

For the third year, the curators **Dimitrina Sevova, Alain Kessi and Emil Miraztchiev** together with the **ArtToday Foundation, Plovdiv** present

Communication Front 2001, Plovdiv, Bulgaria

/project of electronic and media art and theory/

At the Center for Contemporary Art in the Ancient Bath, Plovdiv and the ArtToday Lab, Plovdiv

From 1 to 14 June 2001

Under the title: **Cyber and my sp@ce – Netizens and the new geography**

General background on CFront

CFront 2001 <<http://www.cfront.org>> is the third edition of the curatorial project Communication Front and, like the two previous years, is an international event oriented towards the production of works and analyses on a concrete topic, chosen to be directly relevant to the concrete situation of the Internet and media art and culture community, raising critical questions of immediate concern to that community. This year, we chose to focus on the relation between cyberspace and physical space and the ways new communication technologies structure one and the other, and specifically how they influence the art and culture community.

CFront is a platform consisting of three approaches, a Theoretical Meeting for developing ideas relating to the development of new media and cultural politics in the region, a Working Seminar for producing a Web site presenting and developing further the results of the discussions in the Theoretical Meeting in the form of texts and art-works inspired by the discussions, and an exhibition closely linked to the topic of the Theoretical Meeting.

CFront purposely avoids having festival or conference character, taking a critical stance to what Tapio Makela, Susanna Paasonen (both Finland) and Steve Bradley (USA) have called "media tourist" (<http://www.idea.org.uk/cfront/workshop/tourist/index.html>), namely "experts" travelling from town to town, from country to country, to present one and the same lecture to different audiences. As opposed to this, CFront includes the participants in a work process, in which new ideas and analyses, and Web-oriented works, are developed in collaboration. The concrete contacts between the participants over the period of two weeks allow us to build on the experience of each and on the results of previous projects and networking efforts, and to prepare the way for further networked activities and bring important discussions a step forward.

The discourses and ideas developed in the context of CFront are closely linked to a continuous international process. While being firmly anchored in the reality of Bulgarian and South-East European electronic and media art and theory, the project is tightly embedded in the European and world-wide media culture environment. CFront stands in a line of international projects with similar working and networking character, like Geert Lovink's temp.media.lab in Helsinki, with the working meeting "The Future State of Balkania" (October 1999, <http://www.savanne.ch/balkania>), or his Hybrid WorkSpace, which took place during the Documenta X (1997) in Kassel, the MoneyNations project that started in December 1998 at Shedhalle in Zurich (<http://www.moneynations.ch/>) and then developed into several working meetings in different countries, the series of working seminars and festivals OSTranenie at Bauhaus Dessau (1993-1997), Lina Dzuverovic-Russell's and Lisa Haskel's tech-nicks project at The Lux Gallery, London, that lasted for four weeks in summer 2000 (http://www.noaltgirls.org/tech_nicks), and numerous others. A number of such projects are presented in "The Hybrid Media Lounge" (<http://www.medialounge.net>). Descriptions and reports on projects similar in structure to CFront can be found in the archive of the Syndicate mailing list at <<http://www.v2.nl/mail/v2east/>>.

The Regional Context

Although Western curators and critics, the Art World with a big A, developed some interest in Eastern European artists in the 90ies, this has remained rather limited, and does not easily give these artists opportunities to realize themselves in this context. The net.art and media art community, on the other hand, has developed a broad network of contacts also in Eastern Europe, which has given rise to opportunities for collaborations on a variety of levels. The medium of the Internet and the less institutionalized functioning of the media art community provides opportunities for more even participation of artists, theorists and writers regardless of their geographical location.

To this day, for a large part of the art and culture community in Bulgaria and the region, the access to the international Internet and media art and culture community has remained limited, due to problems of access to technology, but also a lack of knowledge about possible uses of these technologies, and a lack of local context in which to develop ideas and work, and of international contacts to facilitate their integration in ongoing projects.

To overcome these barriers, there is a need for international events like Communication Front in which artists, curators and theorists from Bulgaria, other Balkan countries and the world at large meet and develop common perspectives in concrete collaborative work around current and important problems and questions, with which discussions and ideas on these questions are advanced in an international context of media art and culture and of the information society.

"Cyber and my sp@ce – Netizens and the new geography"

The personal computers, e-mail, World Wide Web can be seen as tools with which to achieve a given set of tasks. More important however for our discussion is that in combination they give rise to what we can call a digital revolution, and open up an entire new social (virtual or cyber) space, with a whole variety of social groups with their respective codes of behavior. The driving forces for the development and structuring of this space are the rising power of technologies, the standardization of communication protocols, including the worldwide spread of English and the Latin alphabet, and the restructuring and decentralization of production and marketing processes by large international companies.

The corporate cyberspace (company Intranets) exerts a powerful pressure on the structuring of the public cyberspace. The rise of e-business, e-advertising and e-services reconfigures fundamentally the virtual geography. Search engines like Altavista have modified their way of sorting search results to give preferential treatment to business companies as compared to the average personal home page. You either pay, or your page becomes less visible.

Can we find, in virtual geography, structures similar to cities, to neighborhoods, or other structures known from physical space? To what extent do the Web communities, consisting of users attracted by commercial portal sites like Yahoo, GMX or MSN/Hotmail with free e-mail and other services, show characteristics similar to those of a city or neighborhood? It may be interesting to note that the digital 'cities' build up around market needs, much like the physical cities of the middle ages.

