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ISBN 3-86588-288-9

The Absolute Report

time space code memory



time

space

The Absolute Report



code

memory

The Absolute Report



t i m e



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The late 1990s were a time of intense activity, networking and East -West collaboration in contemporary arts in the former Eastern Europe. Discovery of new fields of art practice, redefinition of one's position as an artist in a climate of changing social, political and cultural contexts, the establishment of new systems of communication and collaboration, and the emergence of new technologies in art practices all marked that period. Association APSOLUTNO was part of that wider scene, which was in stark contrast to the claustrophobic context of Serbia within which the members of APSOLUTNO lived and

within which the production of the association was created.

This book is an *Absolute Report* of the last five years of the 20. century from the perspective of a specific artistic network that was active at that time. We present the projects that APSOLUTNO created in that period as well as *reports* by various artists, media thinkers and other important personalities that APSOLUTNO met within the same East -West network in the sphere of new art & media practices. In this book we find parallels between our own projects and those of others, by identi-

## i n t r o d u c t i o n



ying four important themes that run through the work created at that time: time, space, code, and memory.

These themes arose in the work of APSOLUTNO as a response to the immediate social surroundings in which APSOLUTNO lived and worked. The guiding principle of APSOLUTNO was search for the sites and situations with a symbolic or metaphorical potential in relation to a wider social context. We refer to these found situations as *absolutely real facts* because of their hidden interpretive quality. Taking *absolutely real facts* as a starting point for our

interventions, we turned the familiar, usual, or even marginal, which is often no longer even perceived, into something unusual, out of the ordinary, and worth further exploration.

Time, space, code and memory are also present in the works by other participants represented in this book. In spite of the variety of approaches, it is evident that this activity, taken as a whole, reflects the existence of a specific epistemological community.

association APSOLUTNO  
spring 2006



# I AM ABSOLUTELY EVERY MOMENT ABSOLUTELY HERE

This project was inspired by the theory of a group of physicists active at the beginning of the 20th century which believed that comprehensive reality consisted of spatially discrete

elements connected by intrinsic non-local ties. Einstein did not accept this theory; he carried out conceptually the EPR (Einstein-Podolsky-Rosen) experiment in order to prove that non-local ties did not exist and that there were hidden variables which humankind was still not capable of discovering. However, he proved precisely the opposite, paradoxically shaking his own understanding of quantum physics. The result of this experiment - which was later carried out by Bell - proved that two electrons rotating in opposite directions present an indi-



visible whole connected by interdependent links into an absolute unity regardless of how distant they are from each other. The sculptural nature of such a system cannot be comprehended in terms of discrete elements. Both particles of the rotating electron connect by momentary non-local ties which surpass our civilizational mental patterns\*.

The sentence - 'I am absolutely every moment absolutely here' - was sent from Sombor to Horn, thence to Vienna, and then on to Novi

\* Revised from Fritjof Capra, The Tao of Physics

Sad and so completed a circle functioning as a synonym of the absolute. By its cyclical form and its contents this project, in a simple way, formed the territory of the absolute constructed space and the absolute temporal span.

The project was carried out in 1995 at the end of November through to early December.





t i m e



1997 APSOLUTNO 0003

## TIME OUT

Place: Trinity Church, Sombor, Yugoslavia  
 The inscription on the wall painting:  
 One of these [hours] is your final one!

APSOLUTNO responded to this warning by installing an awning above the sundial and eliminating time.



# MAPPING THE LIMITS OF NEW MEDIA

Geert Lovink

To what extent have the 'tech wreck' and following scandals affected our understanding of new media? No doubt there will also be cultural fall-out. Critical new-media practices have been slow to respond to both the rise and fall of dot-com mania. The world of IT firms and their volatile valuations on the world's stock markets seemed light-years away from the new-media arts galaxy. The speculative heyday of new-media

culture was the early mid nineties, before the rise of the World Wide Web. Theorists and artists jumped with great eagerness on the still non-existent and inaccessible technologies such as virtual reality. Cyberspace generated a rich collection of mythologies. Issues of embodiment and identity were fiercely debated. Only five years later, while Internet stocks were going through the roof, not much was left of the initial excitement in intellectual and artistic circles. Experimental techno culture missed out on the funny money. Over the last few years there has been a steady stagnation of new-media cultures, both in terms of concepts and funding. With hundreds of millions of new users flocking onto the Net, the arts could no longer keep up and withdrew into their own little world of festivals, mailing lists and workshops.

Whereas new-media arts institutions, begging for goodwill, still portray artists as working at forefront of technological developments, collaborating with state-of-the-art scientists, the reality is a different one. Multi-disciplinary goodwill is at an all-time low. At best, the artistic new media products are 'demo design', as described by Peter Lunenfeld in *Snap to Grid*. Often they do not even reach that level. New-media arts, as defined by the few institutions devoted to them, rarely reach audiences outside of their own subculture. What in positive terms could be described as the heroic fight for the establishment of a self-referential 'new-media arts system' through a frantic differentiation of works, concepts and traditions may as well be classified as a dead-end street. The acceptance of new media by leading museums and collectors will simply not happen. Why wait a few decades, anyway? The majority of the new-media art works on display in ZKM, the Ars Electronica Center, ICC or Cinemedia are hopeless in their innocence, being neither critical nor radically utopian in their approach. It is for this reason that the new-media arts sector, despite its steady growth, is becoming increasingly isolated, incapable of addressing the issues of today's globalized world. It is therefore understandable that the contemporary (visual) arts world is continuing its decade-old boycott of (interactive) new-media works in galleries, biennials and shows such as Documenta.

A critical reassessment of the role of arts and culture within today's network society seems necessary. Let's go beyond the 'tactical' intentions of the players involved. This is not a blame game. The artist-engineer, tinkering with alternative human-machine interfaces, social software, digital aesthetics and more, has effectively been operating in a self-imposed vacuum. Over the last few decades both science and business have successfully ignored the creative community. Even worse, artists have actively been sidelined in the name of 'usability'. The backlash movement against Web design, lead by IT-guru Jakob Nielsen, is a good example of this trend. Other contributing factors may have been the corporate dominance of AOL and Microsoft. Lawrence Lessig argues that innovation of the Internet as such is in danger. In the meanwhile the younger generation is turning its back on the new-media arts questions and operates as anti-corporate activists, if it gets involved at all. After the dot-com crash the Internet has rapidly lost its imaginative attraction. File swapping and cell phones can only temporarily fill up the vacuum. New media have lost their magic. It would be foolish to ignore this. The once so glamorous gadgets are becoming part of everyday life. This long-term tendency, now in a phase of acceleration, seriously undermines the future claim of new media altogether.

† Another issue is generationalism. With video and expensive interactive installations being the domain of the '68 baby boomers, the generation of '89 has embraced the free Internet. But the Net turned out to be a trap for them. Whereas real assets, positions and power remain in the hands of the ageing baby boomers, the gamble of its predecessors on the rise of new media did not materialize. With venture capital having melted away, there is still no sustainable revenue system in place for the Internet. The slow-working bureaucracies within the educational sector have not yet grasped the new-media malaise. Universities are still in the process of establishing new-media departments. But that will come to a halt at some point. The fifty-something tenured chairs and vice-chancellors must feel good about their persistent sabotage. What's so new about new media anyway? Technology was hype after all, promoted by the criminals of Enron and WorldCom. It is sufficient for students to do a bit of e-mail and web surfing, safeguarded within a filtered and controlled intranet. It is because of this cynical reasoning that we urgently need to analyze the ideology of the greedy nineties and its techno-libertarianism. If we don't disassociate new media quickly from the previous decade, and continue with the same rhetoric, the isolation of the new-media sector will sooner or later result in its death. Let's transform the new-media buzz into something more interesting altogether—before others do it for us.

1996 APSOLUTNO 0004

## BEOGRAD 00.04

Time: October 1996; 0004 years until the end of the century and millennium  
 Place: Belgrade

Text on display: Citizens of Belgrade, if you want to see all your fellow citizens in a day you need absolutely 00.004 seconds per person.

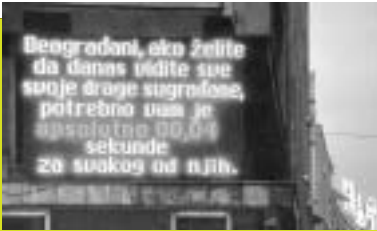
The number was calculated by dividing the number of citizens by the number of seconds in a day.

# THE ABSOLUTE TIME MACHINE

Dejan Sretenović

*Imagine a glass full of water which falls from the table and shatters on the floor. If you were to film it you could easily say whether the film was running backwards or forwards. If you were to run it backwards, you would see the fragments suddenly gathering from the floor and forming into a whole glass, which would then jump to the tabletop.*

S. Hawking, *Brief History of Time*



Hawking's visual illustration of the workings of "the thermodynamic arrow of time" tells us a lot more than the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which says that in every closed system there is always an increase in disorder, entropy. The quote actually demonstrates the capacity of the cinematographic apparatus to transform an irreversible event – the fall of a glass from a table – into a reversible event by the mechanical change in the direction of the flow of information. We're not talking here about whether an event is possible or impossible in accordance with the laws of thermodynamics, but about whether there is a difference between *realization* and *actualization* in the field of the event's morphogenesis. According to French theoretician Pierre

Levy (*Becoming Virtual*), realization means the incarnation of what is *possible*, that which exists latently as an idea or notion and which should be given a real existence, which would mean that the fall of a glass from the table is a logical transformation from one state to another. If realization has the value of *reproduction*, then actualization has the value of *creation*, since we are now talking about the production of new qualities and about "the creation of radically new kinds of information" (P. Levy), as in the example of the glass jumping back on the table, of the return to the primary state of order. However, Levy claims, actualization can only be understood in its relation to *virtualization*, which can be defined as the opposite dynamic movement of actualization, as the displacement of the center of ontological gravity. As opposed to the possible, which is static and already fully constructed, the virtual represents "the knot of tendencies or forces that accompany a situation, event, object or entity", thereby invoking a process of resolution – actualization. That is why Deleuze, in his study on film, also uses the metaphor of the crystal when he speaks of uniting actual and virtual images to the point that they can no longer be differentiated, and of Moebius' effect of film image, which in the whirl of the forces of actualization and virtualization both *is* and *is not* real.



