

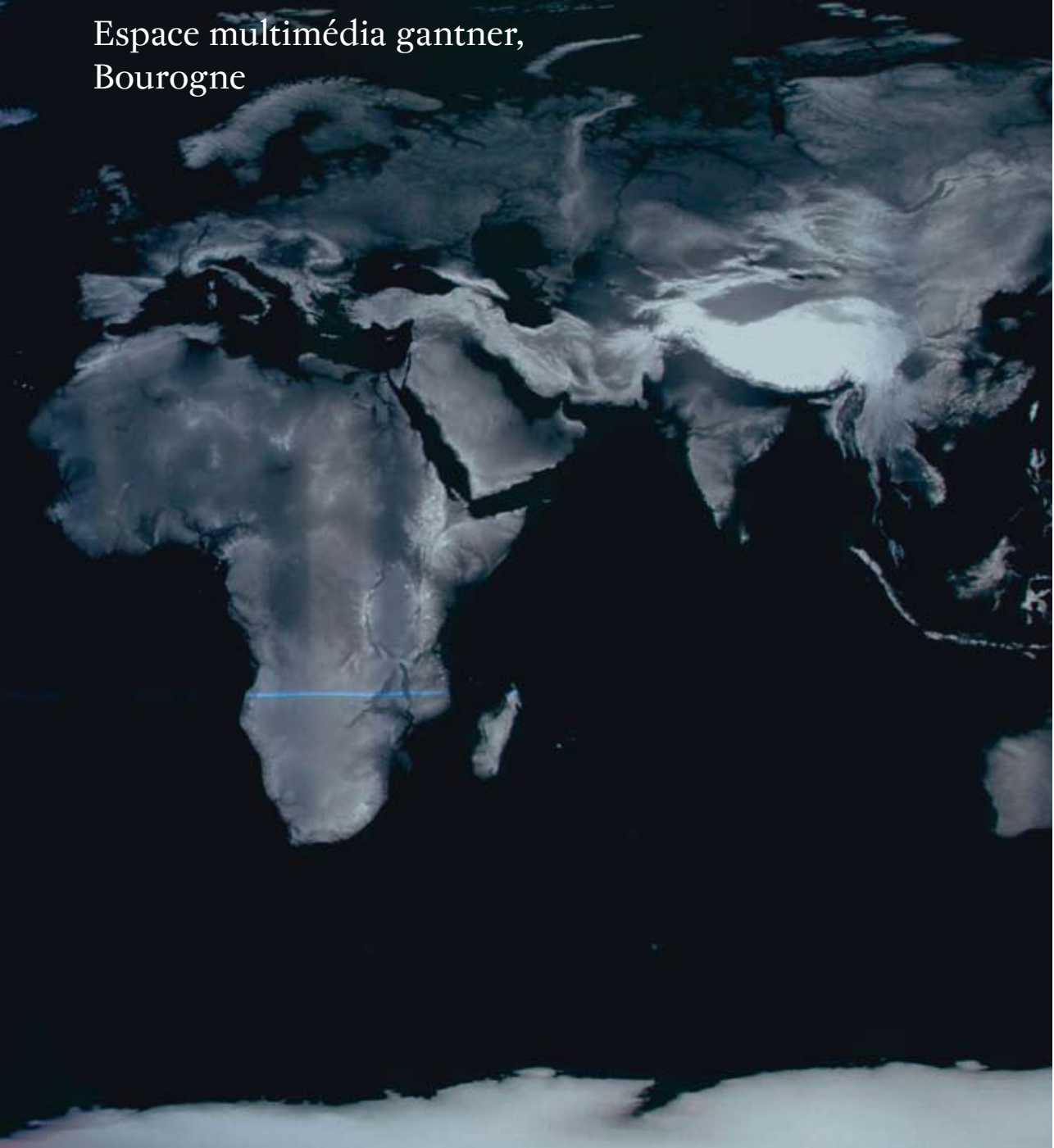
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SEMAINE 32.II

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# *Art of Failure* **TOPOLOGIES**

Espace multimédia gantner,  
Bourogne





COUVERTURE ET QUATRIÈME DE COUVERTURE / COVER AND BACK COVER

*Earth To Signal*, 2011,  
impression sur textile et pointeur lumineux motorisé –  
printed on textile and motorized light pointer.