The term Netizen (from Net & citizen) was introduced back in the mid-70ies, at the time of the first Usenet fora and long before the World Wide Web would give access to the Internet to a broad audience. The Netizens of the time debated the freedom of speech, the development of the Internet and perspectives for the future of communication. In 1980 the MacBride Commission to the UNESCO <<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~rvincent/mcbcon1.htm>>, named after one of the leaders of Netizens, prepared a special report on the future of communication. In the report titled "Many Voices – One World", the commission criticized the unequal access to information, which in practice leaves the countries of the Third World without a voice. The commission demanded a free flow of information.

A large part of the world population (as well as of the Balkan population) are 'PONA' – People of No Account. They have no access to the Net, or if they do, they have insufficient knowledge about it to use it. They form what Olu Oguibe has called the 'digital third world' <<http://camwood.org/springer.htm>> (see also <<http://eserver.org/internet/oguibe/>>). The Internet, in its development, ignores local interrelations and jumps over borders. How will the relations between Netizens and remaining 'PONA' pockets in various locations develop?

If someone from the Balkans, or another 'PONA'-dominated region, has a personal access to the Net, does that automatically make her/him part of the Internet community? How does the lack of a supporting (sub-cultural) environment influence her/his possibilities for contributing to an innovative development of the Internet community?

Robin Bloor extends the meaning of the concept 'PONA' to include people who do have access to and knowledge about the Internet, but who access it through Internet Cafes and other anonymous access providers. A typical example of this case is hackers. How will people escaping identification be considered by other Netizens? How might mechanisms installed to prevent anonymity and activities considered as suspect turn into instruments of censorship that could, among other things, place restrictions on art projects?

In the interactive 'jungle' of cyberspace, on mailing lists such as Syndicate and nettime and a variety of smaller lists, that have formed like global neighborhoods around people with a common interest in media culture and Net practices, important questions about the development of the cultural, artistic and social environment in cyberspace. Such fora provide artists, theorists, writers and others from Eastern Europe with a feeling of community, with a way to interact socially while escaping the structures of the local art scene.

Is there a private space on the Internet? What could private space mean on the Internet at all? Maybe closed chat rooms can be compared to hotel rooms that provide the coziness of a temporary rented 'private' space? How does the illusion of private space, through personalization of public cyberspace pioneered by e-commerce giants like Amazon, affect the relation of people/clients to cyberspace?

Given that the Internet never sleeps and has no opening hours, how does this time regime affect Internet users and the Net community as a whole?

How do people use communication technologies (and thus fill them with "sense" or "meaning"), and how do technologies influence and change people?

The focus of CF01 on space and its structuring allows references to historical discussions of women's movements in the 70ies on relations between the (private) personal and the (public) political spaces. How have the radical changes in recent years, under the influence of new technologies and means of communication, affected the relations between urban space, cyberspace, working space, personal space, as well as, in parallel, the relations between people among themselves and between people and technologies. How do gender relations express themselves on the Internet? What kind of professional and social hierarchies can be found? What is the effect of voyeurist projects breaking the taboo of the personal space? Does the gendered hierarchy between client and service personnel get carried over from physical into cyberspace?

The different parts of CF01

The exhibition "Cyber and my sp@ce"

This year's CFront exhibition presents multimedia installations by women artists. The exhibition opens on 6 June in the downstairs exhibition space of the Mexican House in the Old City of Plovdiv, where the theoretical meeting and working seminar are taking place. It will remain open until 21 June. We hope that by organizing an exhibition of women artists' works in the context of an international project like CFront we can contribute to overcoming the isolation of Bulgarian and South-East European women artists, to creating a context in which they can further develop socially critical art practices, and to legitimizing feminist approaches.

The theoretical meeting

In daily round-table discussions and work in smaller groups (5 hours a day), the participants will develop new ideas on relations between people and technologies and social changes under the influence of new technologies, and texts to be published online and in book form bilingually in English and Bulgarian. The working language for the seminar is English.

The working seminar

Taking up ideas from the round-table discussions, the participants will develop web-based artistic projects (texts, sound, artworks, software) in a common process, while developing at the same time an integrated interface for the web site. The working language of the seminar is English.

The accompanying program of public lectures

In daily evening lectures, the participants will present to a local audience their work and experience in the field of media culture. A special emphasis will be put on discussions after the lecture. The lectures will be in English, with consecutive translation to Bulgarian.

