

### Current Forms of Power Relationships within the Hegemony of the "West/East" Culture Model

**W**hen we are talking about power relationships we use Foucault's terminology and seek support in the image he worked on for the way that power functions in modern society. As we know, under 'power' Foucault primarily sees a diversity of relationships populating and organising a region, as well as strategies within which they achieve their effectiveness. According to Foucault, power is not an institution, not a structure, not one power belonging to a few who are empowered. 'Power' is the name given to a complex strategic situation within a society. Power is not something that one attains, removes or shares. Power takes place at innumerable points in the game of unequal and movable relationships.

We are now going to attempt to analyse a few of the types of power relationships functioning within the framework of the contemporary art system which are being brought up to date by the current culture-specific game of "West/East". Right at the start we would like to stress that the types of power relationships we analyse here spread and received structural support primarily as a result of the ongoing globalisation of capitalism. Precisely this globalisation provoked and created the current situation in international (and primarily European) art. It is this globalisation that has engendered the now current theme of "West/East". It is this globalisation that rendered such new projects as *After the Wall* possible at all, as well as the *Aspects/Positions. 50 years of Central European Art 1949 - 1999* exhibition in Vienna and other cultural events.

We do not want to hide it: We are driven by a loathing of the whole speculative art-system society. And we see our brief critical analysis as a humble contribution in the struggle against contemporary multiculturalist discriminatory conditions in the field of culture.

The contemporary international art system represents a functioning culture model of the great neo-liberal political system and is part of it. This model is designed to work out new socio-cultural strategies and ideologies, to separate categories and evolve formulations, and to test these in the artworld ghetto. These ideologies and formulations are delivered by a specific "discourse industry" which does not itself, of course, belong to the fields of philosophy, sociology, political science or aesthetics, but which is linked to these disciplines via art criticism, magazines, the Internet and curators. Who provides artists with their ideas, strategies, concepts and themes in this way? It is not Paul Virilio, not Slavoj Zizek and not Judith Butler, but the system itself that adapts Zizek, Virilio, Butler *et al.* by means of its various agents, and adapts them to suit its own aims. A little philosophical slapdash, a little aesthetic blur, a little political drivel is what characterises the discrete charm of the "discourse industry" and the art system as a whole. Speed, trend and superficiality, these are the three piers on which the system supports itself.

The political turn of events in the last years has created a trendy theme, especially in the European context: "West/East". The possibility that some of the former Eastern-Bloc countries might be joining the European Union gave the East-European culture scene an aura of novelty and up-to-dateness. The trans-national and pseudo-internationalist strategies of the neo-liberally oriented institutions awakened public interest in art from Eastern Europe. The neo-colonial tendencies of today's cultural and economic globalisation have provoked a series of culture-specific scandals (such as the infamous *Interpol* exhibition in Stockholm) that have finally forced the Western experts to preoccupy themselves with the selection and categorisation of aesthetic phenomena coming from the East. The rules of repressive tolerance demanded of the Eastern European experts (critics, curators and art historians) that they be inte-

grated in the game. In this way, the current situation was formed in which, within a few months, we have become witnesses of (or participants in) a series of art projects that are linked to the model "West/East" in one way or another. These projects are being realised in Stockholm, Vienna, Paris, Ljubljana and Prague, in the entire realm of global capitalism. The falsified and predetermined view of the most recent Eastern European art they construct is a result of the corrupted consensus.

The determining characteristic of all these projects is their neo-colonial character. What do we mean by this? Above all, all of these official representations playing with the post-colonial discourse simultaneously build on a specific subtle form of discrimination. They all disseminate from the great neo-liberal ideological dream of the total integration of the East-European countries in the global market while at the same time retaining specific and ethnic identities of these countries. Examples of such identities are provided in every one of these exhibitions. They construct a false history of modern art of these countries, false and official in Benjamin's sense. These exhibitions produce an image of a more or less homogenous, closed and continuous history of art in which only those elements are integrated that have been approved over the course of negotiations of interest and sanctioned by the system itself. The interrupted, torn and often catastrophic character of the movement of East-European art is ignored.



