

## Critical Perspectives on Artistic Web Browsers

Deadline: Oct 15, 2025

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The appearance of the Internet is largely determined by the browser display. A web browser is a client program that uses the Hypertext Transfer Protocol (HTTP) to initiate the transfer of files from WWW servers on the instructions of users. This intermediary activity is supplemented by a function for displaying the HTML code of the requested files. This representation of the code on the monitor is the interface between the Internet and its users. Since the introduction of the first graphical browser “Mosaic 1.0.3” on January 27, 1994, commercial browsers have varied somewhat in their interpretation of web content. However, they all remain committed to the page metaphor. As long as all browsers largely agree on the conventions for the processing of HTML code, an illusion of solidity or permanence of the web structure is evoked. The content is generated according to this expectation. But what if a browser interprets these instructions differently than intended? Perhaps radically differently?

Since the mid-1990s, artists have been working creatively with the typical design elements, structures, and functions of Internet browsers in their own software applications. These art browsers develop alternatives to the established metaphors, set different priorities, deconstruct or reorganize the infrastructure as an interface to the World Wide Web. They not only offer new modes of presentation but often add new functionalities and therefore encourage the scrutinizing and rethinking of existing categorizations.

In short, web browsers are not neutral tools—they shape how we access, structure, and understand the World Wide Web. In the field of digital art, artists have taken this insight literally, crafting browsers not just as vehicles for content but as aesthetic and critical objects in their own right. This edited volume brings together theoretical investigations into these artistic browsers, alongside broader inquiries into the cultural, technological, and epistemological implications of the web browser itself.

### Call

We invite contributions that offer in-depth theoretical perspectives on the web browser, both in its everyday form and as reimagined in artistic practices. The volume is especially interested in artistic browsers (including browser extensions and bookmarklets) as sites of experimentation, resistance, critique, and speculation, and in how they might challenge dominant modes of navigating and perceiving digital space.

We welcome proposals from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including but not limited to:

- Art history and visual studies
- History of science and technology

- Software and platform studies
- Media and cultural studies
- Internet studies
- Human-computer interaction
- Science and technology studies (STS)
- Critical code studies
- Sociology and anthropology of technology
- Aesthetics and philosophy of technology

Possible themes and questions include:

- What epistemic, aesthetic, and power-related assumptions are embedded in mainstream browsers?
- How do artistic browsers reframe or subvert these assumptions?
- In what ways do these works engage with questions of agency, surveillance, empowerment, interface, and interaction?
- What expressive format is a functional software like a web browser?
- How can we analyze the browser not only as a tool but as a cultural and technological artifact?
- What internet(s) do different web browsers show their users?
- What is happening to web browsing in the age of platformism?
- What critical or archival methods are suited to document and study artistic browsers, given their frequent obsolescence or reliance on unstable infrastructures?

We are particularly interested in contributions that propose new concepts, frameworks, or approaches. Contributions may focus on individual works, historical developments, technical dimensions, or broader theoretical questions.

#### Context

This volume is part of the research project “Coded Secrets: Artistic Interventions Hidden in the Digital Fabric” at Karlsruhe Institute of Technology, Germany. It will complement an oral history book on web browsers as well as a comprehensive volume presenting approx. 200 artistic web browsers and browser extensions, some of which are featured in the exhibition “Choose Your Filter! Browser Art since the Beginnings of the World Wide Web” at ZKM | Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe (Feb-Aug 2025).

Publication schedule: Please send an extended abstract (600–700 words) and a short bio (100–200 words) to [inge.hinterwaldner-AT-kit.edu](mailto:inge.hinterwaldner-AT-kit.edu) and [daniela.hoenigsberg-AT-kit.edu](mailto:daniela.hoenigsberg-AT-kit.edu) by October 15, 2025. Notice is sent by November 5, 2025 and full chapters (approx. 5000-7000 words) will be due by January 15, 2026. The critical reader will be double-blind peer reviewed and edited by Inge Hinterwaldner and Daniela Hönigsberg.

#### Reference:

CFP: Critical Perspectives on Artistic Web Browsers. In: ArtHist.net, Jul 13, 2025 (accessed Jul 15, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/50355>>.