## + Time and Mediation

This aspect of the work of the cinematographic apparatus is also intrinsic to the other media of moving images, that is, to the representational apparatuses which operate images whose interrelationships are determined by some sort of regime of time. Although these regimes today are intertwined due to inter-media dialogues and borrowings, the following generalization can be made: film and video operate through the editing of time (the reassembling of recorded time), while television operates in real time. The three of them share the mechanical time of *movement* (projection, transmission) and the psychological time of *observation*, or that which Augustine called "active passage" coordinated by "persistent attention" of the observer. Augustine is actually trying to solve the aporia of the immeasurability of the present time, which, since it is located at "a punctual moment", remains outside the precise chronometric coordinates of the past and future. Augustine actualizes the immobility of the present by using a metaphor from geometry: a punctual moment is the equivalent to the geometric notion of a point, but "persistent attention" lengthens that point into "a punctual line" whose length coincides with the lasting of the attention. This moving immobility of the present demonstrates the work of the entire chronometric, linear time

machine which does not recognize discontinuity in its punctual mechanism, a mechanism made up of points representing seconds, minutes, hours... Yet, moving-images media, and especially film and video, shuffle the cards of the chronometric coordinates of time through the aforementioned reassembly of recorded time, making obvious the discontinuity between its various intervals, something which can have a greater or lesser effect on the psychological experience of time. From all of this, it turns out that the media machine is the best illustration of the well-known scientific hypothesis that all time is an artificial construction or, more precisely, the function of the state of information within a particular system. In other words, time is the ontological category of mediation, and not its raw material as people generally think.

### Time Mode 1

However, what happens when the time machine of moving images manipulates time as if it were data inscribed in an image, as is the case with the video works of the Apsolutno Association, where the countdown of years remaining to the beginning of the third millennium precedes the opening titles in the form of a digital counter? What happens when the time interval of one year is represented in the time interval of one second in a sort of inverse, fast-

forward condensation? As if we are being confronted by what Baudrillard, when speaking of the euphoria of the countdown to the beginning of the third millennium, called "a time-delayed bomb", which warns us that everything is programmed ahead of time and that we should not wait for the proclaimed end of history, because it has actually already happened. In other words, the Apsolutno-counter semanticizes time by placing it in the function of the work of a popular narrative of "the eschatological zero moment" which has already downloaded the moment of the arrival of the third millennium. Just as science-fiction projections often use the future as an observatory for researching the present, so the Association, according to a statement written for the entire project *2000:1995*, is exploring "the absolute here and the absolute now", asking questions, creating metaphors and highlighting the absurd situations and paradoxes brought about by the time in which we live.

### Time Mode 2

The video *Voyager*, recorded in a cave in eastern Serbia according to the Association, is a message which is being sent to the outside world from the cave: that is, it is a visual metaphor which refers to the isolation of Serbia from the rest of the world and to the (im)possibility of establishing communication from that "particular geograph-

ic, social and political location". The text which explains where and how the message was recorded moves across the screen in the form of a crawl, increasing its speed to an unreadable ultra-speed. *Voyager* thus confronts two modalities of time: the empty cave is a metaphor for empty, "fossilized" time which stretches forth *ad infinitum*, while the crawl represents global currents of the digital acceleration of the information flow which constantly actualize time in the information space. Symbolically, the crawl is a sort of signal which is trying to find a corresponding frequency, and its acceleration, which turns the text in the end into an unreadable cryptic code, is a sign of the entropy of information, its plummet into the black hole of the information time-space.

### Time Mode 3

On the other hand, the video *Good Evening* is an amusing montage of the opening seconds of the TV news recorded from channels all over the world, which the talking heads begin with the same greeting in different languages. The real time of transmission is deactualized and virtualized by its transformation into edited time or, as Deleuze would say, it is "counter-created", which in this concrete situation means that it ceases to function through telepresence. The code of multiplicity (language, the physical appearance of the talking heads, mise-

† en-scène) is ironically used to indicate the unified ideological code in the domain of the TV distribution of information, and thus the piece functions as *meta-information*, saying that information itself is vulnerable and subject to manipulation. Finally, the greeting "Good evening", appropriate to the so-called "prime time" of the evening news, reminds us of the hierarchical character of time slots within the TV information space, and also of the varying value parameters of the organization of TV and, therefore, social time.

#### Time Mode 4

The video installation (*a*)*trophy* is an extensive slow-motion (55 minute) sequence (which lasts only a few seconds) taken from the documentary film *The Last Oasis* by Petar Laloviæ, and thus indicates the problems of the relationship between the abstract punctual moment and the imaginary punctual line of the ongoing present. To put it another way, the piece represents the infinite dissolution of the event into a series of points-events where nothing is happening and everything is changing and coming into existence, and where hardly-seen movements pass through the punctual points – static images. (*a*)*trophy* demonstrates the operation of two different regimes of time: one regime is fixed to the mechanical movement of the tape, while the other is tied to the movement of the represented

object, in which they blend into an organic whole that produces the boredom of the slow-motion time of non-happening in the observer. As in the case with *Good Evening*, we are seeing the procedure of "counter-creation" here, the transformation of a micro-process into a macro-process in which "virtualization moves ahead of time in order to reach eternity" (Levy).

#### The Light of Screen

In astrophysics we find a marvellous picture of time observation: we can, for example, look back in time and see the light of stars which have long since disappeared. Likewise, on the screen of moving images, with the aid of light, we can see events which happened in some other system in the past, in some other space-time continuum, and which are then made actual through representation. What we see on the screen was already explained by Hawking, illustrating the Second Law of Thermodynamics, with the addition that entropy, understood as noise in the field of information delivery, is an integral part of all systems of representation, which always, even in their hyper-realistic resolutions, produce an ontological *difference* in relation to the referent, including the temporal one. If we watch an unedited recording of an event at which we were present, we have the illusion that the recorded time exactly reproduces the time of the

action, which is testified to by the counter which confirms that the recording lasted, let's say, two hours, as did the time of the action. However, there is a difference in the relation of the time flow in physical space and the time flow in the media because the state of the information is completely different within the referential framework of physical reality and the image on the screen, and also because the observer processes the information differently in these divergent visual systems. The event is made actual in reality but, as Levy says, it is virtualized by the production and distribution of the information, and it is thus divorced from the specific time and place and is exposed to heterogenesis. Therefore, information which virtualizes an event becomes an integral part of it, a sequence in its development and articulation.

### The Apsolutno Report

A report is, usually, a mnemo-technical machine which operates with what could be called *memorial time* – time in which memory is made present and accessible through a given media. The memorial time of a report is simultaneously territorialized and de-territorialized: it indicates the space-time locality of the event (which presupposes being at a certain place and time) but, as we have already established, exposes it to the heterogenesis of virtualization

through mediation: an event becomes a representation, a representation becomes an idea, and the idea becomes communicative in time. That is why the Apsolutno Report is simultaneously a new instance in the activity of the Apsolutno time machine and a testimony to its own experience of time, which means that the redesign of existing information presents information in itself which has the value of feedback in relation to the existing state within the machine. The Association, therefore, is making a report in the form of a dynamic "block universe" of time within which we notice a dynamic fluctuation of the correspondence between the realization of an event, registered coordinates of its space-time, and the sequences of its actualization and virtualization. Similar to Hawking's glass, which potentially falls from the table and jumps back up onto it, the Absolute Report acts in both directions of the tape's movement or of leafing through a book where, however, each direction is equally accurate.

1996 APSOLUTNO 0004

# ABSOLUTELY TEMPORARY

Place: "The Old bridge", Novi Sad

Is it possible to determine the borderline between the temporary and the permanent? This question instigated this project. In the center of it is the bridge on the 1261 kilometer downstream the Danube, which connects Petrovaradin and Novi Sad (Vojvodina, Yugoslavia). The bridge was built in 1945

as a temporary solution and 'a new, bigger and more beautiful' one was planned to be built in its place. However, various circumstances got in the way and prolonged its temporary character for years. Finally, by placing the memorial plaque in 1987, 42 years later, the bridge was inaugurated in the "Marshal Tito's Bridge" and transformed into an object of permanent historical value. However, the plaque disappeared two years afterwards and, although it was later found in a nearby park, it was never re-installed. The pillar on which the plaque had stood was not removed either.

# APSOLUTNO REPORT – THE UTOPIA TRANSCRIPTS

Stephen Kovats

The notion of Utopia has often been embedded in the belief that a future era or frame of time will bring an eradication of the evils and dilemmas of the present. As an abstract of an unattainable state of being in which perfect social, spatial and political means will collude in perfect harmony, utopian

projections have played an intrinsic role in artistic and architectonic projects for centuries. The Futurists belief in utopia as a social elixir mixing technology with the rapid pace of early 20<sup>th</sup> Century development laid the groundwork for the project of Utopia as being a media and technology based state attainable through humanity's now irrevocable interaction with the machine. The machine will save us from our own pre-modern evil and this marriage between humanity and technology will be sealed during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, clearing the way for the Utopia that the 21<sup>st</sup> century was sure to bring. The political experiments of the twentieth century had placed a similar cataract of hope upon society while reducing Utopia to a mere simplification of its own dogma.

The association APSOLUTNO responded to this situation by creating a new plaque for the bridge, naming it Absolutely temporary. As part of the project, ceremonious unveiling of the new plaque was performed parallel to the one in 1987.



Three years later, in 1999, the bridge was destroyed during the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. After all, it was temporary indeed.

This Apsolutno Report attempts to capture the moment of time when the twentieth century gives way to the much storied 21<sup>st</sup> Century of technological harmony and societal freedom. The report is a series of discussions with artists who, through their work, thematised a specific year in this period of chronological transformation by examining their conceptual attitude and reasoning for focussing on this particular period. They are journeys in time, tangentially scouring the utopian interface between the change of millennia.

Tehching Hsieh, a naturalised American citizen of Taiwanese origin, discusses his motivation to end the 20<sup>th</sup> Century as an artistic act after having completed a series of 'one year' performances. Each piece exposed the artist to extreme

time-controlled conditions, which have been meticulously documented and declared works of art upon their completion. Whether punching a time-clock each and every hour over the period of one year, locking himself into his studio and not speaking for one year, or chaining himself to a fellow artist whom he could not touch for one year Tehching has, in a unique and excruciatingly intense way, probed the very structure of time itself. The '13 year' project discussed in the course of the interview exposed the artist to the immanence of time with respect to the structure of the century and what lies beyond. Upon completion of the project, on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000, Tehching Hsieh ceased to be an artist. He was, however, still alive.



2000 has played a pivotal role in defining the spatial frame within which the artistic association Apsolutno has been operating. Based originally in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, but acting and moving globally, Apsolutno delineates the fault lines at the close of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century by working in the context of its imminent passing. Beyond 2000 Apsolutno continues its collective work, devoid of geographic space and chronological abstracts of time. Yugoslavia, as a political construct also no longer exists. All things must pass.