And, quite clearly, all of these projects don't want to know anything about the new borders within Europe. Giving us to understand that an end has been put to the old binary oppositions, the current forms of representation are unable to take a critical stance towards such obvious facts as the "Fortress Europe" or the "Schengen Curtain", or other similar manifestations. And despite everything the Berlin Wall is still standing. It is not standing in a physical but in a virtual sense, symbolically, despite all the efforts of the Western intellectual deconstructivists. And this wall is just as brutal, cynical and insipid as the old one was, the one that has been torn down. And the curators, critics, art historians and artists are helping to build this new wall, on this side of it and on the other. In the cemetery of the old, foul cultural oppositions they are now producing immanent and no less monstrous power relationships, chortling and dancing as they go.

So, what do the newest forms of power relationships look like that are forming in the hegemonic "West/East" cultural context?

First of all we would like to mention the frustration. Frustration is politically determined stress, produced by the art system and its agents in the course of negotiations of interest, careeristic longings and games of ambition. Frustration is this socio-political and psycho-somatic atmosphere in which the fancy-sterile or especially dirty spectacles of today's representations are performed. "Frustration" is the real name of the curators Viktor Misiano, Igor Zabel, Bojana Pejic and all the innumerable artists and critics at the service of the contemporary "West/East" model. Frustration permeates bodies and minds, images and situations, exhibition spaces and conference rooms. Not merely small fluctuations, ruptures and coincidences, but everything in the system that mechanically repeats itself, is durable, is linked with frustration and can be described in its terms. The system controls its agents by keeping them in a state of permanent frustration. The basis of the current ideology is not only cynicism but also frustration. Frustration is the result of the high speed of the system with its orientation around decent change, rearrangement. Frustration arises in the necessity for an increasing integration of people into a system that is, in reality, geared towards the renewal, regrouping and exchange of its members.



We have just mentioned integration. The hegemonic and Eurocentric system forces everyone integrated into it to show permanent loyalty. The standard forms of criticism within the system have an exclusively limiting character: They are either produced in a multiculturalist or an objectivising aesthetic form. Criticism is only permitted in the jargon of the standard discourse of the art ghetto, in conventional aesthetic forms. Direct or radically political criticism is inadmissible as it is immediately labelled as "old-fashioned", "utopian" and/or "fascist". The complete integration demanded of its agents by the art system contains a series of rules to which belong not only forms of economic and moral subjection, but also political and aesthetic subjection. The East-European artists (incidentally, like many artists from the West) feel the pressure of the system on a physical level. Their integration into the system is always problematic. It relies entirely on the next flight to the West, on whichever curator, on every mention in a Western magazine. And, of course, not everyone is integrated, but only the Ilya Kabakovs, Boris Groyses, IRWINs and the Nedko Solakovs, *i.e.*, special representatives who conform to the strategies of multiculturalism and whose numbers are strictly regulated. And at the same time this system indirectly contributes to pan-European racism, xenophobia, detention camps, deportation flights and other crap of the kind!

Another currently widespread form of power and indirect coercion is what could be called "making alternatives unthinkable". Today we are dealing with a situation in which artists are supposed to feel right down to their marrow that there is nothing except for the system, there is nothing except for the market, there is nothing except the "discourse industry". There are no alternatives, no room for manoeuvre, no room for artistic refusal, conflict or protest... Oh, it goes without saying that the system is not homogenous, it