Barbara Konopka's "Binary Man"
(**excerpts**)

Eukasz Ronduda fodz, 21st August 2000

*"Those who make it impossible for unity to develop are the makers of angels."
James Joyce*

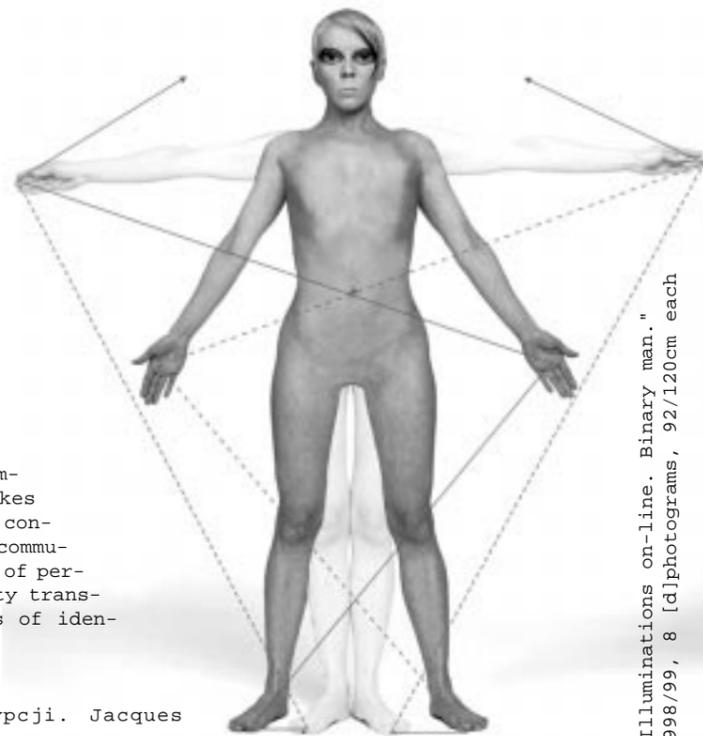
Thanks to the redundancy of the modified version of the portrait, Barbara Konopka shows its mechanism as a stuffy space for the production of a split personality - as the slit between the cognitive subject and its object (which are supposed to be identical in this case) where the "I" is wrought. "[...] Even when the other is only me, me playing the part of another "me" in a double role: of the sender and of the receiver. Between those two roles, between me and the others (even if I am "them" myself), a split appears which makes any completeness of identity quite impossible."*

The abovementioned split becomes the internal space for the ever repeated attempts at constructing the identity of the subject. The real world becomes only an element of the internal psychomachia within this space. The solipsistic relation is the reason why man as a being for himself is not able any more to enter the optimal interpersonal relations. The on-going privatization of society and the separation of man from other people lead him to create his internal space of the superego, where he feels an exile. When Barbara Konopka exorcises the "I" in a multiple portrait she gives up the preroga-

tives of the subject lost in the nuances of its own interior in order to introduce the figure of a binary man in her series of digital photograms called "Illuminations. On-line.". The binary man becomes the material used to form virtual subjectivities in their relation with the exterior, with the other, not with the Identical. Konopka presents the binary man as a double being, empirical and transcendental, made up of two bodies - the physical and the media body. The binary man as a set of analytically atomized physical and mental elements forms the potential for the constitution of subjectivity. It is the frame in whose space osmoses and interphases take place and where ephemeral identities crystallize as the result of contacting any given other. Constant movement, nomadic dismemberment and the location in space makes the binary man a phenomenon which constantly improves and broadens its communicative potential. The possibility of permanent transgression and personality transformation denies thinking in terms of identity-as-foundation.

*M.P. Markowski, "Efekt inskrypcji. Jacques Derrida", p. 396

barbara konopka <konopka@lycos.com>



"Illuminations on-line. Binary man." 1998/99, 8 [d]photograms, 92/120cm each

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Dear Syndicalists,

we would like to invite you to a small Syndicate meeting in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, from 7-9 June.

The community of Internet users at large is continually growing, and the Syndicate family in its turn is building up mass and speed and tradition. In the meantime, the Internet is developing dynamics that are not only due to size. Huge efforts to commercialize the Net, to turn the experience of countless adventurers, hackers, media artists, theorists, into money, are underway. The way we communicate with people who are close to us, and even the very notion of somebody being close, are undergoing considerable transformations under the influence of new technologies, but also new paradigms of social relations that date back to pre-Internet times. The changes in the political systems in Eastern Europe are in part due to these developments, but have also influenced them in return. All over Europe, and in variations throughout the world, we are witnessing deep changes that can be seen to constitute chances, but also create enormous pressures as historically grown power relations have been destabilized and are currently being redefined. A wide range of these questions are regularly discussed on the Syndicate mailing list. The Syndicate family has, since its inception, consisted not only in a mailing list, but also in physical meetings which have had a great importance for the development and identity of the family: Rotterdam (Sept. 96), Liverpool (April 97), Kassel (July 97), Dessau (Nov. 97), Tirana (May 98), Skopje (Oct. 98), and most recently in Budapest (April 99), with many smaller meetings and joint projects, presentations and workshops happening in between. These meetings have been essential in developing, in closer collaboration than is possible online, strategies of resistance and subversion against pressures that tend to limit our choices and freedom.

Since April 1999 in Budapest there has been no proper meeting. Two years is a long time without meetings for the Syndicate.

Communication Front proposes us its hospitality in Plovdiv, Bulgaria, for a small meeting from 7-9 June. Communication Front is an international project of electronic and media art and theory going into its third year, and will take place from 1-14 June. This year's topic is "Cyber and my sp@ce - Netizens and the New Geography". Specific Syndicate questions will be discussed in a shorter, closed-doors Syndicalist meeting in the afternoon of 8 or 9 June. The rest of the three days will be open to all interested people including the participants in the CFront event, for a cultural networking meeting to address some urgent questions. Once again, the Balkan region is at the center of attention, with the recent developments in Macedonia. Similar destabilizations are happening all over Europe. It seems that the Balkans give a stronger echo to these destabilizations, and the pressures escalate into more visible conflicts, which are then attributed to "ethnic" feuds. Once again, the question which role artists and cultural

producers can play in such a situation is posed in a dramatically urgent way.