Jennifer and Kevin McCoy are American media artists based in New York. Their web-based work '201 a space algorithm' shakes down and re-examines one of the classic artistic documents of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, Stanley

Kubrick's 1968 epic '2001 A Space Odyssey'. The film's attempt to explore humanity's desire to define itself in terms of its future being, set a standard not only in the sci-fi genre but succinctly wrapped the notion of a future Utopia in the dystopic mantle of humanity's own intrinsic failings.

The discussions were all recorded in New York City during mid-February 2001.

### 1999 – Tehching Hsieh

I was born in Taiwan and I jumped ship illegally into the U.S. in 1974. At that time the Kuomintang didn't allow young people to leave the country, unless maybe you were studying somewhere. If you didn't have a reason, you didn't



get out. I knew that New York is one good place for art in the world, so that's why I came here. It was the fastest, but most difficult way to get in!

**How was that moment of time when you set foot in this country? did you feel you were running away from something or running to something?**

It was a total plan for me. I escaped at the Delaware river in Philadelphia, and told the taxi driver to hurry – I was afraid of getting caught by the immigration police. I didn't know anything, this land was something new for me-like another planet, and saw the car, it was like a spaceship. I jumped in and then the highway! ... the car sped – I saw the landscape, it was all so new, so fresh. But I knew I was still in the escape process – the time, the four, five

hours going to New York, I still didn't know I would reach the place I want to be. From the New Jersey side I see the view, it was so incredible, such a huge city, I've never seen before. Then we entered the city, and the taxi driver doesn't know where to go, where I'm going – in the beginning he drives all over, asking where is my sister, where she lives? I spoke almost no English, and I'm sure the taxi driver is thinking all along that there's something wrong with this guy because I paid him \$150 at the Philadelphia bus station, and he goes to his home to change to his regular car and drives me to the city. And before, all the way up to the tunnel under the Hudson River, he says "no, I only drive you to the tunnel! To go into the city is another \$20!" So I had to pay him another \$20 and he drives me in



+ through the Holland tunnel into New York ...

**Was this journey for you some kind of artistic act in itself?**

This in itself I don't call art – but for all the actions I take in my life I still use the big words 'modern art' – every action is related to each other.

**Since so much of your work is time based and process conceptual in nature, were you thinking about these things back then?**

Because now the time has passed so the thing I was thinking about at the time was total reality, but of course an action is an act! My whole life is art in different ways – even now, even after that I'm not an artist anymore.

**So then you found your sister, you settled in – so to speak – and you embarked on a series of 'one year' performances...**

Yes, 5 one year pieces, and one 13 year piece.

**I'm particularly interested in the '13 year' piece ...**

Yes, it started on December 31<sup>st</sup> – my birthday – 1986, I was 36 years old, and it went until December 31<sup>st</sup> 1999, "do art – nothing public".

**What is the significance of the date?**

I picked up the date of my birthday to try to use the century in its form – not so much because of the 13 years. But 13 is also a nice number, and 1999 is the

end of the century. So I picked out numbers like my birthday, the end of the century, the millennium, it's all about a philosophical look at the life of time – you spend it, you kill it – and then ... you're still alive. That's the way I experience time, how I feel it – strongly. It doesn't mean I do something with *meaning* or *no meaning*. In the worst of times there's nothing to do, or thinking about what it is to die.

**Of course, whether the project started a year earlier or later is somewhat irrelevant, but at a certain time you decided you were going to focus on the end of the century.**

That's exactly the point because my last 'one year' project was in 1986, and then you want to reach the end of century, it doesn't matter which year, but of course that period of time must be longer – not just 2 or 3 or 4 years – I must try to make it longer. One person said to me, "13 years, that's wasted, it's quite long", but to me it becomes 100 years or longer. That's the way I tried to keep my work focussed. After the 'one year' performances, I didn't want to go back.

**Do you look at that '13 year' performance as a type of container for your other performances, or as a time border for the other projects?**

It feels like the old work doesn't matter, I just do more, or I do less - it's just time passing, past time. But I have four of five previous works, the old ones, which form a structure. The time passing is the form of expression. That's me,

I've done something. When you stretch time, you make marks, like it's some body. In human history it's just a fraction. Did you see the movie 2001 by Stanley Kubrick? It's a sculpture of time marking history.

**When you embarked on your 13 years of survival project there is some kind of mathematical phenomenon, that as you get closer to that moment when it ends, time gets compressed psychologically ...**

At that point everybody nears the end of the century, but for my person, it is my project, it is a human being issue and its universal. The century is artificial. The earth moves around the sun, its universal, one circle makes a year and there's a rhythm with which we calculate time. But for a century, based on 100, it's an abstraction. It doesn't matter if tomorrow is another century, there's no difference. Utopia is the freedom to express my own will. For me time is my freedom, this is what I choose – this is a utopia.

**In the moment of a transfer, in the moment that the approach to a 'change-over' has past - this is a bit like the impossibility of photography. How is it really possible to fix movement on say, a piece of paper? When you cut time into ever smaller pieces, there's still movement. Time is always a continuum – but then there's a certain point when things flip and there's an incredible energy in that moment. How did you feel about that moment when suddenly it was 2000, the moment as Decem-**

**ber 31st, 11:59:59 p.m. became the whole time-space of your 13 year project?**

The moment of January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000, meant that I had to publish my report for my piece, for what I had been doing for the past 13 years! It was a collage which read "I kept myself alive. I passed the De. 31, 1999. Tehching Hsieh, January 1, 2001." And so that day, I actually had something to do! January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2000 was a very big day for me!

## 2000 – Apsolutno

**What was - or is - the significance of this temporal boundary to your work?**

At one point, we were thinking of dealing with the last 5 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but indeed we dealt with 5+1 years! Since the very beginning of our collaboration, we understood that the



year 2000 is actually a part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, hence 1995:2000 project and characteristic annual signatures 1995 APSOLUTNO 0005 through 2000 APSOLUTNO 0000. This was some kind of rebellion attitude towards the establishment yet acceptance of

+ absolutely real facts as a backbone of our production. Parallels between 1995:2000 and 5-year plans, a governing conception on socialistic economic and political agenda, were drawn. Then, we realised that this doesn't make much sense since our project contains 6 years. Ooops!

**Had it (does it) had an impact in establishing any strategy with respect to the delivery of your artistic expression?**

The production became way more complex. Everything was taken in consideration. The project turned into an inventory of the reality. Yet, APSOLUTNO never developed a "shtick" in terms of aesthetic appearance. As every day brings new challenges, meanings, dramas, excitements, etc., we tried to stay as open to all of these influences and respond to them sincerely in the carefully selected or the most appropriated media. 1995:2000 is extremely eclectic in this regard. The end of the century was very rich in technological terms and we were vehemently experimenting and expressing our concerns, ideas, and beliefs in video, web, and CD-Rom. At the same time, we felt quite comfortable within realm of more traditional media, like print, photography, and sculpture. Text, in many forms and languages, played a pivotal role in conveying the messages of our projects. Despite this pile of artefacts, we kept it very very simple – minimal in a way.



**Has the approach to 2000 had the effect of compressing any aspect of your work?**

No. Lets look at 1995:2000 rather as a documentary, not a feature.

**Did you have any expectations for 2000?**

That Jörg Haider (leader of the populist far right Austrian People's Party) doesn't shut down t0, our ISP in Vienna! It would be the greatest irony, given that Milosevic previously shut down openet in Belgrade, which was our local host.

**Was the fact, that 2000 ended with a complete shakedown of the political context within which you were working, part of your strategy?**

That would be a far fetch. We were not anticipating anything. APSOLUTNO was pointing at some of the important facts in the world around us. During the period, Yugoslavia experienced a total crash down in every sense. Since the end of the millennium is a period of

highly developed telecommunications and multinational corporations, events in Yugoslavia were reflected in the global political and economical arena and vice versa, which was certainly mirrored onto our themes and interests as well. Everything is political, our work too.

**Is there any irony in this situation with respect to your work?**

The main attributes of our work were irony and paradox. Irony was following us as we were trying to point at it. A kind of "perpetuum mobile" of irony. One night in 1995, we watched 7:30 TV news where an interview with the CEO of the Novi Sad shipyard was broadcast. A gentleman in a suit was talking about the great potential and progress of this firm in front of two giant transoceanic liners, rusting in the shipyard for years due to the UN sanctions and total collapse of the local infrastructure. Coincidentally, a day before APSOLUTNO para-legally intervened in the shipyard, surrounding both ships with the police yellow ribbon that had imprinted text "ABSOLUTELY DEAD – KEEP OFF"! Needless to say that the ribbon was in the picture, hovering between the CEO and the ships.

**Have there been any utopic chasms opened with the step beyond 2000?**

1995:2000 was quite utopian idea to begin with. Presently, we are continuing our collaboration between – Ann Arbor,



Budapest, Novi Sad, and San Francisco via the most utopian medium of all - the Internet. If it weren't for utopian beliefs, APSOLUTNO wouldn't be.

**Will you continue with any artistic expression beyond 2000, and if so, in what way will it be referential to 2000?**

We are definitely continuing our everyday lives, therefore our artistic activities. The entire year 2000 was considered 0000 year of our 1995:2000 project. All the projects originated between midnight of 12/31/99 and 00:00 hours 12/31/00 were signed with 2000 APSOLUTNO 0000. As mentioned before, APSOLUTNO agrees with the scientific approach to the year 2000 as the last year of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Let's say that 1995:2000 was a very site-specific undertaking in global terms. After 12/31/00 we made a number of pieces that do not belong to a larger cluster of projects with an anticipated time limit.

✦ As we produce new work in regards to specific times and locations we currently live in, we'll continue to show and lecture about 1995:2000. Y2K was an overblown moment in our history with a number of political and economical consequences, and some insignificant technological defects. If we discontinue keeping this phenomenon as a pivotal reference on the horizon of our collaborative production and research, we certainly won't ignore its role in contemporary culture.

### 2001 – Jennifer and Kevin McCoy

(K.M.) '201 a space algorithm' is a web based project we completed in February 2001. It is based on a program which allows you to construct various remixes of the film '2001' by Stanley Kubrick. The interface gives you the possibility to intervene in the movie's structure.

(J.M.) It's not exactly remixes in the sense that you can manipulate the images from the film but the basic unit of operation that we were looking at in the project is on the level of the shot, but you can reorder the shots from beginning to end, for example playing the film backwards in reverse shot order or there's various algorithms that let you recombine the shot lengths by expanding and repeating to construct new time frames for the film that are shorter or longer.

