be expressed in online space. It raises debates about the carving out of cyberspace through domain extensions which is arguably a form of 'digital colonialism': "the use of digital technology for political, economic and social domination of another nation or territory."[50] ccTLDs are treated like national resources and domains originally assigned to Latin American nations tend to

47 Brian Mackern, "Netart Latino "Database"," *netart latino database*, trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 159.
48 Gustavo Romano, "Madonna, Water Maps and Botanical Gardens," *netart latino database*, trans. Polisemia, Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 31.
49 Laura Baigorri, "Artistas Latinos Making Global Art," Netart.org.uy, June 2006.

become appropriated by powers like the U.S. to construct new virtual identities outside of their territory. The marketization of domain names plays a role in the ways in which content is funded, sustained, and prioritized. Now that the '.com' era is falling out of fashion; some Caribbean countries have domain handles that are desirable for Big Tech companies in the U.S.; Saint Vincent and the Grenadines operate the '.vc' domain which has been appealing to venture capitalist firms by allowing them to exploit the market with insignificant benefit to Saint Vincent. Thus, the naming system of URLs can easily reproduce claims to globalism and presume the U.S. as the hegemony.

Conclusion

  netart latino database shows a continuous shaping of Latin America through its different network cultures. It is not only a form of cultural experience that is emblematic of the network era,[51] but an indication of nearby digital media futures. By closely observing the social and geopolitical appropriations of new information technology in Latin American countries, the new neo-colonization of digital media becomes more apparent. Mackern's *NALD* directly critiques traditional geographies and the Western representations of Latin America in order to question and expose the assumptions that are built upon past configurations created through the internet.

  Lila Pagola poses an important question about net art in Latin America: "is net.art just another of these exported forms of classification operating on local practices, which have yet to adjust to the true reality and outlook of the world?"[52] While it's not a simple as reducing net art as "just another case" of cultural infiltration, the *NALD* manages to explain what the internet's influence on art was in a vast region located in the periphery of an idealized globalized network. Mackern's *NALD* changed the configuration of countries in online space to challenge the leading digital architecture and politics of geographic space online. He identified on his inverted map a total of thirteen countries in Latin America and included an absurd number of external links to net art works. Thus, he used the power in numbers to show the urgency of a project that flipped the discourse of net art on its head.

  The future of digital media needs more of these works of art that preserve and interpret the different digital networks throughout the world. 2000-2005 were perhaps "the most relevant years for net art in Latin America"[53] and the *NALD* is a testament to a few ways in which digital technology has influenced new media cultures. Digital encoding creates an architecture of oblivion –net art is ephemeral and could disappear at any moment (many artists even thought that it should disappear spontaneously) – and the NALD is no exception. However, the "database" significantly indicates a trace of what has been undone instead of pretending that it was never undone at all (websites usually include a "no cache" command code that deletes the previously accessed version of the site from one's hard drive). By keeping such traces of past versions, we can maintain the same cultural knowledge formats

50 Michael Kwet, "Digital Colonialism: The Evolution of US Empire," Transnational Institute, March 04, 2021. https://longreads.tni.org/digital-colonialism-the-evolution-of-us-empire.
51 Lev Manovich, "Database as Symbolic Form," in *Database Aesthetics – Art in the Age of Information Overflow*, Edited by Victoria Vesna, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007: 39-60.
52 Lila Pagola, "netart latino database: the inverted map of Latin American net.art," *netart latino database.* trans. Polisemia. Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010: 37.
53 Lila Pagola, "netart latino database: The inverted map of Latin American net.art," *The Art Happens Here: Net Art Anthology*, New York: Rhizome, 2019: 403.

Francisca Rudolph
ARTHI 4410: Latinx/Latin American Art and Crisis
Spring 2021

without overriding them with updated versions of history. We need this knowledge in order to interpret the evolution of cultural geopolitics of new digital technology. Where would we be if artists had to start from scratch on a highly vulnerable net in which everything was erased? We would only have the most recent vision of the world but never a reality of its recent past.

Bibliography

Baigorri, Laura. "Artistas Latinos Making Global Art." Netart.org.uy. June 2006. Accessed May 10, 2021. http://netart.org.uy/almga/.

Baigorri, Laura. "netart latino database: the emotional mapping of the Net. Dialogue with Brian Mackern." *netart latino database.* Trans. Polisemia. Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010.

Beiguelman, Giselle. "Memory of the Futures with no Past." *netart latino database.* Trans. Polisemia. Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010.

Bosma, Josephine. *Nettitudes: Let's Talk Net Art*. Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2011.

Casares, Nilo. "On 7 January 2009." *netart latino database.* Trans. Polisemia. Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010.

Connor, Michael. "Notes on a Definition of Net Art Based on What I Remember from a Borrowed Copy of Nettitudes." rhizome.org. Rhizome, July 17, 2015. https://rhizome.org/editorial/2015/jul/17/notes-definition-net-art/.

Droitcour, Brian. "The Perils of Post-Internet Art." ARTnews.com. Art in America, October 29, 2014. https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/features/the-perils-of-post-internet-art-63040/.

Ippolito, Jon. "Jon Ippolito: Death by Wall Label." Jon Ippolito | Death by Wall Label. Still Water Mesh, August 21, 2008. http://vectors.usc.edu/thoughtmesh/publish/11.php?collaboration.

Kwet, Michael. "Digital Colonialism: The Evolution of US Empire." Transnational Institute. March 04, 2021. https://longreads.tni.org/digital-colonialism-the-evolution-of-us-empire.

Mackern, Brian. "Artist CV." untitled cv // brian mackern // netart or notart? http://netart.org.uy/brian.html.

Mackern, Brian. "Entrevista: Brian Mackern, Net Artista Urugayo: 'El Netart Latinoamericano Existe, Pero No Es Comprendido.'" By Benjamin Bibas. Tour du monde du web. fluctuat.net, 2003. http://netart.org.uy/interviews/demain.htm.

Manovich, Lev. "Database as Symbolic Form." In *Database Aesthetics – Art in the Age of Information Overflow,* edited by Victoria Vesna. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Pagola, Lila. "netart latino database: The inverted map of Latin American net.art." *The Art Happens Here: Net Art Anthology*. New York: Rhizome, 2019.

Francisca Rudolph
ARTHI 4410: Latinx/Latin American Art and Crisis
Spring 2021

Pagola, Lila. "*netart latino database.*" Trans. Polisemia. Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010.

"Retelling the History of Net Art from the 1980s to the 2010s." Net Art Anthology. Accessed May 26, 2021. https://anthology.rhizome.org/.

Rhizome. "What Is Net Art? A Working Definition." Rhizome, June 13, 2017. https://rhizome.org/editorial/2017/jun/13/what-is-net-art-a-definition/#:~:text=To %20accommodate%20this%20diversity%20of,by%20institutions%2C%20or%20%22net.

Rinehart, Richard, and Jon Ippolito. Re-Collection: Art, New Media, and Social Memory, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2015.

Romano, Gustavo. "Madonna, Water Maps and Botanical Gardens." *netart latino database.* Trans. Polisemia. Badajoz: Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, 2010.

Taylor, Claire, and Thea Pitman. *Latin American Identity in Online Cultural Production*. New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2013.