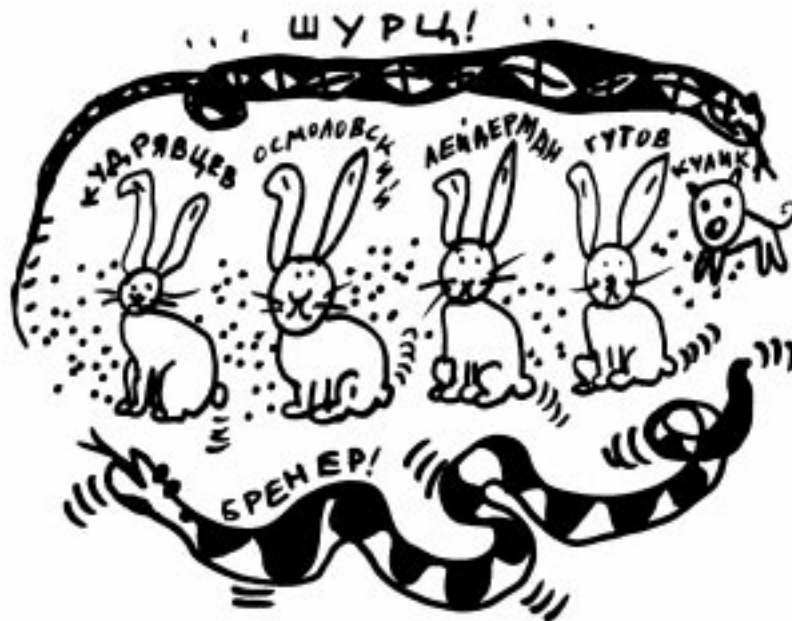
is mobile, and yet as soon as you do not act according to a prescribed set of rules you disappear from the pages of the magazines, from the *Art Diary*, from the artistic life. And artists are scared of anonymity, darkness, emptiness, death... Artists are slaves of the hegemonic culture, which is why they can't think of any alternatives.

But of course there are alternatives. We started our lecture by mentioning Foucault's work. And particularly Foucault wrote: "Where there is power there is resistance." And moreover: there are numerous types of resistance, and every one of these is a case in itself. Possible, necessary, improbable, spontaneous, wild, lonely, unforgiving forms of resistance, or those ready to compromise, interested or with a readiness to make sacrifices... forms of resistance that introduce various fractures into the system, calling false unities to splinter and regroup, individuals to sever and rearrange...

Let us listen to Foucault again: "The most intense point of life, where all its energy is concentrated, is where it crashes with power, fights power and tries to use power's force and escape from its traps."

Unfortunately everything we have in art at the moment is not resistance but crap. Contemporary subversion? Crap. Intellectual arguments? Yes, as Homi Bhabha rightly put it: "Intellectual arguments don't dismantle institutions." This means that war is necessary. A gay war. Fighting for a new set of conditions in our culture. War is conflict, crash, crossing lines, choice, introducing chaos into configurations of power, new conflicts...

But we will need to speak about this war separately.



# Curating and Creating Across Networks

© Iliyana Nedkova, 2001 <translocal@fact.co.uk>

**W**ith the old century out and the new in, we are experiencing an unprecedented rise in networked art practices as we have never known it before. The rise of network society and culture has cultivated and streamlined a great deal of artistic and curatorial responses of which Communication Front (CF) [www.cfront.org](http://www.cfront.org), Crossing Over (CO) [www.crossingover.org](http://www.crossingover.org) and Virtual Revolutions (VR) [www.virtualrevolutions.net](http://www.virtualrevolutions.net) are just an exemplary fraction which has originated in Bulgaria but curated and created across networks achieved a strong impact way beyond Bulgaria.

The rise of the network society is an age-defining force, as the social scientist Manuel Castells argues eloquently in his recently revised book under the same title (1). Within his systematic analysis he formulates a scenario whereby art has got a very central role to play by capitalising on the opportunities and challenges which the network society brings along. Without being messianistic, Castells assumes that in progressive terms art can be the saviour of the network society, of the society which is increasingly about timelessness and spacelessness due to the acceleration of just about everything. The sociologist also investigates the downside of this new network society tracing the devastating effect on the society as have known it up until recently. If any society is about communities, that is where the network devastation is bound

to erode its way. Dispersal of local energies and increased alienation is creeping between members of the communities who are adopting different growth rates. Therefore, the networked art practices can embrace the opportunity for intervening as a community-building kind of saviour.

All societies even the network society are caught in this mythical search of community. What is the defining logic of the newly rising network communities, what are the new communal values, constructing mass utopias for shared spaces and how will they differ from the exclusion or inclusion patterns in the old sense of community. In Castells' frame of mind today's art reflecting the network society can interject as an instrument of meaning and functionality. Rather than looking at places of public monumentality and grand projects let's focus on small-scale, mini-events such as the two curatorial examples of functional art or else artists-led community-building projects - VR and CO.