(K.M.) We wrote the software from the ground up. We digitised the film, 2 hours and 24 minutes and we broke it up into individual shot sequences. It turns out there are 607 shots in 2001, and that was our database, and we had to write software which allowed us to pull it out shot by shot. Then once we had the shots and compressed them for internet streaming, like this hyper super-low compression that we did, we kept the original aspect ratio for the film which is 2.2:1 - really wide - and then we wrote an application which the viewer can then use to create these reconfigurations. There are no juicy parts to the project.

**What is about the project that makes it relevant for this year other than the fact that it's 2001?**

(K.M.) Well that was part of it – in the end we thought we better do it now – because we're not going to do it next year! You could, but it would be kind of weird. In the end we realised we needed to tap into the time, but really what we thought was that the main idea for the project - beyond anything about the shots and all the subsequent discoveries - was the realisation that the title itself was an algorithm. That 2001 was this kind of equation that could be reconfigured with different kinds of control data sent to it and that it could change – so that 2001 could be 1002. And what's 1002? It's the film in reverse order. It could be 2 000 001, and what's

2 000 001, well it's the film really really long, so we made this conceptual connection between the title and the shots as a kind of equation that we can manipulate. That was the original idea which came about through discussion.

**Is there a kind of relevance in the film which lends itself to this kind of re-interpretation especially when you're dealing with the compression and extraction or a decompression of time?**

(K.M.) Yes, the basic mechanism of the project is this shuffling of sequences. Each individual unit -whatever that unit may be – was in this case shot from 2001. It could also be some other material that we might make for some other project, whatever. But the basic idea is your not really controlling which piece of media can connect up to the other piece of media. You have to assume each individual unit you are dealing with is infinitely connectable with any other piece of media in an arbitrary way. Each piece has to be stand alone on the one hand and connectable on the other in this kind of weird relationship. So the choice with 2001 is that there are several things going for it already. There's a film that's already designed to move from shot to shot in its continuity editing, so you can challenge that, but you're still operating from a position of the shots having gone together in a certain way already. It turns out that there are a lot of things in the film that lend itself to that

approach – its own kind of hypermodular approach because each shot is designed in a stand alone kind of way. There are these fixed tableaux in it.

We were chopping up that film after having done all this 'Starskey and Hutch' stuff, so we had seen thousands of shots of 'Starskey and Hutch' and in a 45 minute episode of 'Starskey and Hutch' there's about 520 shots in this 1970's TV program. So when we sat down to sequence 2001 and there's only 607 shots in this 2 and a half hour film - whoa! – that was the first revelation!

(J.M.) Also the fact that if you edit the beginning of most films together with the end you'll see similar characters, similar locations and a similar sensibility but with this film if you edit the beginning with the end you get monkeys with pre-man earth and you get space on Jupiter. There's a different kind of visual juxtaposition you couldn't get in any other film, especially in traditional narrative films. It makes massive leaps and the software can make those leaps even more massive, or shrink them. The expansion and compression of time in that film is so incredible that the amount of time that the film covers is extraordinary.

(K.M.) Our software institutionalises that famous jump cut in the film – the arbitrariness of one shot to another that opens up a space for the audience to

— make their own connections – the kind of conceptual juxtapositions that he made with the bone and the spaceship, ours is an expansion of that idea.

The way you approached making this project, using the film you chose, seemed to make it the ultimate film to have if you were a passenger on that spaceship itself because there are such weird time problems going on during that journey. There are scenes which cover incredibly long periods of time – they may be only 5 seconds, but they may feel like 5 minutes. Were you thinking about the kind of narrative that that film actually has in your project, since your work also contains a parody of what is happening within the original film itself?

(K.M.) Our software works through a number of presets – from a practical viewpoint there's always a trade-off between total flexibility and total pre-determination so our software is in this middle ground where there's a lot of permutations that the users can do but it's all operating within a set of preset templates. From our perspective we thought about each of the templates really carefully. In the sequencing of the shots where there's a traditional order – first shot is first, last shot is last which is a basic idea – and there's a random one where the shots are in whatever order, but then there's these other two – an interlaced mode and a stutter mode – which play on the narrative and depend on the idea of a predetermined knowledge of narrative where they

tweak that in some way and the shots oscillate, for example, towards the centre of the film – a kind of flash-forward/flash-back kind of psychosis that's happening. The stutter mode is then the neurosis kind of selection where it'll be constantly cycling around a certain set of shots. Basically how the algorithm works is that it will arbitrarily switch from forward to reverse mode, so you're basically constantly playing through a set of 20 or 30 shots in this eternal kind of neurotic spinning around – and both of these things depend on a narrative structure being there.

The film illustrates one of humanity's great struggles with its destiny. How do you read that film knowing its context in the sixties before the moon landing, compared to today being the year 2001? You've given the movie a new form, a new spin, it's been re-produced, re-presented. How does that work in terms of this original idea of destiny? Is there a difference in the meaning? Has it been altered by the way we 'call up' the film – now that we're doing this via modem?

(J.M.) Certain things about the film are underlined in certain algorithms, others are de-emphasised in those same algorithms. Most of the algorithms emphasise the mystery of the destiny of the process and that's what most of the viewers of the film walk away with – with this initial sense of 'oh my! did I really understand it?' because it can be read so many different ways. In one

way this unseen race is controlling man's destiny and introducing him to things that aren't always terribly pleasant. Like when the apes at the beginning end up discovering technology they'll use it to subjugate other animals, other species. By extending and rasterising the time frame and showing all these artefacts of the visual image it underlines that mystery – you get this beautiful 2 minute long shot with this Ligeti soundtrack just looping and looping and looping and looping. It slows down the whole time frame and you get into this more meditative space and when the next shot comes – its this shock you feel in the movie, but even more so when you expand the time frame like that. The film really can function as a loop – the process of the star child coming back to earth is really a beginning, but it's also an ending so if you see those things in a different order it draws parasitically on the experience of having seen the film already.

The conceptual drive to transform one medium into an other is seen to be a utopian gesture. the film plays with this constantly, certain relationships in the film are reproduced with technology emphasising the utopian nature of a clean technological age - for example the shot where the doctor on board the space ship calls his daughter on the *videophone*, and kubrick says, oh hey! People in the future are just like us today (1968), they have to call their

kids on their birthdays but this whole technological structure is supporting that over a much greater distance in the way that the web has taken the same old drives and this other transition.

(K.M.) Another reason for having done the project in 2001 is that the film now, today, reflects current state of the art technology – this whole internet, interactive TV kind of thing - we're using *this* actual state of the art of *this* 2001 to revisit the fictitious 2001 which showed us this technology back then!

Cinerama!

Of course there are things which are totally antiquated in the film as well, like the Pan Am flight they come in on, and the airline's out of business today, (J.M.) the gender relationships from the 60's, (K.M.) and the typical Bell telephone from the 'pre-Bell-telephone-monopoly break-up' he uses. There's this retro-ism built into the film like when HAL – the distopian foil – is on his last breath and says "Hello gentlemen! I was 'born' in Urbana Illinois in 1992 ... " So already in the film *now* there's this look back 10 years to 1992 – and you think – 1992? – *that* seems like decades ago!

New York, February 2002



1996 APSOLUTNO 0004

## GOOD EVENING

This project refers to the 'evening' of the millennium and the impact of the media on the experience of reality. It was realized as video and a booklet thus making reference to both television and the press. The link between the two parts is established by the use of the same sentence "Good evening" - the standard way tv news readers address their viewers at the beginning of the news. The sentence also implies the 'evening' of the century and millennium.

The video (duration 8 minutes) questions the way the media present information as fact. It adopts the recognisable framework of TV news by utilising the first two words news presenters utter when addressing viewers. Transmissions from the TV channels of various countries, involving numerous languages, were appropriated.

In the booklet, the sentence is written using the logos of the main daily newspapers in the corresponding languages. The pagination uses symbols signifying moves in chess instead of numerals. After 32 moves this game of chess ends in checkmate, a situation from which escape is impossible.

## STRING (2000)

C5

### Triangle

[5]

(5) 1995  
(55) 1945  
(555) 1445

1995

- Sun develops *Java*.
- The Prince Gustav Ice Shelf and the Northern Ice Shelf in Antarctica begin to disintegrate.

1945

- *Trinity* is exploded near Alamogordo, NM.
- Adolf Hitler marries Eva Braun in Berlin.
- Coke becomes a registered trademark.

1445

- János Hunyadi, Governor of Transylvania, is elected Regent of Hungary for the infant king Ladislas V.
- Johannes Gutenberg adapts the winepress and develops a press for printing.

### crystalline

[3, 7]

(333) 1667  
(337) 1663  
(373) 1627  
(377) 1623  
(733) 1267  
(737) 1263  
(773) 1227  
(777) 1223

1667

- Jan Vermeer paints *The Painter* in his studio.
- John Milton publishes *Paradise Lost*.
- Jean-Baptiste Denys, physician to Louis



XIV, treats a boy bled too many times for fever by a transfusion of lamb's blood. The boy recovers but later patients die and the practice is banned.

#### 1663

- Ivan Rzhnevsky sees a huge flaming sphere, bluish smoke pouring out from its sides, hover over Robozero Lake.
- The first Bible is printed in the Americas. It was called *The Apostle to the Indians* and was written in the Algonquian language.
- The first Turnpike act is passed in Britain.

#### 1627

- The last Aurochs (*Bos taurus primigenius*) dies in the Jaktorowski forest, Poland.
- Johannes Kepler completes the *Rudolphine Tables* and gives accurate positions of 1,005 fixed stars.

#### 1623

- German inventor William Schickard of Tübingen builds an early adding machine.

- Blair Pascal is born in Clermont-Ferrand, France.
- Galileo Galilei publishes *The Assayer*.

#### 1267

- The first toll road is introduced in England.
- Present Portugal is united.
- The Aztecs arrive in the valley of Mexico.

#### 1263

- Astronomers Jehuda Cohen and Issac ben Sid of Toledo begin work on compiling *The Alfonsine Tables*. The tables include accurate calculations of planetary motions.
- Shinran, founder of Jodo Shinshu, dies in Kyoto, Japan, at the age of 89.

#### 1227

- Mongol emperor Genghis Khan dies.
- Dōgo introduces the Soto sect of Zen Buddhism from China to Japan.

BOA TARDE

DOBRA VEČER

GUTEN ABEND



1223

- Alfonso II the Fat, the excommunicated king of Portugal, dies.
- Snorri Sturluson writes *The Prose Edda*.

**ascension****[0+1+4]**

(014) 1986

(041) 1959

(104) 1896

(140) 1860

(401) 1599

(410) 1590

1986

- Spain recognizes Israel.
- 25th Space Shuttle (51L)-Challenger 10 explodes 73 seconds after liftoff; Christa McAuliffe is the first teacher lost in space.
- Geraldo Rivera opens Al Capone's vault on TV and finds nothing.

