

# Table of Contents

Beyond the Big Boys . . . . . 1



# Beyond the Big Boys

ByMute Editor

Net.artist Jess Loseby celebrates the greener pastures of the thriving net.art, net.sound and net.criticism aggregator Furtherfield

Digital artists, together with net nomads and net junkies, habitually spend time searching for art platforms for works often created in an atmosphere of solitary obsession. Traditionally, the American net.art 'big boys' have built and occupied such spaces. Despite the apparently unifying anonymity of the net, to use these hubs it is advisable to be vocal, adversarial, preferably from NY, and male.

Sometimes called the British Alternative, the UK organisation Furtherfield [[www.furtherfield.org](http://www.furtherfield.org)] presents a different net model. I discovered Furtherfield in 2002 and, after practicing as a net artist for some time in a medium that both stimulates and isolates, Furtherfield sent me the overwhelming message that my work was appreciated. Shortly afterwards, I attended one of the (now annual) Furtherfield Networking Parties and learnt that my experience was not unique. During a happy riot (beer, cheese and an obscene number of laptops), I met with the many artists, writers and creatives from inside and outside the UK who had chosen not to 'play with the big boys' but to look for an alternative.

Furtherfield was founded in 1997 by artists Marc Garrett and Ruth Catlow and is a London-based, non-profit organisation. Their aim is to investigate 'new social contexts that transcend the digital.' Furtherfield delights in its rebellion against closed doors, whether they are institutionally, financially or culturally shut. As part of this project, redefining the traditional roles of artists, curators and organisations is fundamental. Beyond the visions of Marc and Ruth, the wider team is integral to its development. Faces include 'web gurus' Neil Jenkins, Chris Webb, Adrian Eaton and Lisa Skuret with 'satellite' members Charlotte Frost (Further.txt editor), Ryan Griffis and Lewis LaCook contributing informed and influential reviews, and Roger Mills now editing the FurtherNoise music and sound art section.

Visiting [furtherfield.org](http://furtherfield.org) you are invited to view a broad range of artworks. There are no dinosaurs of net.art here, but you may notice a different shared characteristic. Furtherfield-hosted projects are often emotional, 'naughty' or playful. Artists at all stages in their development are encouraged to launch new projects and contribute to the site. Daily updated listings announce opportunities and articles. The main areas of the website comprise the artists' projects supported by it, as well as content produced for Furtherfield, such as (often collaborative) art, reviews, discussions and comprehensive links. The site itself is expanding quickly and the ongoing struggle is to keep the website current and in line with Furtherfield's increasing ambitions. Just some of these presently in development include an artist multi-blog (NetBehaviour), Web Arts TV, streaming high bandwidth live art to a network of global public venues (NonTVTV) and a collaborative mobile medialab aimed at providing women with more opportunities to learn new technology.

In 2003 I had enormous fun becoming the first of three (virtual) artists-in-residence at FurtherStudio. Alongside the Artists' Studios is the Visitor's Studio which allows multiple users to upload, mix and play with sources online and in real-time. Furtherfield (not satisfied with providing opportunities to only three artists) are currently looking to expand these studios into open, virtual spaces. Here, internationally-based artists will be able to work live online whilst visitors drop in and out of screen-captured desktops.

Perhaps the quality that separates Furtherfield from the many creative nodes on the web is its recognition that artist and artworks are not separate, consumable entities. Their style of supporting artists inspires the creation of experimental art; artists are facilitated not through the establishment of lifeless structures (over which they compete) but the provision of networked lifelines. Stable islands from which artists can look around, gather together and jump back into the datastreams...

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