Both of these networked art projects were born in the aftermath of the bloody, velvet, singing, virtual and often misunderstood revolutions that have been delineating a new Europe since the late 1980s. Both VR and CO sprang from the same anxiety and inquiry typical for the post-cold war generation. Both projects intended to question the revolutionary dream of transition, the potential for transformation and the crossover into the new shared cultural space after the disintegration of

the cold war world. They both marked a personal learning curve over the last 10 years of the last century. In the early 1990s I naively stumbled into the Bulgarian VR and ever since I wanted to check how the dream turned out. After the flurry of enthusiasm and national rupture faded away it felt like sudden sanity and there was a strong need to make sense of this sanity.

VR is about at least two types of sanities and revolutions - the digital or technological one on the one hand and the social, political and economic revolution on the other. VR is also about the degrees of virtuality in these two revolutions. Although equivocal and not difficult to be confused with Virtual Reality, VR insisted from the start on this other connotation of being virtual as in not quite, as if, semi-, half-hearted and just about to be transformed. Thus, VR set off to reflect on the commonalities, shared believes and not so much on the polarities between the formerly divided Europe. The east - west debate was further exasperated by the new post-cold war discourse which seemed to have reserved no room for such reflection. It has instead prioritised the hegemonic view of the alleged winners vs. the losers as Susan Buck-Morss have shown in her thorough investigation of the two former empires relationships (2).

Although clearly marked by the same apprehension VR and CO branched out to pursue their goals through two differ-



ent structural models. CO is an ongoing project for producing and exhibiting new short digital films which celebrates its sixth and a common denominator for networking. It is hugely significant that one third of the curated VR Act zone works are authored by Bulgarian sound and visual artists aided by home-grown computer programmers. These are proactive works, which open up space for playtime, reflection and critique.

As part of the VR Act zone sound maker AnnaBo premieres White Room, which was originally a composition written to induce a private niche for sound therapy on the web but eventually migrated to the facade of the VR as part of the VR score permeating the entire audio environment. Similarly, the award-winning contemporary composer Georgi Arnaoudov re-examines an earlier minimalist work, which visualises the sounds of silence (aka SOS) in his elegant web debut SOS. In search of new revolutionary modes of self-representation across the web pipelines Petko Dourmana deliberately slows down the notoriously sluggish world of limited bandwidth to reveal fragments of his digital self-portrait in Nobody (Faceloading). Graphic artist Margarita Goranova blends in fine Chinese penmanship and Flash digital aesthetics to scratch beneath the surface of ancient and digital signs in her Heart Art Work - the hieroglyphic sign for "must" and allegedly for "revolution" reveals the hideousness of each historical trauma - a pierced human heart. In collaboration with digital guru Mare Tralla (Est/UK) writer and poet George Gospodinov reads a series of visual poems about the small revolution in broadcasting - amidst a world jammed with noise and information, his VRadio picks up the station of silence. This is silence that can radiate with an invisible voice and vocal virtuality. Artist Dimitrina Sevova's VRCookbook could be enjoyed with a pinch of salt as a recipe for postmodern living. Pick up and mix the series of photographs with the score of train rail tracks while passing through the while tunnel of Яа dinner plate.

One can even get a taster for the powerful satire of the lucrative art world through a glimpse in the final chapter of artist Nedko Solakov's mini-Canterbury Tales comprising The Right One - a stand alone CD-ROM-based interactive artwork and a booklet of essays, which have also emerged from the VR series of networking residencies (4). Another VR Act zone is built as a short documentary to celebrate a work initially exhibited as a large-scale gallery installation during VR. Revolution for All by artist and theoretician Luchezar Boyadjiev is a face and identity swapping game parodying the western nostalgia for revolutionary utopia. Revolutions have always been about people's festivities, mass spectacles and celebrations. "Where is that we want to change? Where can we draw the fine line for those in the West deprived of the first-hand experience of the Eastern European revolutions?", asks Boyadjiev.