1959

- First weather satellite launched: Vanguard 2, 9.8 kg.
- Vatican edict forbids Roman Catholics to vote for communists.
- Monkeys Able and Baker zoom 500 km into space on Jupiter missile, becoming the first animals retrieved from a space mission.

1896

- Wilhelm Röntgen announces his discovery of x-rays.
- First car accident occurs; Henry Wells hits a bicyclist in New York City.

1860

- Britain formally returns the Mosquito Coast to Nicaragua.
- Pony Express begins between St Joseph, Missouri and Sacramento, California.

1599

- Jacob van Necks' fleet leaves Bantam Java with pepper, clove and nutmeg.



**1590**

- Mauritius of Nassau's ship reaches Breda.
- The unexplained word, Croatoan, is found carved on a tree on Roanoke Island off North Carolina by Governor John White, when he returned to the colony from England and discovered the colonists gone. White took the letters to mean that the settlers had gone to Croatoan Island some 80 km away, but no trace of them was ever found.

**metaphor**

**[0+2+3]**

- (023) 1977
- (032) 1968
- (203) 1797
- (230) 1770
- (302) 1698
- (320) 1680

**1977**

- World's largest crowd - 12.7 million - for an Indian religious festival.
- First CRAY 1 supercomputer shipped, to Los Alamos Laboratories, NM.

**1968**

- Christian Barnard performs 2nd heart transplant.
- First pulsar discovered (CP 1919 by Jocelyn Burnell at Cambridge).
- Clandestine Radio Voice of Iraqi People broadcasts its final transmission.

**1797**

- First top hat worn (John Etherington of London).
- Bank of England issues first £1-note.

**1770**

- Marie Antoinette, aged 14, marries future King Louis XVI of France, aged 15.



1698

- Early atmospheric steam engine patented by Thomas Savery.

1680

- No entry

**matador**

[1+1+3]

(113) 1887

(131) 1869

(311) 1689

(313) 1687

1887

- Anne Sullivan teaches the word *water* to Helen Keller.
- Harvey Wilcox of Kansas subdivides 120 acres he owned in Southern California and starts selling it off as a real estate development (Hollywood).

1869

- R Luther discovers asteroid #108 Hecuba.
- Steam power brake patented (George Westinghouse).

1689

- Scotland dismisses Willem III and Mary Stuart as king and queen.

1687

- King James II orders his declaration of indulgence read in church.

**mean**

[6-1-0]

(016) 1984

(061) 1939

(106) 1894

(160) 1840

(601) 1399

(610) 1390



1984

- Apple Computer Inc. unveils its Macintosh personal computer.
- USSR announces it will not participate in the Los Angeles Summer Olympics.

1939

- Hitler and Mussolini sign *Pact of Steel*.

1894

- Motion picture experiment of comedian Fred Ott filmed sneezing.

1840

- Draper takes first successful photo of the Moon (daguerrotype).
- First adhesive postage stamps (*Penny Blacks* from England) issued.

1399

- Henry IV, king of England, usurps the throne from King Richard II.

1390

- Scottish nobleman, Alexander Stewart, earl of Buchan, burns the town of Forres and the cathedral at Elgin, enraged by the bishops who censured him for repudiating his wife.

**variable**  
[7-2-0]

(027) 1973

(072) 1928

(207) 1793

(270) 1730

(702) 1298

(720) 1280

1973

- West African Economic Community formed (Benin, Ivory Coast, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Senegal, Upper Volta).
- President Nixon signs *Endangered Species Act* into law.
- Japan allows its citizens to own gold.

1997 APSOLUTNO 0003

# TYME TRYETH TROTH

Project for the Improvement of the English  
Landscape Value

Date: August 1997

Place: Shavefarm, Nettlecombe, England

The starting point for this site-specific project  
was questioning the idea of improving the

landscape to suit the aesthetic needs of  
the landowner. Using citations from various  
sources and placing the bulldog sign as part of  
the views photographed, APSOLUTNO creates  
'landscape packages', in which landscape is  
presented as a product. APSOLUTNO thus  
relates the antropocentric attitude towards  
nature with domination in other spheres.

## Justification

"Venerable trees should give an air  
of dignity and continuity to a  
Gentleman's Seat."

Veitch, cited in: Rackham, O. (1986)  
*The History of the Countryside*.

## Aims

"...(to) enhance the existing landscape  
by judicious ... alterations."

ibid.

## Present condition and guidelines for improvement

"Most of the oldest trees show  
significant crown dieback or other  
damage, and could be aesthetically  
improved by restrained tree surgery."

*Nettlecombe Park and Pleasure Grounds*.  
Historic survey and restoration plan.

Nicholas Pearson Associates LTD  
Environmental Planners Landscape  
Architects  
August 1992, p. 19/26

"Dense weed growth, dead bamboo and  
overhanging trees reduce appreciation  
of the orchard pond, which is also sub-  
ject to siltation. Dense laurel precludes  
enjoyable access to the north corner of  
the pleasure grounds."

ibid. p. 19/26

"The high banks on which the hedges  
are planted form the next characteristic  
of these counties, rendering it difficult  
to see the adjoining fields or country  
from the road, and being really a great  
nuisance to a stranger. We have also to  
complain of the narrowness and depth



# TYME TRYETH TROTH GREAT BRITISH PRODUCE

of the lanes, or parish roads and the general want of guide-posts."

John Claudius Loudon (1842) "Travels in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset" in: *In Search of English Gardens*. National Trust Classics

## Possible additional costs

"... compensation for lost grazing to the agricultural tenant would be required."

*Nettlecombe Park and Pleasure Grounds*.  
Historic survey and restoration plan.  
Nicholas Pearson Associates LTD  
Environmental Planners Landscape Architects  
August 1992, p. 23/26

## Outcome of the project

"... the effect ... is romantic in a very high degree."

John Claudius Loudon (1842)  
"Travels in Devon, Cornwall and Somerset"  
in: *In Search of English Gardens*. National Trust Classics

Special thanks to Tom Wolsely





1928

- First U.S. air-conditioned office building opens, San Antonio, Texas.
- Soviet Union orders exile of Leon Trotsky.
- Scotch tape first marketed by 3-M Company.

1793

- Jean Pierre Blanchard makes first balloon flight in North America, Philadelphia.
- U.S. President Washington's 2nd inauguration, shortest speech (133 words).

1730

- First Jewish congregation in the U.S. consecrates a synagogue, New York City.

1298

- The first battle of Falkirk, said to be the first military engagement in which the longbow was decisive. Edward I and the English defeated the Scots led by Sir William Wallace.

1280

- Kublai Khan is formally recognized as Emperor of China – the beginning of the Yuan dynasty which lasted until 1368.

**target**

**[8-3-0]**

(038) 1962

(083) 1917

(308) 1692

(380) 1620

(803) 1197

(830) 1170

1962

- U.S. first lady Jacqueline Kennedy conducts White House tour on TV.
- 5 research groups announce simultaneously the discovery of anti-matter.
- Laser beam successfully bounced off the Moon for the first time.



**1917**

- Lenin returns to Russia to start Bolshevik Revolution.
- First appearance of Mary to three shepherd children in Fatima, Portugal.

**1692**

- Salem witch hunt begins.

**1620**

- First merry-go-round seen at a fair, Philippopolis, Turkey.

**1197**

- The Château Gaillard is built by Richard I of England.

**1170**

- Dublin, Ireland captured by the English.
- Knights of Henry II, King of England, murder Saint Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury.

**descension**  
**[9-4-0]**

- (049) **1951**
- (094) **1906**
- (409) **1591**
- (490) **1510**
- (904) **1096**
- (940) **1060**

**1951**

- Shigeki Tanaka, survivor of Hiroshima A-bomb, wins the Boston Marathon.
- Thought extinct since 1615, a Cahow is rediscovered in Bermuda.
- First jet passenger trip made.

**1906**

- *Census of the British Empire* shows England rules 1/5 of the world.
- Wright Brothers patent an aeroplane.
- First time Dow Jones closes above 100 (100.26).

+ 1591

- The Rialto Bridge, spanning Venice's Grand Canal and connecting Rialto and San Marco islands, is completed.

1510

- Pope Julius II excommunicates the republic of Venice.

1096

- The First Crusade begins, spurred on by Pope Urban II, who urged Christendom to go to war for the Sepulcher, promising that the journey would count as full penance.

1060

- Start of the Norman conquest of Sicily.

token

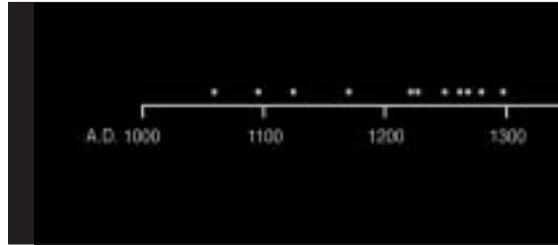
[0, 2, 5, 6, 7]

|   |                  |                      |
|---|------------------|----------------------|
| $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 = 120$ | $120 + 0 = 120$  | $120 \times 5 = 600$ |
| $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 = 24$           | $120 + 24 = 144$ | $144 \times 5 = 720$ |
| $1 \times 2 \times 3 = 6$                     | $144 + 6 = 150$  | $150 \times 5 = 750$ |
| $1 \times 2 = 2$                              | $150 + 2 = 152$  | $152 \times 5 = 760$ |
| $1 \times 1 = 1$                              | $152 + 1 = 153$  | $153 \times 5 = 765$ |

seed integer identification:

|                   |               |             |
|-------------------|---------------|-------------|
| $5 \times 0 = 0$  | $2000 - 0 =$  | <b>2000</b> |
| $5 \times 2 = 10$ | $2000 - 10 =$ | <b>1990</b> |
| $5 \times 5 = 25$ | $2000 - 25 =$ | <b>1975</b> |
| $5 \times 6 = 30$ | $2000 - 30 =$ | <b>1970</b> |
| $5 \times 7 = 35$ | $2000 - 35 =$ | <b>1965</b> |

|                     |                |             |
|---------------------|----------------|-------------|
| $5 \times 0 = 0$    | $2000 - 0 =$   | <b>2000</b> |
| $5 \times 10 = 50$  | $2000 - 50 =$  | <b>1950</b> |
| $5 \times 25 = 125$ | $2000 - 125 =$ | <b>1875</b> |
| $5 \times 30 = 150$ | $2000 - 150 =$ | <b>1850</b> |
| $5 \times 35 = 175$ | $2000 - 175 =$ | <b>1825</b> |



|                      |                |             |
|----------------------|----------------|-------------|
| $5 \times 0 = 0$     | $2000 - 0 =$   | <b>2000</b> |
| $5 \times 50 = 250$  | $2000 - 250 =$ | <b>1750</b> |
| $5 \times 125 = 625$ | $2000 - 625 =$ | <b>1375</b> |
| $5 \times 150 = 750$ | $2000 - 750 =$ | <b>1250</b> |
| $5 \times 175 = 875$ | $2000 - 875 =$ | <b>1125</b> |