CI-DESSUS / ABOVE

*Earth to Disk*, 2008-2011,  
disques vinyles – vinyl disks.

Exposition – Exhibition  
09.07 – 18.09.2011  
*Art Of Failure, TOPOLOGIES*  
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1 rue de la Varonne, 90140 Bourgogne.  
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Du mardi au samedi, 14h-18h –  
Tuesday to Saturday, 2-6 pm.

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Art of Failure  
(Nicolas Maigret &  
Nicolas Montgermont)  
<http://artoffailure.org>  
<http://laps.artoffailure.org>  
<http://infinitemstreamloop.net>

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FR

L'exposition TOPOLOGIES rassemble des travaux du collectif Art of Failure (Nicolas Maigret & Nicolas Montgermont) autour des questions de représentations sensibles des données numériques. Les pièces présentées explorent les connexions entre notre espace concret et les espaces immatériels de l'information. La série de projets *Laps* scrute les vibrations internes du réseau de communication mondiale à la manière d'une analyse sismique. Elle propose ainsi une perception de l'espace numérique et intangible propre au réseau Internet. La série *Flat Earth Society* navigue au cœur des données cartographiques globales, et propose une expérience sonore des reliefs terrestres.

EN

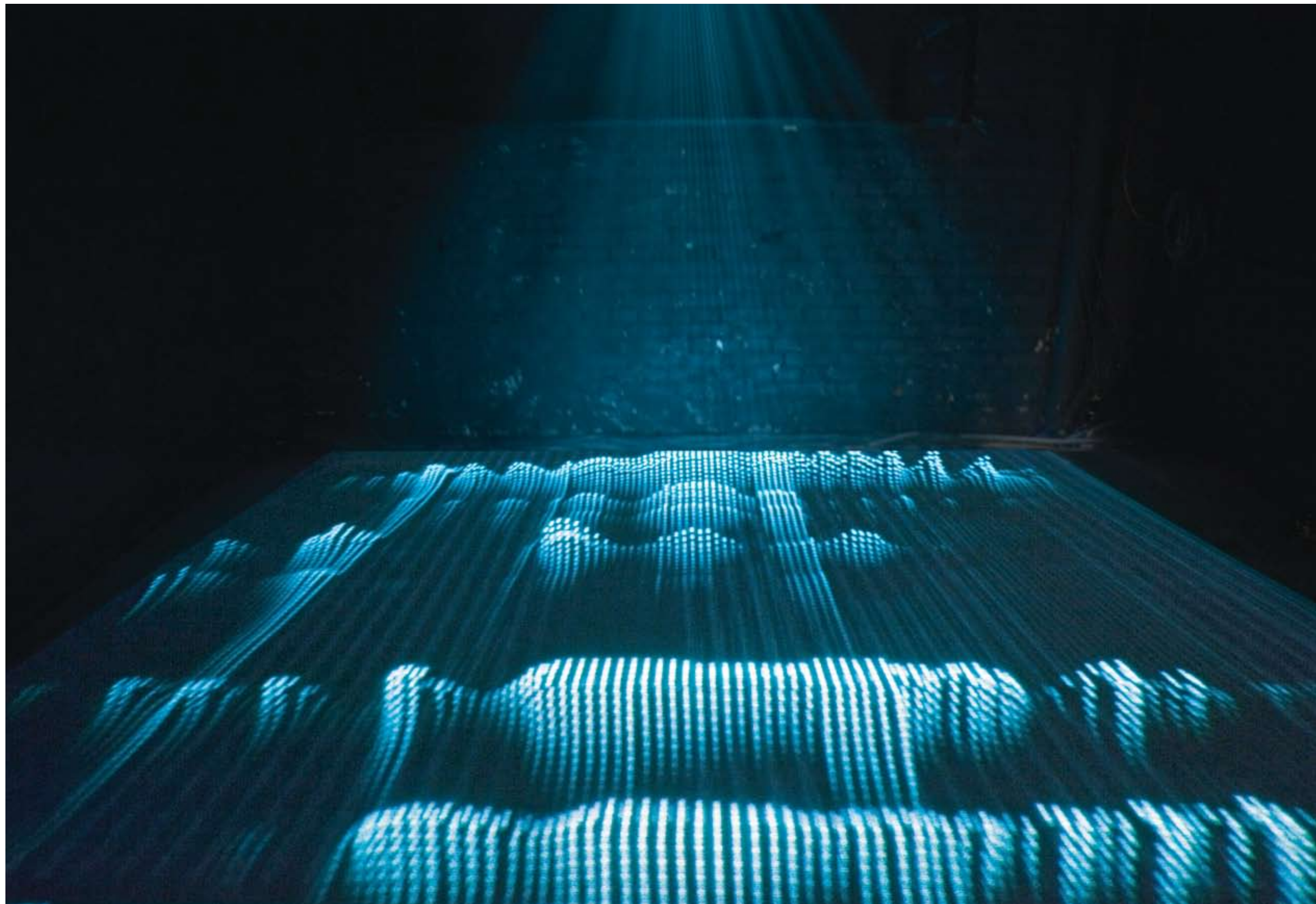
The exhibition TOPOLOGIES brings together works produced by the Art of Failure collective (Nicolas Maigret & Nicolas Montgermont) dealing with issues of perceptible representations of digital data. The pieces on view explore the connections between our concrete space and the immaterial spaces of information. The series of *Laps* projects takes a close look at the internal vibrations of the worldwide communication network in the manner of a seismic analysis. It thus proposes a perception of the digital and intangible space peculiar to the Internet network. The *Flat Earth Society* series surfs at the heart of global cartographic data and offers an acoustic experience of terrestrial reliefs.