With the meeting in Plovdiv, we hope to take the discussions started on Syndicate and in other fora a step further and in face-to-face debate, come up with concrete proposals for projects that can develop inter-cultural collaboration. Some wounds are difficult to heal, some will remain for long, and yet we must find ways to deal with each other, to see others as persons and not exclusively as representatives of a community seen as the "enemy" and, building on the Syndicate family, to find common strategies to overcome the "dividing lines of hatred" and break through the isolation.

Below you will find a few excerpts from texts dealing with so-called "ethnic" wars and conflicts, which may serve as an inspiration for the discussions on what is going on in Macedonia and the Balkans at large, and for developing common strategies as artists, theorists and activists networked through the Syndicate mailing list, on how to deal with this and similar situations.

Please contact us at <curators@cfront.org> if you'd like to join the meeting.

With our very best greetings,

Dimitrina Sevova, Alain Kessi & Andreas Broeckmann

It is a collection of essays by Alexander Shurbanov, "The Dream of Reason - Is it easy to be an intellectual?", that called our attention to several texts we find relevant to our Syndicalist discussions. It is a hopeful sign that a book as far-sighted as Alexander Shurbanov's is published in Bulgaria, a book that carefully avoids Balkanizing and treats the question of cultural conflicts broadly, drawing on a wide variety of sources to look at a whole range of conflicts across the world. Some of the texts chosen by Alexander Shurbanov are of lectures presented at the at the WORLD CONFERENCE on CULTURE @ STOCKHOLM (31 March-2 April 1998 <<http://www.klys.se/worldconference/papers/index.htm>>). Following his logic of presenting different conflicts, we have picked a few of those, from Vietnam through Cyprus to Israel/Palestine, and add a few quotes more closely related to the Syndicate discussions at the end. Let Alexander Shurbanov introduce the first source himself:

"I think that Wayne Karlin's introduction to 'The other side of heaven' has something to tell us about our world and about the mission of the intellectual as a "third party" in every conflict. It is a narration about the compilation of an unusual book in which one-time enemies rise above politics, recognize each other as people and come to enjoy the process of working for the common good." (Alexander Shurbanov, "The Dream of Reason - Is it easy to be an intellectual?"; Sofia 1999, p. 42 - in Bulgarian)

"The juxtaposition of that realization with the realization of how much

we liked each other, how much we had in common, how terrible it would have been if we'd succeeded in killing each other, brought us to moments of what I can only describe as a grief so intense that it changed us so we could never again see each other - or ourselves - in the same way. For me, that basic emotional shift became tied to a moment when in a conversation over the breakfast table with Le Minh Khue she found I'd been a helicopter gunner for a time and I found that she, from the time she was fifteen to the time she was nineteen, had been in a North Vietnamese Army Brigade that worked, often under attack from our aircraft, clearing bombs on the Ho Chi Minh Trail. We had become friends by then and at that moment I pictured myself flying above the jungle canopy, transfixed with hate and fear and searching for her in order to shoot her, while she looked up, in hatred and fear also, searching for me - and how it would have been if I had found her then. To waste someone, we called killing in the war, and the word had never seemed more apt. I looked across the table then and saw her face, as if, after twenty years, it was at last emerging from the jungle canopy. She looked across at me and saw the same. It was that look, that sudden mutual seeing of the humanness we held in common - which is of course what all good stories should do - that led to this book." (Wayne Karlin, US writer and Vietnam veteran, Introduction to "The other side of heaven" <<http://www.connix.com/~curbston/OSHINTRO.html>>)

"Living in a country of ethnic conflict means that you have to obey certain rules characterised with the side taking aspect of the conflict. Conflict dictates you to think in terms of categories. You, yourself are in a certain category and what is expected from you is to act within the limits of this certain category. The conflict culture operates with dualistic thinking. This is the either/or approach where you are forced to make the choice. Actually as I told above, you don't even have a choice. Your category is determined from your birth and you have to act and take side with this relevant category that you were put in. When you were socialised to your national identity you were thought to be proud of the aspects of your national identity and you also learned about the other which is less valued and which is the historical enemy. What if you approach the enemy and try to understand the reality through their terms? Some writers and poets in Cyprus have talked about the choice of "both" instead of an either/or approach. But since "both" includes also the enemy, they were named as the agents of the enemy by the supporters of the status quo.

Of course literature has a strong power to deal with these type of problems. If you are a person of literature in a country of conflict the first thing you have to deal with is the language itself. When I say language I don't mean the different languages spoken and the problem of translation etc. but what I mean is the language of your own society where most of the beautiful words are borrowed by the conflict. Where peace becomes the name of war, where victory means the denial of the other's rights and where many innocent words become

associated with some categories of thought and where the words staying at the tip of the iceberg are actually associated with some feelings, interests, values and a certain history underneath. Words lose their original meanings and become identified with some divisions in life. Many words become associated with certain group thinking."