By encouraging genuine and meaningful collaboration between the VR people, VR managed to stay away from the former power blocks mentality and focussed on the refined problematic of each individual and the community and locality they felt attached to. Not unlike Communication Front (CF), VR is thus another step in getting beyond the former east-west divide of Europe, in reassessing the European identity as less split, less insolent and less closed to the rest of the world. As the diverse works by the Bulgarian artists have made it evident, VR has developed a media strategy that counters the ideology-driven, grand narrative of revolution and terror and puts forth a number of 'minor narrations' that irritate, subvert, amuse and tickle the minds.' (5) If we look at it as a fine example of a community-based practice and therefore not as sharp-edged and sublime as Andreas Broeckmann affirms, we can apply the weapons technology perspective. VR will be the short story of paper machine guns set against the ferociously blown-up TV scene with the big guys, flying and crashing their Apache helicopters. VR was all about risk, pressure-free, open-ended and process-led creativity. Predominantly, horizontal, dispersed and inclusive, VR networked activity was socialising and polyphonic - an activity 'that could imagine what it wanted to imagine rather than have its fantasies made-up for it like a be-spoke suit. It could imagine revolution if it wanted to' (6). And so it did.

CO was also a dream-catcher from the start as the catalogue celebrating five years of CO networked activities points out (7). In 1996, when CO began - much needed then, and

still in demand today - was an alternative, free-access framework for developing, producing, and presenting experimental video works. CO even borrowed its name from the dream of transformation, disguising it in the cross-cultural metaphor of the journey recurrent in each work emerging from the annual CO master classes. CO videos talk about passing through the realities and utopias of cultures, technologies, art disciplines, geographies, and economies. While pursuing the dream, the works shift our perceptions, which are heavily encoded by language and ideology or by cultural tourism and consumption of places. It may be a dream, but perhaps one day when CO becomes history, there will be no need to restrict identities to the overpoliticised notions of east or west, north or south.

In its modest scale, each CO plugs into local cultural ecologies. Its continual impact on the Bulgarian art community has been highlighted by cultural theorist Chris Hill, "As a vehicle for artists' work CO contributes to the larger project of provoking, marking, and articulating a floating frontier. What it means to address or reference the now shifting frontier that for decades sustained enormous differences between Eastern and Western Europe will continue to change quickly. There is always cultural capital to be gained for those who observe cultural changes from a distance of decades, but the importance of creating opportunities for cultural exchange through active production, as CO has done, is perhaps not remarked upon often enough" (8).

Each CO temporary media lab has led to the production of a new series of about ten videoshorts every year. By 2000 more than twelve Bulgarian artists have managed to contribute to the collective video epic of CO. By mastering the fine art of condensing often complex concepts into just three

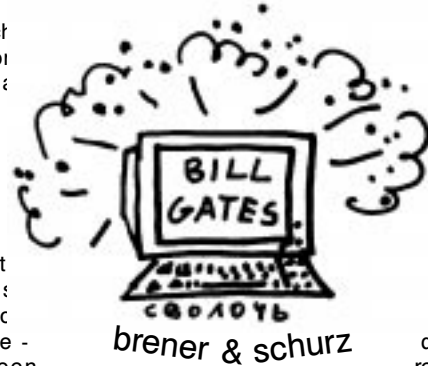
minutes each videoshort earned acclaim Bulgarian artists-tors. The first series of eight projects most commonly have been

as the leading new media artists working across networks from within Bulgaria. Joining their CO counterparts Elena Belova, Krassimir Terziev, Odiliya Yankova, Tsvetelina Gancheva, Ivan Mudov, Dimitrina Sevova and Kalin Serapionov have explored the individual's relationship to the body as a landscape and the personal charting of terra nova (new territory). Counteracting the millennium frenzy, the fourth series featured another three Bulgarian video works by Boriyana Dragoeva, Dimitrina Sevova and Zornitsa Sophia telling the subtle and varied stories of time. The latest fifth series revisited the myths and absurdities of the former evil empires of east and west and involved a project by Boriyana Dragoeva. Eschewing the arcane polarities and the uncanny similarities of historical ideologies, each work in each CO compilation, including the strong Bulgarian works, generates a dense micro-narrative and illuminates the changing nature of the dream for a shared cultural space.