Semaine n° 281  
Revue hebdomadaire  
pour l'art contemporain.  
Vendredi – Friday 12.08.2011  
Publié et diffusé par –  
published and diffused by  
Analogues, maison d'édition  
pour l'art contemporain.  
67, rue du Quatre-Septembre,  
13200 Arles, France.  
Tél. +33 (0)9 54 88 85 67  
[www.analogues.fr](http://www.analogues.fr)

Directrice de la publication –  
Publishing Director  
Gwénola Ménou  
Graphisme – Graphic design  
Alt studio, Bruxelles  
Corrections  
Pierre-Marie Prugnard  
Traductions – Translations  
Lucie Perineau  
Photogravure – Photoengraving  
Terre Neuve, Arles  
Impression  
XL Print, Saint-Étienne  
Papier – Paper  
Claro Silk 130 g/m<sup>2</sup>  
Crédits photos – Photographic credits  
Samuel Carnovali

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Abonnement annuel – Annual subscription  
3 volumes, 52,80 €  
Prix unitaire – price per issue 4 €  
Dépôt légal août 2011  
Issn 1766-6465





## SOUNDS OF THE EARTH: THE ART OF FAILURE.

Can we hear the earth? Not the sounds occurring upon it but the earth on a geophysical scale? Apart from an occasional Krakatoa, the longest sounds only travel locally, and attempts to find a good place to listen to the whole earth at once quickly end up in the vacuum of outer space where no sound can occur.

It is clearly impossible to hear the earth without technology. Unfortunately, communications technologies have served to annihilate space and time with the speed of transmission, to enable people to talk in an entirely social world, not to hear the space and time of the earth. We now belong to global internet communities with no natural habitat, where landscapes traversed in the routes of our messages are engulfed in the collapse of channels, repressed for an illusion that communication is immediate and instantaneous.

Fortunately, there are technological and artistic means to sense the magnitude of the earth and counteract this repression. The "hill-and-dale" technique was used in Edison's phonograph, recording sound with a stylus that vertically cut a minute landscape into the grooves of the cylinder. Styluses need not be material and haptic; lasers now read surfaces of compact discs and radar topography scans the earth from space orbit to make detailed elevated maps.