"In a country of conflict it is very difficult to experience democracy. The limits of freedom of expression is the "national cause and interest" which is mainly formulated and dictated by the ones in power. In a country of conflict, you can not have normality. For example in Cyprus we are still in a cease fire situation. This is an excuse for the administrators of both sides to take measures which couldn't be taken in a country which is not experiencing a regular threat of war. There is a call for national unity which actually means going along with the national cause formulated by the decision makers in power. Fighting for a national cause usually means fighting for your own group interest against the other. The concerns and the needs of the other is not included in this formula. It is a situation where one party will win and the other will lose. Here the writer's place may be the place of the third party where concerns of both parties could be taken into consideration.

Politicians analyse the events and fix positions which fits the needs of their own side. The position of the other side is fixed with the same way. But literature does not work with positions and it rather deals with the human needs and experiences underneath these positions. This is the place where you can reach unity. I think many writers of countries of conflict are already playing this role by disconnecting themselves from the side taking and self-centred aspect of the conflict. Somebody may say what if there is a clear victim and this is your own side. I think there is never a definite victim in a situation of conflict. The interaction of victim and the persecutor is a rather complicated issue."

(Neshe Yashin, Cypriot poet and journalist, "The Choice for Both" <http://www.klys.se/worldconference/papers/Neshe_Yashin.htm>.)

"Indeed, we need to work out a kind of art which breaks down stereotypes that existed amongst us in our region. Stereotypes need real brave genuine people to question them and lay them bare. This does not need a hasty flight into love and marriage because it would not be true. It rather needs an objective and deep insight into the human need to survive in dignity, and that this need touches all. A clear sense of equality should prevail as a persisting tone. [...] Culture is the only media which can dig out all the sources for such a society both in the ancient roots and the existing reality." (Izzat Ghazzawi, Palestinian writer and former prisoner of the Israeli authorities, "The role of Culture in Areas of Conflict" <http://www.klys.se/worldconference/papers/Izzat_Ghazzawi.htm>)

Alexander Shurbanov in his essays discusses in depth how history is constructed, and how it is taught in schools on both sides of a conflict, paying special attention to the construction of the "enemy" and the differences in the description of one and the same event in different "histories"

"Superiority is always relative and demands that the other side be discredited. In order to support the claims of one nation that it is civilized, the past, the descent and "character" of its neighbors are declared to be Barbarian. Past events are fabricated, exaggerated or estimated according to anachronistic current standards outside of any historical context and understanding." (Alexander Shurbanov, p. 16)

Vladimir Trendafilov, in his newest column in the Bulgarian weekly "Kultura", intervenes in an explosive discussion provoked by a proper media bomb launched by a populist-nationalist commentary by Alexander Tomov in the Bulgarian daily *Demokracia*, close to government positions. Tomov's article is about "The New Barbarians" (read: the intellectuals, and especially those not in line with the government) who want to destroy the metaphorical City of Democracy.

"Of course, I am not here developing mythological theories about the national individual or character. I am trying to sketch tendencies that have constituted themselves for a long time among the fragmented Bulgarian-language community. These tendencies or constructions, on the basis of a long-time praxis, have sedimented into the system, and if you are not in tune with this system you will rather feel in conflict with it; and conversely, if you share its values, you will benefit to some degree from the comfort of the collective resonance, and will be more understandable and therefore more integrated. And eventually, in case you sympathize with a more principled system of values, chances are that you will act out your person in our social field simply as an alien from outer space.

The traits and constructions sketched above form a colorful tradition that I prefer to call the syndrome of unsuccessful barbarism. I understand "tradition" to be the disorderly system of Bulgarian ethnic self-reflection that has been preserved to this day some relevance in writings and mentality. Even before the Ottoman invasion, that favorite historical period of our historians-nationalists, Bulgaria has always had only a foreign policy and no home-affairs policy. I'm not criticizing, just trying to outline. The main – if not the only – topic of our history is our borders – the movement in that and the other direction across the borders with Byzantium, the loss of borders in the times of the briefer Byzantine and the longer Ottoman slavery, the reestablishment of the borders after the Russo-Turkish war 1878, the movements for enlarging the borders in the direction of Southern Rumelia, Macedonia, Aegaeon Thrace and the unhappy contractions of those borders after a few grim wars. All the rest that is known and emphasized – the Czars, culture, religion, battles, the people, the alphabet, literature, etc. – are variations on that same theme.

It seems that at the roots of this centrifugal deviation stands the long-standing inertia of mentality originating unsurprisingly in the high tiers of our strongly hierarchical social field. Our collective identity, which constituted itself around a lasting inferiority complex, stands out in history from afar and as yet from above – from the complex of the government that has not succeeded in conquer or decisively defeat its more brilliant geopolitical neighbor and has therefore come to imitate him, envying him about everything he has and is. The fate of Bulgarians is thus to some extent analogous to that of the Barbarian tribes that destroyed Rome and in the early Middle Ages regrouped themselves in its already decentralized territories. With two differences. The first is less important, and the second perhaps decisive. Our conflictual contact is, first of all, with Rome Minor, secondary, isolated and lurking, that has regressed to its pre-Roman (i.e., Greek) language-cultural identity. The second difference is that the tribes of new settlers in this case do not end up conquering their Rome, but stay in its periphery. It is the Ottoman invaders that in the end play the role of successful Barbarians. In this line of reasoning the latter turn out to be more local – or more inside – than we are, because they are the activating element of the emotional ferment on the land of the Balkan peninsula. We remain outsiders and even construct ourselves on the sub-state level, in terms of the group, towns and villages or larger family."