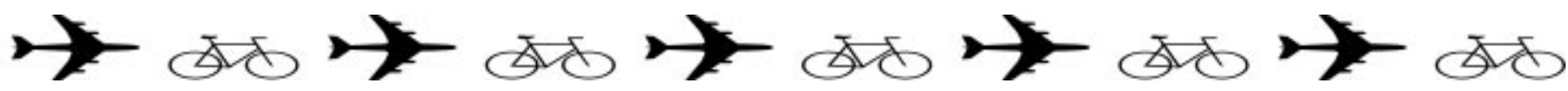
Sevova's Merry-go-round is a short roller-coaster ride into a dreamland where surreal visions and sounds mix with a nightclub-style ambience. Shots of a playground, puppies, babies, and lovemaking are set against a soundscape of pulsing heartbeats, jolly laughter, and heavy breathing. Throughout his In Search Of... Terziev explores issues of memory loss. It is based on a mathematical paradigm of dark and light sequences. The investigation of a dark storage space is increasingly interrupted with shots of street life, including images of political demonstrations in Sofia. Mudov's theatrically staged video short Simon Says...reflects on the shallow display and bigotry of established religions, as well as on the spread of child-abusing religious cults through bold use of strong imagery.

Less poignant is Belova's first video work, Impressions of a Mirror which seems to ask, "You out there, looking through the mirror, are you seeing your own real image?" Shot through various glass objects, portraits of TV celebrities intermix with those of family and friends, creating an eerie pool of images. Yankova's brief video (less than a minute) I, RNG (random numbers generation) deals with the conflict between the impulse for control over the representation of one's identity and the limits of one's actual power. In contrast, the slow-motion aesthetics of Gancheva's confessional work Virgin centers around visual fragments of a nude female body on an imaginary stage. The intriguing first-person narrative resonates with the nerve of being a virgin in a world short of love and attention. My Name Is Samsonite by Serapionov glorifies a minimalist image of railway tracks, shot from a moving train. The repeated sequences create an abstract yet mesmerising pattern. The pun of the title comes from the artist's statement, "Often I feel like a piece of Samsonite stuck in the luggage compartment of the train, bouncing back and forth." Dragoeva's Celebrating the Next Twinkling features two screaming girls. Reshot off a monitor and manipulated by playing with the controls, the images slowly become independent of the soundtrack. The feeling of real time is gradually lost, and the next twinkling is celebrated as the real progress in time. Zornitsa Sophia's Crossing Over Time is an irrational story or an experiment. The video short overturns our contemporary notion of time, evoking the old carnivals when people "change" their clothes, sex, or behaviour, and everything becomes possible. Mixing the bloodthirsty and the humorous, Dragoeva's Beauty and the Beast 2 is a tragicomic tale of a woman and her lover is set in a labyrinthine domestic environment. Finally, Sevova's Three Short Videoportraits is about three generations of women living together in one family flat. The end of the 20 century has a very different significance for each woman, from a physical, social, and spiritual perspective.

Each of the short CO works as well as VR and CF open a window onto still shifting sensibilities - all legacy of the turbulent 20 century. If we are to paraphrase Chris Hill, one can claim that the five CO programs, the VR residencies and the CF networked activities considered as a whole, legibly mark cultural time (9). The viewer is invited to travel with the work from east to west, although the journey is hardly direct and the time warps frequently. Each CF festival event as much as each CO and VR digital short create an opportunity to pause on that journey and to check out the cultural landscape at that place and time. Experienced as an entire body of work, the three network art projects offer a foundation for wider cultural translation of this historic trek.