*Earth to Disk* is a beautiful art work by Nicolas Maigret and Nicolas Montgermont, aka, The Art of Failure. It takes readings from the stylus of topographic radar, cuts them into

vinyl and then plays them back with a stylus. Phonographic hills-and-dales grow into the Alps, Andes, Himalayas, Grand Canyon, Great Steppe, Great Rift Valley, Great Outback and the Lesser Antilles. Where Enrico Caruso and Nellie Melba once sang one hears the Baja Peninsula, Antarctic Peninsula, and the bathymetric pauses of the Red Sea and Baffin Bay.

*Earth to Disk* belongs to The Art of Failure's series *Flat Earth Society*. Most societies live on an oblate sphere, but few people inhabit a flat earth resembling a rather large LP record. Earth to Disk might serve as their anthem, but their earth has only one side, lest they fall from the darkness of the B-side. It spins on an axis of their imagination and has a circumference of ice that blocks them from falling off into space. Obviously, melting polar ice threatens their existence. Earth to Disk, in contrast, has its axes at the poles, with the equator at each circumference. Neither hemisphere has weather and its only settlements are dust.

*Earth to Signal* functions like a compact disc, using a laser as a stylus, scanning across the earth reading elevation in the gradations of a grey scale. The stylus does not drag across the surface but orbits and touches electromagnetically from a distance like topographic radar. It does not circumnavigate a blue marble but instead hurries across a darkened, mythical planet, a C-side with no weather, no societies with nighttime lights shining back upon the stylus. Actual topographic radar creates mythical places too. Missing pixels in the map generate spikes and wells among the hills and dales; in other words, errors do not produce an absence of landscape, only a different type. Peaks and valleys, spikes and wells, spires and troughs, aspirations and depressions, all have their gradations in mythical and actual landscapes.

Whereas Maigret and Montgermont's *Flat Earth Society* uses the sound of the earth on

map-sized models inscribed in vinyl or drawn across a grey scale, and presume a virtual position in outer space, the various versions of *Laps* use signals transmitted terrestrially at the actual scale of the earth. We have moved from recording to transmission.

Because electromagnetic waves approach the speed of light, they move too quickly for us to perceive them as the activity they are. Most signals seem to establish a state, like the sun's saturation of daytime, or occur instantaneously at the very moment we perceive them, like stars at night, rather than occupying real distance and time, the eight-and-a-half minutes it takes sun light to arrive, the eight-and-a-half years it takes light from Sirius, a close star, to arrive.

In fact, our hearing is faster than the speed of light at the magnitude of the earth. Space is reformed by an inability to completely annihilate time. One lap around the equator (134 milliseconds) approaches normal auditory detection, especially to the precise timing of a musician's trained ear. But no signal will ever travel that quickly since there is, thankfully, no vacuum along the length of the equator. Signals on the internet travel more slowly still. They are hybrid forms of energy and information that would enjoy traveling at the speed of light, but they are slowed as they pass through different materials, media, switches, circuitry and the computational procedures of devices. Thus delayed, their effects are easier to hear.

Nicolas Maigret and Nicolas Montgermont use this breach-in-an-instant, these millisecond lapses in time, within which to listen the earth and construct an energetic landscape of communication. This is similar to the liminal dimensions of Marcel Duchamp's *inframince*; yet for him it was conceptual whereas for Maigret and Montgermont it is actual and can be experienced. These lapses of time are a form of recording,

which itself is nothing more than delayed energy; applied to light, this is what Duchamp meant by "delay in glass." There is a delay in the glass of the optical fiber running under the length and breadth of the world's oceans.

They send neutral and silent signals out to distant places and listen to the raw signal returning. No signals on the internet travel in direct lines to there-and-back, they globetrot indeterminately through a distributed array of nodes. As hybrid forms of energy and information, signals make their broken-up trips electromagnetically and procedurally. They travel with their ultimate address on-board, but pick up and carry the baggage of other addresses along the way.