2000

- No entry

1990

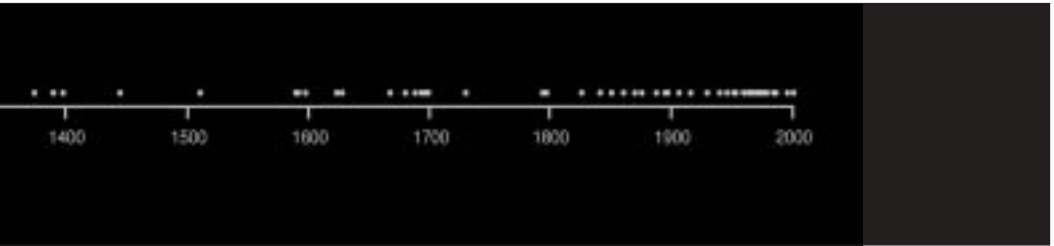
- More than 1,400 Muslim pilgrims are crushed to death in Saudi Arabia in a single stampede in an overcrowded tunnel leading from Mecca to the hill outside.
- A four-year-old girl has the gene for adenosine deaminase inserted into her DNA, becoming the first human to receive gene therapy.
- McDonald's opens its first branch in the USSR, in Pushkin Square, Moscow.

1975

- At age 19 Bill Gates founds Microsoft.
- South Vietnam surrenders the capital of Saigon to the North Vietnamese.
- Michel Foucault publishes *Surveiller et punir/Discipline and Punishment*.

1970

- Ann Summers launches her chain of sex stores with the opening of the *Ann Summers Sex Supermarket* in London.



- Queen Elizabeth II of England, accompanied by Prince Philip and Princess Anne, conducts the first royal walkabout in New Zealand.
- The Scottish psychologist R.D. Laing publishes his collection of poems, *Knots*.

### 1965

- Soviet cosmonaut Alexei Leonov leaves spacecraft Voskhod 2 and floats in space for 12 minutes in the first human space walk.
- The last section of the Trans-Canada Highway is completed.
- The lava-lamp is marketed.

### 1950

- The first embryos are transplanted in cattle.
- Mathematician Jon von Neuman makes the first 24-hour weather forecast using a computer.
- Fuel injection is introduced by Mercedes Benz.

### 1875

- Physiologist Leonard Landuis demonstrates the danger of transfusions using animal blood by showing that red blood cells from one species clump together or burst when mixed with serum from another species.

- British anthropologist E.R. Jones identifies tiny cuts in bones, used by Neolithic cultures, as tallies for a counting game.
- French artist Gustave Moreau paints *Jupiter and Semele*.

### 1850

- Gutta-percha (rubber) hoses begin to replace watering cans.
- Russian mathematician Pafnuty Lvovich Chebyslaev publishes *On Primary Numbers*, in which he further develops the theory of prime numbers.
- German inventor Sebastian Bauer builds *Le Plongeur-Marin*, one of the first submarines.

### 1825

- Austrian composer Franz Schubert completes his Symphony No. 9 in C major.
- The Stockton to Darlington railroad in England opens, becoming the world's first public railway.
- English scientist Michael Faraday isolates benzene by distilling whale oil.

### 1750

- The Benedictines of St. Maur, France publish *Dictionnaire de l'art de verifier les dates des faits historiques/A Dictionary of the Art of Verifying Historical Dates and Facts*.
- The first British soft-paste porcelain factory opens at Stratford-le-Bow, England.

2000 APSOLUTNO 0000

# SERBEIKO

# SERBEIKO®

## Video installation

In this installation, APSOLUTNO uses computer animation of an image taken, as an absolutely real fact, from the Serbian state television news programme. SERBEIKO presents the absolutely exact (Serbian) time: constantly just before the main news.



SERBEIKO was first shown at the exhibition "INSOMNIA" in January 2000 in Belgrade.

- The Celsius Scale is created by Scandinavian physicist Martin Stromer; it inverts the temperature scale devised by his mentor, astronomer Anders Celsius, and sets the freezing point as 0 degrees C and boiling point as 100 degrees C.

1375

- As a gift from Pedro of Aragon to French King Charles V, Abraham Cresques, a Jewish mapmaker from Majorca, makes the *Catalan Atlas*, the first world map showing Marco Polo's travels.
- French bishop and astronomer Nichole d'Oresme translates the works of Aristotle for French King Charles V.
- William Benkelsoor, a Dutch fisherman, develops a technique for salting and storing gutted herring on board ship.



### 1250

- Norwegian settlers in Greenland reinvent under-floor central heating, last used by the Romans.
- The Dominicans found the first school of oriental studies at Toledo, Spain.

### 1125

- Tidal mills are built near the mouth of the River Adour, France, to take advantage of the flow of water constantly changing with the tides.



s p a c e





1995 APSOLUTNO 0005

# NEWS(PAPERS)

Date: July, 1995

Place: Fish Market in Novi Sad

Background: war on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia; sanctions and media blockade; absolute control of the media by the political regime in Belgrade

Situation: A newspaper kiosk out of function at the Fish Market in Novi Sad. Through the glass panes of the kiosk one could see a brick wall

as the kiosk was being turned into a more stable structure. This form of “remodeling” was a common technique used to avoid paying building permits and taxes.

APSOLUTNO intervention: the sign NEWS(PAPERS) was placed on the door of the kiosk. The original function of the kiosk was thus reactivated though with an important difference: newspapers were replaced by a wall of bricks. The photograph of the kiosk was accompanied with the following text.

## On Censorship

Newspapers have always been subjugated by the authority in power (unless, of course, the paper in question is the mouthpiece of the authorities); the Establishment jealously guards the privilege of controlling and censoring what is printed or published. One of North America’s greatest journalists, Benjamin Franklin, had to cease publication of his newspapers several times under the coercion of royal censorship.

The French Revolution gave powerful impetus to the development of journalism; revolutionary ideas and social upheaval provoked the interest of the masses. Newspapers became a weapon in the struggle against the *ancien régime* and their number significantly increased

during the first years of the Revolution. However, Napoleon’s regime suppressed press freedom and permitted only semi-official papers to circulate in the areas under rule. The restoration of the ‘legitimate’ monarchy and the Holy Alliance did not herald the reinstatement of press freedom: newspapers were prohibited from addressing political issues candidly.

Taken from: *The Encyclopedia of the Lexicographic Institute*, Zagreb MCMLXIII (revised)



# INFO BODY CULT

Konrad Becker

## Culture and communication as instruments of social control

Culture is not merely the expression of individual interests and orientations, manifested in groups according to certain rules and habits; it also holds the possibility of identification with a system of values.

The construction of a cultural memory with a view to setting up mental and ideological spaces and thereby establishing a symbolic order has a

longstanding tradition. The social memory of pre-modern societies was largely based on oral transmission and visually coded information, a situation that is reflected in the popular multi-media landscape of the present. Artificial remembrance is formed by places and images of a virtual, synreal psychogeography. Maps of the world have always been a tool of power politics that marks "ways of life" with an aura of objectivity. Images of the world as simulation or maps of reality are highly inductive, which is why, traditionally, no means are spared when it comes to measures of cultural representation. Whoever controls the metaphors controls thought.

The diffusion of conceptions by "infection" and the proliferation of the

— expression of culturally based convictions in the form of attitudes often takes on the form of an offer of a gesture, a position that can be mimetically appropriated in a more or less conscious fashion. These scenarios mediate an implicitly political narrative logic. From historiography to education, perception is influenced by establishing mental scenarios that establish the symbolic order. According to Edward L. Bernays, one of the fathers of public relations: "The only difference between propaganda and education is the point of view. The advocacy of what we believe in is education. The advocacy of what we don't believe in is propaganda."

Evidence of examples of fictitious cultural reconstruction can be found in the Middle Ages. Recently, the magnitude that the faking of genealogies, official documents and codices had acquired in the Middle Ages caught the attention of the media. In 12<sup>th</sup> century Europe in particular, pseudo-historical documents were widely employed as tools of political legitimacy and psychological manipulation. According to conservative estimates, the majority of all documents of this period was forged. With hindsight, whole empires could turn out to be products of cultural "engineering".

Moreover, writers such as Martin Bernal, author of "The Fabrication of Ancient Greece 1785-1985", have clear-

ly demonstrated to what extent cultural propaganda and historical disinformation is contained in the work of European scholars. On the basis of racist ideas and political motivations, historical facts were distorted in order to support the ideological hegemony of a white, male elite.

During the so-called Cold War, too, issues of cultural hegemony were of importance. In publications such as "The Cultural Cold War" and "How America stole the Avantgarde", Frances Stonor Saunders and Serge Guilbaud offer a behind-the-scenes view of the cultural propaganda machine and provide a sense of the extravagance with which this mission was carried out. Interestingly, there were also efforts to support progressive and liberal positions as a bridgehead against the "communist threat". If one believes contemporary historical analyses, there was no major progressive art magazine in the fifties and sixties that was not founded by a cover organisation of the CIA or was not supported or infiltrated by such organisations. In the light of this fact, the claim made by Cuba at the UNESCO World Conference in Havana - that culture was the "weapon of the 21<sup>st</sup> century" - does not seem unfounded.

The construction of myths with the intention of harmonising subjective experience of the environment is also

used for integration and motivation in conflict management. "Information peacekeeping", the control of the psycho-cultural parameters through the subliminal power of definition in intermediation and interpretation, is considered as the most modern form of warfare, while "intelligence" passes as the virtual substitute for violence in the information society.

For a long time, information control has made itself felt by the profound penetration of the media landscape by agents of influence. Large-scale operations that modify public opinion, create social consensus and influence policy-making have not been exclusive to the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

However, the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was a heyday for intelligence agencies. Not only governmental and security-relevant data have acquired great importance: private and business intelligence services, global surveillance systems, dataveillance and information processing have grown into a monstrous global industry.

The communication technologies of the information age attack the information body: the individual and collective info body is defined by the totality of its patterns of interaction and communication, such as those that are increasingly digitally recorded and processed as so-called electronic footprints.

The present flow of information is too fast for people to be able to absorb it or to acquire the additional information necessary to influence outcomes. This situation provides the ground for electronic warfare, tactical deception and psychological operations. The developments in electronic media allow for a global tele-presence of values and behavioural norms. There are increasing possibilities of controlling public opinion by accelerating the flow of persuasive communication, and the difference between information and propaganda - "the manipulation of symbols as a means of influencing attitudes (Harold Lasswell) – is dwindling.