- (1) Manuel Castells, The Rise of the Network Society, Blackwell Publishers, New York, 2000.
- (2) Susan Buck-Morss, Dreamworld and Catastrophe. The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West, MIT Press, Cambridge (Mass), 2000.
- (3) Iliyana Nedkova et al. (eds), Virtual Revolutions: Act and Read, CD-ROM-cum-book, AVRE, Liverpool Art School and FACT, Liverpool, 2000.
- (4) Nedko Solakov, The Right One, CD-ROM and book, AVRE, Liverpool Art School and FACT, Liverpool, 2000.
- (5) Andreas Broeckmann, Changing Faces, In: Media Revolution, Stephen Kovats (ed.), Campus Verlag, Frankfurt/NewYork, 1999.
- (6) Howard Slater, Post-media Operations, In: READ-ME! Nettime (eds.), Autonomedia, New York, 1999.
- (7) Iliyana Nedkova and Nina Czegledy, Crossing Over Dreams. In: Crossing Over, Iliyana Nedkova et al. (eds), FACT, Liverpool and Wexner Centre for the Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus (Oh), 2001.
- (8) Chris Hill, Marking Time at Shifting Cultural Borders. In: Crossing Over, Iliyana Nedkova et al. (eds), FACT, Liverpool and Wexner Centre for the Arts, Ohio State University, Columbus (Oh), 2001.
- (9) Chris Hill, ibid.



## TEOLOP SEJCYO NABRU URBAN CYCLES PROJECT

In September 2000 six Manchester artists travelled to Sofia, Bulgaria to work with four Bulgarian artists to install the public interactive video series "Urban Cycles". This exchange project was initiated by the Interspace Media Centre, Sofia and will come to IDEA, Manchester in April 2001. The project has evolved through a yearlong process of online communication and collaboration. The following excerpts are taken from an extended conversation between Jen Southern, one of the artists participating, and Galina Dimitrova, the project's curator.

**GALIA:** From the beginning Interspace had planned to develop the project as an international collaboration. We were interested in the diverse visual and conceptual perspectives of an international group of artists in relation to the specific public space of the Bulgarian National Palace of Culture. The experimental nature of the project and the use of hi-technologies determined a long and sophisticated process of creation and preparation, in which we also wished to collaborate with an organisation and artists who have experience in that area. Interspace had been introduced to Idea's site-specific digital and video projects through our contact with Gary Peplow an artist working with IDEA who made presentations during the "Videoarcheology" International Video Festival, organised by "HO Association for Contemporary Art" and Interspace's Media Arts Festival "Project END".

### THE NATIONAL PALACE OF CULTURE (NPC) . . . . .

**JEN:** The practises of all the artists involved are linked by an interest in urban sites and digital installations. In June this year [2000] we made an initial visit to Sofia to meet and to explore the site. The NPC, where the work was to be installed, is vast. Built in 1981 on the wishes of Liudmilla Zhivkova, daughter of the then communist leader, this cultural palace consists of 15 floors, 8 auditoriums and a five-storey foyer with a marble floor onto which our videos would be projected. A park with formal fountains extends several hundred metres in front of it. These large public and open spaces have the concrete optimism of 1970's public galleries and libraries in the UK, but on a much bigger scale. During the installation Monserrat Caballe performed, the huge 4 storey tall modern chandeliers were turned on, and as ticket holders flooded in, the building took on its intended grandeur and status.

**GALIA:** The choice of a public space over a traditional gallery was determined by the wish for a large-scale visual impact and to reach wider audience of both general public and cultural consumers. To put the project into an "official" cultural space, into the public art context and outside of the artist run gallery.

The Palace of Culture is a unique space; its architecture and function were very appropriate for this project. The giant building was built to host diverse and prestigious cultural events. Nowadays however many commercial activities take place there. This typifies the current socio-cultural situation in Bulgaria, in which such institutions have no public support and must finance themselves. The monumental architecture typical of the Communist period both framed the large-scale projections and opposed the dynamically changing images, the various levels of the foyer interior allowing multiple perspectives on the projections.



jen southern BENEATH THE MARBLE, THE SHOPPING CENTRE

### TEN DAYS TEN WORKS . . . . .

**GALIA:** The project presents the artists with a common platform for creation and exhibition of individual works - multiple-screen video installation, integrated within the urban environment. Entering into a well-known public space the visitors are drawn into a changed environment, four juxtaposed video images projected onto the foyer floor created a "visual illusion and spatial manipulation". The everyday flow

of people coming into the Palace of Culture are provoked to participate in the work, as they trigger images via a sensor system when walking through them.