(Vladimir Trendafilov, "The Unsuccessful Barbarism"; *Kultura*, Vol. 17, 4 May 2001 <http://www.online.bg/my_html/2178/varvar.htm> – in Bulgarian)

Here's a glimpse of a commentary in the Bulgarian daily press about what's happening in our neighbor country.

"Macedonia is on the brink of a civil war. The killings and violence give rise to vendetta. The streams of refugees go to regions with ethnic dominance among the inhabitants – the Bitolian Albanians seek refuge with their relatives in Western Macedonia, the Macedonians from Tetovo move to Bitol and Strumitsa. Ethnically cleansed zones are appearing, which have been the portents of armed conflicts and civil wars in throughout the history of Yugoslavia's falling apart." (From Krassimir Uzunov, "Macedonia Is Civilian"; in: *Trud*, 5 May 2001, see also <<http://www.focusbg.com>>.)

Let's now continue on in more cozy waters with a few excerpts from Syndicate discussions and interventions.

"I can understand what Misko started in the syndicate list as reporting on the situation, and i don't have

a big problem with it. i think that it's necessary to be involved when such situations occur. what i disagree with is the simple reporting, or the cut and paste from local and international media reports, which we can get in any case, and i tell you that i am simply deleting them from my mail box now. - what i suggest is to see what can we do, Misko, Michael, Eleni, Andreas, everybody that is participating in this posting, to find some common ground where to develop common initiatives that can help towards a longer term goals, of peaceful coexistence, such as the latest posting from Misko was on the pannel being organized in the Harvard school of Law."

(Edi Muka, message to Syndicate on 30 March 2001 <<http://www.v2.nl/mail/v2east/2001/Mar/0350.html>>)

"Let's create peace. Let's rebuild our own region. It coincides with the boundaries of the Balkans. This time on safe ground. Openly face and overpass all hardships. Get acquainted to each other. Maybe for the first time properly. A creative explosion will come from this. Let us conduct a thoughtful reorganization of the Balkans where cultures interact one with another constructing thus a new socio-economic system that will make good use of the existing cultures on our peninsula. Expand the conscience for spiritually and materially prosperous Balkans. Have us use in a good direction the historical conscience of our people. Let us reject the untruth and hatred. Praise the joy of people, praise their peace. Allow for reconciliation of the Balkanian people and settling of their disagreements. Negotiate how to demilitarize, transform. Preserve the cultural heritage of the Balkans. The Balkans are flexible enough to adjust to sociological, economical, and political changes accepting all religious beliefs. Holy places are holy for all. It only makes them more holy if more people regard them as such. Let us surpass the destroyed economy, the end of millennium catasBalkantrophy. In accomplishing this let us try not to harm anyone. Do not work on splitting the region but work on its unity. It's so easy to split and so difficult to unite. But so much worthier. We need wisdom more than courage. We need a constant revolution of the heart. We need a concept of togetherness. We need creative minds with love for the people. We do not need leaders with hunger for power. Nor do we need stubbornness but rather adaptable, power sharing people. Nobody is alien on the Balkans so nobody should be discriminated on issues of nation or faith. Religion is a private affair of the individual. Fear no one and nothing. Let the people of the Balkans determine the faith of the Balkans. If we don't someone else will."

(Melentie Pandilovski, "The Balkans to the Balkanians"; posted to Syndicate on 3 April 1999 <<http://www.savanne.ch/balkania/papers/balkania.html>>)

"On the constantly morphing political map of the Balkans, it is easier than in most other places to visualize how arbitrary the writing and teaching of "history" is, and to draw the conclusion that there are "histories" rather than "history", each written in a time and place and context for a purpose rather than following logically from a sequence of events that intrinsically relate to each other. Each an attempt at designing and molding the past to fit the interests of a ruling class. In a broader context, feminist theorists and historians have shown how official history-writing in the countries of the imperialist center ignore the active role played by women and otherwise works to perpetuate gender stereotypes and impose gendered social roles. Writers and historians from antagonist movements have shown that this same history-writing extensively deals with the interaction between people (men) from the ruling classes while ignoring the struggles of other people against the control mechanisms installed by the former. Similarly, critical historians and activists from countries of the periphery have shown how official history-writing takes on an imperialist perspective, legitimizing colonialist and imperialist control and access to people and resources."