The increasing informatisation of society and the economy results in a growing culturalisation of politics. The use of information technology for the deterrence of civilian dissent opens up a new dimension of political and cultural control. There is a great interest in constructing an in-formed opinion and to shape public opinion as a whole using a hypnotic network of "facts" – even if these have no relation to reality. The art of the economy of attention consists in directing perception to a certain area, evoking psychological guiding motivations and shedding light on certain aspects in order to leave others in the dark. The increasing concentration of all attention on the spectacle makes everything disappear that is not within the predefined horizon of experience.

✦ This is done by utilising the functional mode of the brain, which filters out all but a few million signals that then are called "reality".

Psychological warfare targets the mind in order to reach the will, where desires and fears are addressed as control mechanisms of an economy of imagination. Whereas covert propaganda aims to strengthen the credibility of a news item by making it seem as if it came from among the midst of the target population, deep propaganda aims at habits and traditions, at the norms and the values of life. Normative empathic warfare evaluates the value systems of the target in order to then create situations in which the victim chooses a pattern of behaviour that brings him/her under total control or at least into a restricted position.

**"An ill-informed person is a subject, a well-informed person is a citizen."**

The democratic and participatory potential of new communication technologies has been increasingly forced out of the public debates, and the hope for an emancipatory cultural practice is seeming to turn into its own opposite, while the potential for control and repression through the use of ICTs is becoming increasingly apparent.

The development in new media is characterised by a dramatic concentration

of private capital interests and a gaping absence of public interests. Political participation must not be reduced to electronic polling and must instead be viewed as a structural challenge that affects standards and basic conditions for everything from education to industry. It is therefore necessary to create the conditions for a discussion of the democratic and political implications of ICTs on a broad basis.

Any democratic society depends on an informed public that is in a position to take political decisions. Historically, the development of a public sphere" was the precondition for the advent of democracy.

Democracy requires places and fora where the issues of the political community are discussed and debated and where basic information for the participation in a democratic society is presented.

The logic of the control over the media market is strongly opposed to the cultivation and formation of a "public sphere", and the dysfunctionality of a media market generates a crucial deficiency of participatory media culture. The public sphere can best be developed independently from the state and from dominant business interests. A society shaped by technological systems and digital communication should open a life perspective in which use and

value are not exclusively determined by material criteria and where cultural freedom can be actively pursued.

Just as the technocrats highlight the efficiency of technology and cloud its social effects, any purely political or economic critique is insufficient and unable to develop sound counter-models for social participation. Behind the machines that surround us, there is a technology of know-how, a way of looking at the world and dealing with it – integrated definitions and information models. Experimental cultural practice has a particularly important role to play

in the conquest of a participatory territory in electronic information technologies.

The work of artists and of independent cultural producers and their contribution to the shaping of a sustainable and emancipatory communication environment can not be overestimated. Only the promotion of a wide range of heterogeneous and experimental approaches that do not just serve short-term private profit interests can make it possible to live up to the positive cultural potential of new media.

1995 APSOLUTNO 0005

# PRElom BREAKing

Installation

Time: 25 May 1995, the date which was a public holiday in the ex-Yugoslavia as President Tito's birthday, on which occasion a central celebration was organised every year at a stadium in Belgrade

Place: Zlatno oko Gallery, Novi Sad

The title of the installation, BREAKing, refers to discontinuity, interruption, splitting, division or

separation, implying an abrupt and irrecoverable change. The installation consists of two elements: two shotguns in a broken position, one ready to be reloaded and used again, the other completely broken and unfit for usage; and sawdust covering the floor. The installation thus brings together two associations: military insignia and the circus.

The installation was realized for the second time at Kwangju Biennial in 1997, with important alterations: the shotguns in the installation, which were taken from the Kwangju police archive, had been used in the government's retaliation against the citizens who had taken part in the uprising in South Korea in the eighties.

# ABSOLUTE NOTHINGNESS 4 THESIS

Marina Gržinić

1.

The interactive CD-ROM *Troubles with Sex, Theory and History* by Marina Gržinić and Aina Šmid (produced by ZKM Karlsruhe, Germany, in 1997/98) starts with pure chance or contingency. The user is the agent that chooses between the numbers 1 or 2. The user is a gambler. The numbers 1 or 2 are connectors that link up with different images, texts and interactions derived

from 15 years of video and film production by Gržinić and Šmid and of theoretical work by Gržinić. All visual and textual productions were generated in the period between 1982-1997, and are now classified on four levels ranging from - - to -+ and from +- to ++. The images and interactions express function and redundancy on the one hand, and meaning, nonsense, chance, destiny and void on the other. It is not possible to travel through the four structures without changing them in accordance with our particular histories, intimacies, prejudices and stereotypes.

The CD-ROM displays the end of psychology: against the background of the ideology of psychology that reigns today, Gržinić and Šmid use a procedure of common clichés. Each sentence



in the CD-ROM is a cliché from a B-movie, yet somehow the trivial dimension of these clichés is lost and subdued into a metaphysical depth. Identity is represented not through the psychology of an individual, but through the formation of a new visual and cultural space, via the recycling of stereotypes. What we are witnessing is the act of taking possession of documents, photographs, images, faces and bodies, which are constantly produced as types, stereotypes and prototypes. Consequently, there is (contrary to the anticipation of the realist doctrine) no psychology, except when it is a constituent part of a 'quotation' or 'stereotype'; the psychological unity of a person disintegrates into a series of clichés and ritualized behavior. The use of quotations and recycling methods suggests

questions about originality and repetition, about reality and media simulation. The overall effect of this return to cliché is that people are strangely de-realized or, rather, de-psychologized. The same can be said of the procedure in the video work entitled *Hysteria* (made in 1984 by Marina Gržinić and Dušan Mandić (IRWIN)), which presents the work of Cindy Sherman. In this work, the video reconstruction of Cindy Sherman's photographs consisted of recycling scenic and stylistic elements and details, as well as performing poses from Sherman's photographs in front of the video camera. This act of taking into possession the photographs which Cindy Sherman herself utilized in the production of female types, stereotypes and prototypes is a kind of double twist. The images of women,





the many faces and identities, which had already been 'stolen' by Sherman from film and mass media, are taken one step further. The video work is thus a kind of double negation of identity—a negation of the already recycled images of Cindy Sherman. It can be regarded as the return of the repressed, which pushes back: returning the photo-images to the place from which they were taken or borrowed from the 'empire of the moving image'. The methods described result in a video image which exposes a never-ending display, insertion and rearrangement. The body is an artifact cobbled from other artifacts, rather than from a profound life experience. By contrast with the mass-media-produced idea that the body connected with new media achieves a natural totality, the post-

socialist visualization of the subject and of her/his body in the media underlines this artificial, mediatized, constructed and unnatural human body, and her/his thoughts and emotions.

One possible way of reading this is that the effect of de-realization is an effect of juxtaposing reality and its phantasmatic supplement face to face, parallel to each other. The idea is to put together the aseptic, quotidian social reality (formed through stereotypical questioning) and to parallel it (the questions) with its phantasmatic supplement. We can observe a similar process in the exhibition in Paris on Eastern European Art (2000), where the Russian artist Kabakov displayed the reconstruction of the Soviet kitchen. Through the window of this recon-

structed kitchen it was possible to watch delirious films from the golden Soviet era, full of bright future and smiling faces eager to work, to fight. The Soviet kitchen was placed parallel to its phantasmatic counterpart, observable through films and visual ideology. By using such a procedure, which allows us to externalize our innermost fantasies in all their inconsistency, the artistic practice stages a unique possibility of acting out the phantasmatic support of our existence. In cyberspace these traumatic scenes, which not only never took place in life but were never even consciously fantasized, have an even more important role, showing clearly that the real is a purely virtual entity, an entity which has no positive ontological consistency.

The CD-ROM *Troubles with Sex, Theory and History* signifies an interface between at least two force fields, between a form of content that is pure contingency, and a form of expression that is attached to the interactive user responses (this is a process of translating a general order of taste, knowledge, obsessions and ethical viewpoints into a personal order).

Unlike with most CD-ROM structures, after choosing between 1 and 2 the user cannot change the path of events by leaping backwards and forwards. The user either proceeds to the end, or has to quit. This differs from other CD-ROMs, where it is possible to erase

memory, to start over, to try a different resolution. In such works of hypertext form or of rhizome fiction, we get a vision of mistakes that can always be corrected. The rhizomatic, hypertext form refers to the trauma of some impossible Real which forever resists symbolization. In *Troubles with Sex, Theory and History* we have at our disposal only a limited power of intervention over the story.

I stated: in cyberspace these traumatic scenes, which not only never took place in life, but were never even consciously fantasized, have an even more important role, showing clearly that the real is a pure virtual entity, an entity which has no positive ontological consistency. But this is only one level of rethinking the situation.

Visualization(s) with film and imaging technologies clearly show ideologically engendered boundaries, and constitute safe distance-proximity relations in the real world and its phantasmatic film scenarios.

If we recall, the chief military commander Ripley from the blockbuster film *Alien 4* needed a lot of strength to get rid of the too-loving alien creature. The creature recognized that Ripley was its biological mother, and this was possible solely because in *Alien 4* Ripley, in contrast to the previous three films in the series, was a clone, i.e., an

— artificially procreated human entity, and not a true human woman, as was the case in all previous films. This same biological mother had to destroy the Alien through its total dematerialization into the extraterrestrial world. Despite this, the love gesture of the Alien was something morbid and extremely romantic and emphatic. We can confirm, with S. Stensly, that in the world of high technology, cloning and bio-chips, the empathic relation between two monsters (or a cloned cyborg) human and the monster tell us more about social relations, social interactions and the politics of love in the real world, than any other type of sexual relationship between any humans of whatever sexual orientation and preferences.

Ripley, despite being cloned, was still too human, and therefore ideologically still too problematic to fit the science-fiction story. In the industry of the moving image and its ideological support, a relationship between something that is semi-human and the mucus substance is allowed. Empathy and sexual relationships between humans is a forbidden territory. This is true of the first cyber-cloning film saga, *Bladerunner*, as well. The relationship between Harrison Ford and the film heroine Rachel functions smoothly as they are both replicas, and not a male who is copulating with a female cloned entity. This is why they are a perfect realization of the phantasmatic love couple (being

both almost, but not quite, identical to human beings).