**JEN:** The technical set up for an installation is usually seen as the main factor shaping the interaction. In using the same system on 10 consecutive days for ten different works, Urban Cycles revealed that the interaction between artist, audience and site had more to do with content and context than with technical set up. The works became an investigation of the role of the audience in not only a publicly triggered installation, but also in the changing face of a public space.

As the audience tried to catch, to anticipate, to avoid these works they became creative participants, official intruders, unwanted guests, members of a faceless crowd, cumulative and creative numbers. The solidity of the architecture was challenged by Dourmana's body laid bare, my own architectural addition of an extra floor, and the moving filmic video of both Myers and Terziev animating the solidity of the monumental. The artists played many roles: the covert intruder, the domestic performer, and the defender of the space.

### "URBAN CYCLES" Public Video Installation project

Dates/Exhibition Hours: 15-24 September, 11-19 h, Location: Central Foyer of the National Palace of Culture, Sofia

A collaborative project between InterSpace Media Arts Center, Sofia, BG and IDEA - Innovation in Digital and Electronic Arts, Manchester, UK; With the kind support of British Council, Sofia; Soros Center for the Arts, Sofia; National Palace of Culture, Sofia; Irbis, 3M, Bulgaria, Huddersfield University, UK; Liverpool Arts School and Liverpool John Moores University, UK; Curator: Galina Dimitrova /Interspace/; Participating Artists: Interspace - Krassimir Terziev, Petko Dourmana, Nikolay Chakarov, Maria Berova; IDEA - Jen Southern, Anneke Pettican, Adele Myers, Jenna Collins, Steve Symons, Gary Peplow



jenna collins HOME

To: CFRONT NEWSPAPER

Subject: Re: URBAN CYCLES.SOFIA.BULGARIA

From: "Galina Dimitrova" <galia@i-space.org> and "Jen Southern" <bus.gas@mcr1.poptel.org.uk>

In Krassimir Terziev's work the audience's movements assembled fragmented clips of the film Casablanca, Maria Berova's cleaning lady aggressively cleaned up after visitors, taking care of the building, Anneke Pettican's silhouetted figure wrote graffiti specific to the building onto the floor, leaving sentences half written when visitors approached. Gary Peplow's fruit machine of Eastern and Western icons and logo's invited you to play serious games. In Nikolay Chakarov and Steve Symons' work the audience played a cumulative part. While for Nikki they were faceless ants colonising the space, for Symons each audience member and the cumulative order in which they entered the four trigger areas built up a "language genome" unique to the paths taken through that specific space. These articulations of the role of audience also reflected on the role of the artist in a public space. As Jenna Collins invited the audience to walk into images of her home, their interaction became an intrusion. Petko Dourmana's image lay provocatively naked as if buried under the floor of the palace of culture, turning in pain as visitors walked over him. In my own work visitors revealed black and white snap shots of the shopping centre inevitably incorporated beneath the floor of the Palace of Culture, whilst Adele Myers four videos showed traffic flows through cities, as a path walked through the images became a journey through the traffic of international cities.

These works negotiated a series of temporary relationships with the audience, with the building, and with each other. These relationships were perhaps specific to that building, or buildings of that kind, but they were also a more specific interjection into both the field of public arts within BG, but also the more general field of video art.

### SECOND SITE . . . . .

**GALIA:** Following the exhibition of this work it has become obvious through the interest of journalists, artists and critics that Urban Cycles made public media art approachable and attractive to a great number of people. According to the NPC, over the 10 days 20 000 people either consciously or incidentally viewed and participated in the creation and composition of the works. The project provoked mass media interest in public art events. Most journalists reviewed it as sensation and qualified the artists' work as radical acts to current socio-cultural life NPC's commercial activities.

Urban Cycles UK will take place in September/October 2001, when the Bulgarian and UK artists and Galia Dimitrova will take up a month long residency at IDEA to make new work for the Manchester site.

\* - This is how David D'Agostino described the project in his review "Urban Cycles brings new media to public space", published in the Sofia Echo English-language weekly newspaper, Sept.29-Oct.5, 2000.



gary peplow HOLD/NUDGE