"One of the moments in which the richness of contradictory and subversive potential of Balkan "histories" became apparent was a series of night-long discussions between Luchezar Boyadjiev (from Sofia) and Melentie Pandelovski (from Skopje), with the involvement of Amos Taylor (from the UK, living in Finland) some of the time, at the ISEA 98 (Inter-Society for Electronic Arts) meeting in Manchester/UK in the first week of September 1998, in the context of the temporary media lab Revolving. The two started discussing the respective histories on which the notion of the Bulgarian and the Macedonian nation are constructed. What they found is that the same events were often described with completely different connotation in one or the other historical construct, that the same people were sometimes claimed as part of the respective "nation" by both official histories, and that the histories varied in which stories, events and relations they left unreflected and untold. Each official history builds a narrative in order to create a necessary, a "logical" order between single events. This narrative including its omissions is one of the important building blocks of the concept of "nation:"

(Alain Kessi, "Unstable identities and multiplied histories – a step towards Balkania" <<http://www.savanne.ch/balkania/texts/broken1.html>>)

"From my experience of many artists that I have met, including many cyber ones also, is that they are much more concerned on how cool they look externally rather than daring to declare open direct, creative action against institutional control. There are a few exceptions. A lot of artists have gone through the process of being pruned and directed, given ideas by institutions on how they should behave in an idealized, art world. A lot of artists are quite happily, isolated in their studios, trapped by their computers & ignore dealing with fundamental issues of the world. The usual problem is that loads of these supposed artists hide behind the medium & have no message to say at all. The way round this for many strategical, denial orientated artists is to say that there is nothing worth while saying anymore, which is part of the decadent & facile american x generation sheen that issued 'irony beyond intention'. Art has never saved lives, people have."

"So all you artists who hide behind the institutional, lazy agendas of cultural complicity. I dare you to become real for once and re-invent who you have been informed you are & become part of the world actively. Any little creative gesture helps towards the liberation of our mediated souls. All oppression should be challenged—now!"

(Marc Garrett of furtherfield.org, message to Syndicate on 29 March 2001 <<http://www.v2.nl/mail/v2east/2001/Jan/0685.html>>)

"In 1942, during his American exile, the German writer Carl Zuckmayer writes the theatre play *Des Teufels General*, *The Devil's General*. The central figure, Harras, is a German airforce general who comes to resist the Nazi order and eventually kills himself at the end of the play. In one scene, Harras is talking to a young SS officer from the Rhineland, who is very proud of his pure Arian family tree. Harras laughs at him and says:

'Imagine all the things that can happen in an old family. And especially in one from the Rhine, of all places. From the Rhine. From the big grinder of populations. From the winepress of Europe! And now imagine your ancestral line – since the birth of Christ. There was a Roman field captain, a black fellow, brown as a ripe olive, he taught Latin to a blond girl. And then a Jewish spice merchant came into the family, he was a serious man and became a Christian before the wedding and he was the founder of the Catholic tradition in the line. And then followed a Greek physician, a Celtic legionary, a landsquenet [French for German mercenary soldier, from German *Landsknecht*; ed.] from the Grisons in Switzerland, a Swedish cavalryman, a soldier from Napoleon's army, a deserting Cossack, a mine worker from the Black Forest, a miller from the Alsace on his travels, a fat boatman from Holland, a Magyar, a Pandur, an officer from Vienna, a French actor, a Bohemian musician – on the Rhine, all these people have lived, fought, drunk and sung and made children.'

Harras tells the young SS officer not to be proud of some purity, but to be proud 'because everything has been mixed in the Rhineland: To come from the Rhine, he says, means to be from the occident, from the Abendland, from Europe. [...]

On the morning of 26 May 1999, the day of a European football cup final between Manchester United

and Bayern Munchen, the Berlin yellow press newspaper BZ included a subtitle on its front page, reading: Heute abend sind alle Berliner Bayern. Tonight, all Berliners are Bavarians.

This vignette encapsulates the degree to which identities are constructs that can be changed, acquired, rejected, manipulated. The flexibility suggested here – turning Berliners into Bavarians when that seems to be opportune – is a good start. Let us look out for the stories with headlines such as:

Tonight, all Brits are French.

Tonight, all Serbs are Albanians.

Tonight, all Belgradskis are Croatians.

And, a challenging one:

Heute abend sind alle Europäer Zigeuner. Tonight, all Europeans are gypsies."

(Andreas Broeckmann, "Small Channels for Deep Europe (almost a sermon)"; presented at the finissage of OSTranenie in October 1999, to be published in the Communication Front 2000 Book <<http://www.cfront.org/cf00book/en/broeckmann-channels-en.html>>)

<<http://www.v2.nl/mail/v2east/1996/0000.html>>

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Sat, 27 Jan 1996 16:08:48 +0100

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V2_EAST 96/01 newsletter

V2_East Meeting, Rotterdam 21 January 1996

At the end of the Next 5 Minutes: Tactical Media conference, 30 media artists, curators and networkers from thirteen different European countries met at V2_Organisation in Rotterdam to launch a new initiative, V2_East.

V2_East

After a few welcoming words and an introduction by Alex Adriaansens on the history and current work of V2, Andreas Broeckmann briefly outlined the V2_East initiative. It is meant to become a research tool and a networking facility in the field of art and media technology in Eastern Europe, both with Western partners and within Eastern Europe. For V2 - as for all the other partners - V2_East should be a way of developing new contacts and projects. The aim of V2_East is therefore not restricted to triggering projects for V2, put to provide a platform from which cooperations between all institutions involved in media art can develop.

There are important cultural, political and historical reasons for the focus that the initiative takes on East and West European relations - the East European countries share a structurally similar set of problems which should be tackled on an international scale. At the same time, there is a great demand for developing the ties within the European media art community across the defunct, yet still partially existing Cold War divide.

Initially, V2 is offering space on its Internet server to build up a site where information about European media art projects and institutions can be collected and made available. For its future programmes and ongoing projects (like the Dutch Electronic Art Festival, DEAF) V2 will make extra efforts to include East European artists.