This signal entourage also suffers obstruction of energy spikes and drop-offs into wells of background noise and accumulates more baggage of error correction and redundancy to give the impression that nothing untoward has happened. What we hear are idealized versions of the bloated, burdened and distracted journey that has actually transpired. By suppressing the means by which errors and other data are suppressed, The Art of Failure both suppresses idealization and hears the journey.

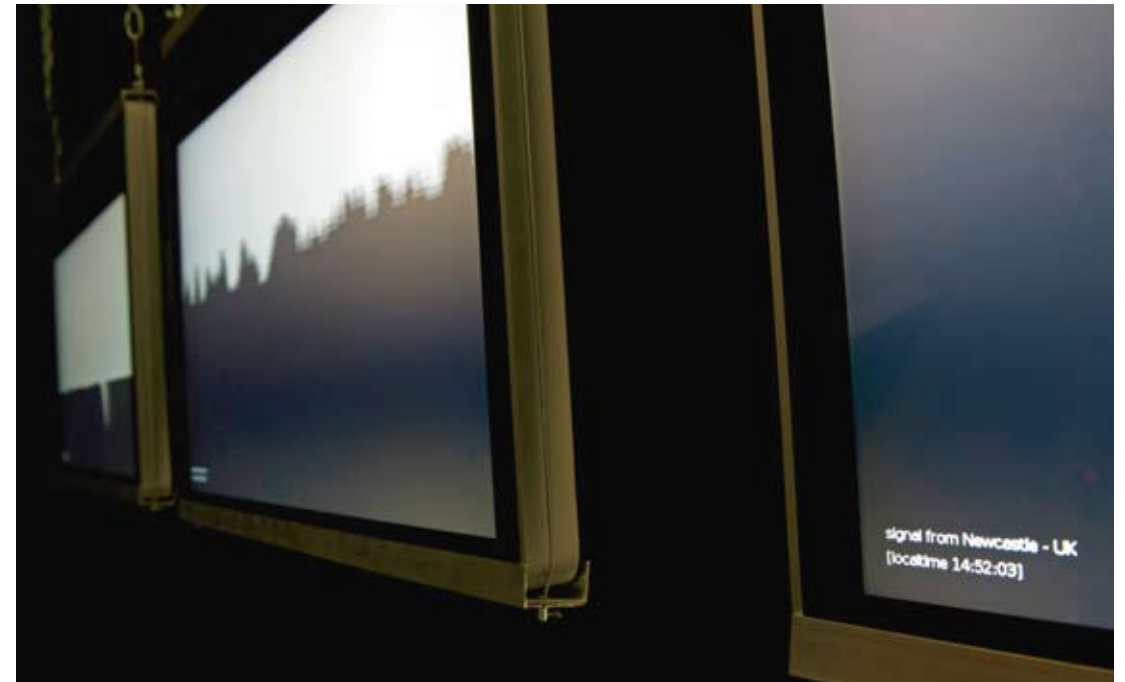
At the myriad of nodes through which they are routed, signals compete with one another in queues and become momentarily delayed. These lapses in LAPS are a form of dynamic memory, a trace record of the competition among signals, that is, internet usage, that builds up among all the separate transmissions as signals make their way around the earth. In this way, unlike the depopulated Flat Earth Society, some disturbances heard are social.

In this way Maigret and Montgermont offer us what I call transperception, an apperception, a conscious or intrinsic awareness, of all that has been traversed. This is not mediation.

We conceive of mediation from a position outside the message, much as we conceive of the entirety of the earth from the vacuum of outer space; whereas we transperceive modulated forces foreshortened from within the experience. We can sense from where waves crash upon us by what they carry.

But they go one step further in certain versions of *Laps*; they take these electromagnetic and acoustical waves that carry the magnitude of the earth and the social activity strewn over it and transect them so we can see a landscape of energetic disturbances. Where normal procedures reconstitute an idealized image, Maigret and Montgermont take what others consider erosion of an ideal and used it for earth formation. In this way they have made an art of failure.