The participants of the meeting (cf list below) introduced themselves and gave a brief personal assessment of the situation of media art. After a discussion of different practical and theoretical problems, and about the rationale of the V2_ a "shopping list" of the crucial points that have to be tackled at present. (They will here be summarised and reorganised.)

Access and connectivity

There is a set of general problems related esp. to Internet access and connectivity which exist everywhere and which often have to be solved locally, although support from the translocal network is generally very helpful. It will be important to create an inventory of independent local and regional networks in the different countries that might be available to artists. A question that was raised in the discussion was the role that the internet should have, both as an artistic medium and as a communication and information carrier for the V2_East initiative. There appears to be no real alternative to the efficiency that the Net offers at the moment, although the medium clearly has its limitations.

Existing networks and data bases

V2_East is just one in a series of attempts to reconnect artist communities in East and West Europe after '1989: Existing networks and data bases (e.g. Gulliver Clearing House/Amsterdam, Third Eye/Glasgow, HILUS/Wien, Soros Centres) should be used and linked, and possibly used as models.

Gerfried Stocker suggested that the Ars Electronica database might actually be useful for our purposes. Like the V2_East project, it is specifically concerned with media art, a field that is not covered by other projects in sufficient depth. Furthermore, our aim is to enhance our abilities for cooperating by establishing our own networked structure in Eastern Europe.

The initiative has three main vectors: exchange of information, organising the network, initiating projects. Especially the first two points depend on our commitment to provide information and make our own knowledge and research available. Collectively we already know an incredible amount of stuff, we should now find ways of making it generally available.

1. Exchange of information

(This will initially happen on the website <<http://www.v2.nl/east>>, although we must also think about other channels and carriers, incl. Books and e-mailings. Please, add suggestions to this list, as it will form the basis of the formal structure of the website.)

- addresses (institutions, artists, writers, journals, performance and exhibition places)
- events (festivals, exhibitions - past and present, documentation)
- deadlines and a calendar of forthcoming events
- publishing media art projects and works
- hardware (studios, workshops, hardware pools)
- educational programmes
- resources and funds (private sources, grants, government programmes)
- data bases, publications, libraries, archives
- links to other sources

2. Organising the V2_East network

The exchange of information will form the basis for us to forge new links with people working in media art in order to make it easier to show each others work in East and West, to exchange events, and to find like-minded people for collaborative projects. In order to strengthen the network it will also be important to open up one or more discussion groups where practical, theoretical and political issues can be dealt with. We should aim to meet regularly in real life, but it is doubtlessly necessary to carry on the discussion between those meetings.

3. Initiating projects

The collaborative projects that can emerge from such a network will be as diverse as anything we are dealing with now. During the meeting, we hardly talked about the aesthetic potentials of our initiative - that is clearly something that depends on individual, heuristic decisions.

Yet, especially in this initial phase, such projects should be developed with the great need for education, hardware and knowhow in mind. Artists, curators and other people must be educated as regards the potential of electronic networks and media in general for the arts. As for instance the Interstanding example shows (Tallinn, Nov.95), such projects can have an important function as catalysts and should be planned as such. What is needed is the development of a networking culture in which people learn to think translocally, the creation of a culture of being internationally connected. Calin Dan suggested that we should focus esp. on the younger generation. Hardware and knowhow (technical, theoretical, political) should be made available in workshops (incl. telephone lines, networks, software).

Diana McCarty proposed to think about, for instance, mobile units, buses or trucks, which allow for the setting up of mini events and for training people locally, preferably leaving hardware behind. The Media Research Foundation in Budapest is working on a programme for collecting old hardware in the West, upgrading it and redistributing it in Eastern Europe, the main bottleneck at the moment being the problem of transport.

What is crucial in all such initiatives is that we exchange and use the experiences of previous projects and both from earlier failures and successes, without forgetting about the specificity of each situation. We should openly display the full diversity of the media, projects and art forms we are dealing with: spread the word, connect, multiply!

Money

Beside the obvious - three comments:

- find financial support for artists who are working in projects that do not provide salaries
- enable culturally energetic people to travel and experience; invite people
- approach sponsors, both for hardware and connectivity, some people have had very good experiences with this

Conclusion

The effectiveness of the V2_East initiative will strongly depend on the degree to which it will be used by the people involved, and on our overall commitment to make this a useful tool. On the one hand, it should be a means through which we can help each other out, work together and support local problem-solving. On the other hand we should team up to be able to speak with greater authority as a collective: we should begin to think of our group, as was suggested, as a form of 'syndicate' that can lobby and exert political pressure. For this aim, an e-mailing list will be installed at the ars electronica centre, Linz/Austria: <syndicate@aec.at>. E-mail sent here will go to all V2_East partners. (Please, pass the messages on by fax or mail to others

who are not on-line. Please send addresses of people you would also like to see included in the list to <v2east@v2.nl>)

The V2_East website will develop at: <<http://www.v2.nl/east>>

Please, send all information you want to put there, incl. homepages, calls, documentations, links, texts, and other info, to: <v2east@v2.nl> (failing this, send them to <abroeck@v2.nl>).

Participants

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Comments, corrections and further suggestions are very welcome.

Next message: [Alexei Shulgin: "graaaaants"](#)