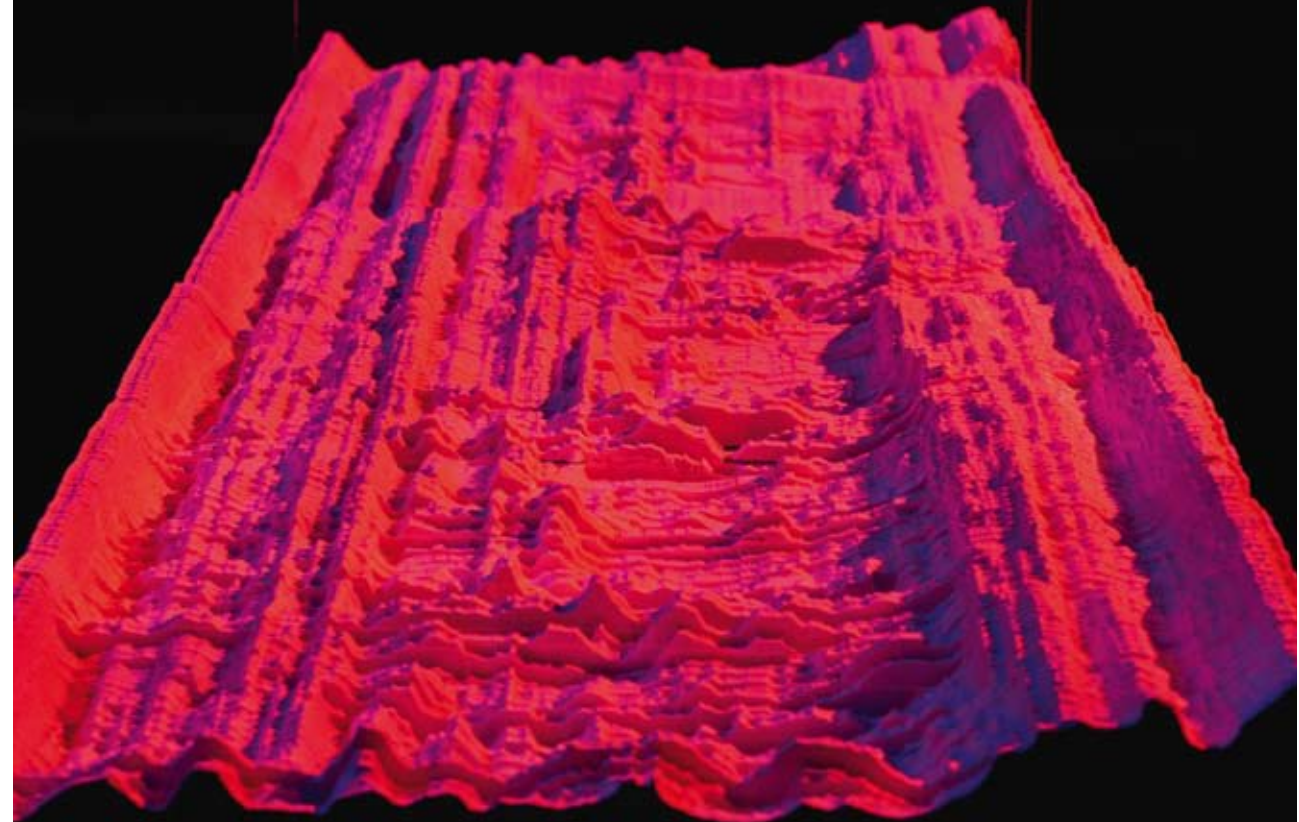
DOUGLAS KAHN



*Internet Encephalography*, Paris, Tokyo, Newcastle, 2011,  
installation audiovisuelle en réseau –  
networked audiovisual installation.

01.07.11\_09:06  
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01.07.11\_08:48  
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01.07.11\_03:36  
01.07.11\_03:30  
01.07.11\_03:24  
01.07.11\_03:18  
01.07.11\_03:12



CI-CONTRE / OPPOSITE

*Internet Erosion*, 01.07.2011, 2011,  
sculpture sur labelite – sculpture on labelite.  
*Infinite-Stream-Loop*, 2010-2011,  
stream mp3, site Web – stream mp3, website.

*Infinite-Stream-Loop*, 2010-2011,  
stream mp3, site Web – stream mp3, website.