The logic of the sex(ual relation) is as follows: love and sex in the exchange of empathy between the mucus microorganism and the human being that for now were not yet consumed always come to the point of a strategic distance. This is the distance necessary to keep the hygienic border relationship between us and the formless other conforming to the ideology. We can produce all the other live entities, but we will not have sex and empathy with them. Is not such a safe, remote relationship similar to the one proposed by the conscious middle class with the so-called Third World? Through UNICEF and similar organizations, they send one US dollar a month for an African child, thus allowing the children to survive - although the question is whether they can really live as well as just surviving. The relationship is externally empathic, to judge from the affectionate, grateful letters written by the African children. But this relationship is absolutely abstract; it does not require any kind of real contact, and is devoid of the possibility that such a contact will transmit contagious illness or something similar. It is the same with the Alien in *Alien 4*: the search for love and tenderness is from a safe distance: the distance teaches us, who are the mothers of the monsters, how the real children have to look and what the borders of our sexual-paternal-maternal lust are.

## 2.

Multiculturalism is the cultural logic of global capitalism, in the same way that the new spiritualism is its ideology; multiculturalism is not about leveling, but abstract multiplication. This is why global capitalism needs particular identities. In this triangle of global-multicultural-spiritual, the post-political must be seen not as the conflict between global and national ideological visions that are represented by competitive parties, but as abstract collaboration. As Jacques Rancière states in his theory of the post-political, it is about the collaboration of enlightened technocrats (economists, lawyers, public opinion experts) and liberal multiculturalists. This absolutely abstracted version of the functioning of art institutions is at the same time the international legitimation of the enlightened technocrats of post-socialism by international multiculturalists. This abstract collaboration shows a radical discord between the effects of resistance and the institutions and mechanisms of power that provoke them, and the complicity of power, private capital and thought with mastery.

The true horror today is not horrifying projects in art: these function, paradoxically, as protective shields that protecting us from the true horror—the horror of the abstract positioning of East and West. The psychosis-generating experience in itself is that this abstract collab-

oration functions as a protective barrier (that in the end protects only the institution itself) and erases all traces of difference, (a-historical) positioning, etc. The art institution's defense against the true threat is actually to stage a bloody, aggressive, destructive threat in order to protect the abstract, sanitized situation. This is also what demonstrates the absolute inconsistency of the phantasmatic support. Instead of the talk of multiple reality, as Slavoj Žižek would say, one should emphasize a different aspect—the fact that the phantasmatic support of the reality of the art institution is in itself multiple and inconsistent!

We have a triangle of global-multicultural-spiritual, and, on the other side, capital-democracy-ethics.

Absolute profanation and secularization are important processes. They are initiated by capital itself. This logical inversion may be summarized in the words of Baudrillard: "After all, it was capital which, throughout history, fed on the destruction of every reference, every human objective, which completely loosened every differentiation between false and real, good and evil, in order to introduce a radical law of equivalence and exchange, the iron law of its power. Capital was the first to perform intimidation, abstraction, de-territorialization, non-connectedness, etc. Nowadays this logic is turning against it. And when it tries to fight against this spiraling catas-

+ trophe, by concealing the last gleam of reality in which it was supposed to be the last thunder of power, it only multiplies the signs and accelerates the play of simulation." (Baudrillard, *The Procession of Simulacra*, in *Art and Text*, Spring 1983, p. 28)

Alain Badiou argues that it does not matter if this disintegration is going on in an almost barbaric way; it still has, as Baudrillard was already implying in the eighties, something of an ontological value. The processes of disintegration question the mythos of presence and the fetish of the absolute ONE. The machine of capital is showing that the essence of presence is multi-layered, is multitude. It is necessary to take the inconsistency produced by capital as an inconsistency of the multitude itself. On the other hand, democracy is, according to Badiou, just an economic democracy, connected with nothing else but bureaucracy and totalitarianism. Democracy is a norm inscribed in the relation of the subjects to the state. It is always a situation or a code of normatively imposing regulations about what multitude is. Badiou calls this process of establishing and perpetuating the norm counting for the One, which is always a result and not a process.

The cut of the counting for the One is, therefore, the most important process in the space of art and politics, one that is a process of invention, a new way of

acting today. And here is a place where ethics enters the arena of the world. Here we can see the importance of the law of total de-sacralization fostered by capital. The process is questioning this counting for the One is a process of producing the inconsistency of the One. The inconsistency here can be seen as a parallel process to what I was referring to above, in relation to Slavoj Žižek, as the inconsistency of the real world and its phantasmatic scenarios.

Capital has destroyed and de-fragmented the structure of the institution of the One, in theory and philosophy as well, and philosophy is now, as in Hegel's story of the owl of Minerva, trying to give a rational outline to this total process of fragmentation in order not to have to get rid of the historical structure and the philosophical edifice that was grounded in this One.

### 3.

I would like to start with a theoretical-political positioning of feminist theory and practice and subsequently with the relation between philosophy and cyberfeminism. The idea of this positioning or of taking a (conceptual) specific ground is to philosophically denote and articulate a proper Eastern European position. This idea is not grounded in the simple game of identity politics, where specific women search for their rights to colonize cyberspace; it is

rather a militant response to this constant process of fragmentation and particularization. Even more, I insist on the re-politicization of the cyberworld by taking a ground that is not a geographical space or a location on the geographical map of the "New Europe" but as E. Said would say, a ground that is a concept.

My rethinking of the position of (post) feminism and gender theories today is also a direct answer to the often populist remarks that today is not the time to divide East and West (Europe), and that due to the ideology of globalization it is only home that matters: "No East, no West, home is the best!" Despite the ideological blindness of such a sentence, which forgets to take into account the claustrophobic tendency and totalitarian flavor intrinsic to every ideology of intimacy, again we have to ask "Where is this home?" In which spiritual and conceptual context is it situated, if we have one?

Instead of reflecting myself as a gendered, academically positioned woman, and therefore as a (cyber)feminist from Eastern Europe, I propose a radical reversal of a possible interpretation of this Eastern European position. I would like to propose to articulate my proper Eastern European position (or if you prefer, in Lyotard's term: my Eastern European condition) as a (post) feminist - as a cyberfeminist paradigm. Eastern

Europe is to be seen as a woman paradigm or as the female side in the process of sexual difference and grounding ourselves in the real world or cyberworld. It is rooted in a much deeper universal demand for identity, politics, strategy and tactics of action, theorization, emancipation and uselessness. It can be perceived as the militant theorization of a particular position in the crucial debate concerning the ways and modes and protocols for entering the (cyber)space of hopes, uselessness, theory and terror.

Generally speaking, I identified two broad lines of critical thought which form positioning matrices in this debate. The first emphasizes the individuals or groups, acting as a kind of entity that has neither a fixed historical nor a geographical position, while consciously taking the position of a counter-culture. This position I call "The Scum of Society Matrix". However, this "Scum of Society Matrix" refers principally to the positioning of the so-called critical Western European and North American participants, users and online community circuits on the WWW who form a kind of parasitic body trying to get everything possible from the social structures that have already been established. "The Scum of Society Matrix" proposes a new autonomous economy and new structures developed from the appropriation and restructuring of the so-called old ones.

1995 APSOLUTNO 0005

# AZBUKA absolut in Wien

Site specific project

Place: streets of Vienna

This project emphasises cultural communication between Vienna and Serbia. Serbian culture is connected to Vienna in a unique way. Among the many events that occurred in Vienna which have had a significant impact on Serbian culture is the publication of a book crucial

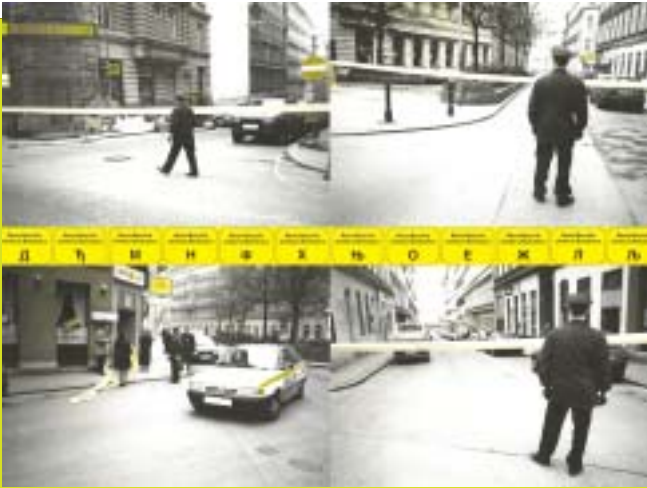
for the creation of the Serbian Cyrillic Alphabet - the AZBUKA, which is still used as one of the two official alphabets in Yugoslavia. Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic [1787-1864], "the creator of the standard Serbian language and literature" (as stated on the memorial plaque in Marokkanergasse 3, where he died), published the first Dictionary of the Serbian language using the AZBUKA in 1818. The Dictionary was printed in the Mechitharisten Monastery printing house in Vienna (Mechitaristengasse 4).

Starting with these facts, APSOLUTNO first found the shapes of all the thirty letters of the AZBUKA on the map of Vienna, formed by the streets. This was followed by an action in

As Peter Lamborn Wilson, alias Hakim Bey, stated in the lecture at the Nettime meeting *Beauty and the East* in Ljubljana in 1997, it seems that the Second World is erased and that what is left is the First and Third World. Instead of the Second World, Bey argued, there is a big hole from which one jumps into the Third. I will call this hole and the second line of thought "The Matrix of Monsters", as a travesty of the general title of the Nettime conference *Beauty and the East* (which was already a paraphrase of the fairy-tale title, *Beauty and the Beast*). When it comes to the differences between East and West, it has to be made clear that the actors from the black hole, the so-called Eastern European critical WWW users, do not simply want to mirror the First World, "the developed capitalist societies", but to

articulate and interpret or, rather, to construct a proper position in this changed constellation.

"The Monsters" insist on difference - a critical difference within and not a special classification method marking the process of grounding differences, such as apartheid, as Trinh T. Minh-ha suggests. The question of who is allowed to write about the history of art, culture and politics in the area once known as Eastern Europe has to be posed along with the questions of how and when these events are marked. The following questions or synthetic moments are crucial, as formulated by Yvonne Volkart: "Which spaces do subjects and agents cross when they communicate? What do they call themselves? Are they subjects, cyborgs, monsters, nomads or



simply hackers?" (Yvonne Volkart, "Stubborn Practices," in the Age of Information and Biotechnology, written as a part of her curatorial project, Tenacity: Cultural Practices in the Age of Information and Biotechnology, presented at the Swiss Institute, New York, 2000 and at the Stedhale, Zurich, 2000) We have to ask ourselves what space, which actors, whose agents and what subjects?

#### 4.

In this final part of the essay I would like to connect the two poles: Alain Badiou's proposal to end with counting for the One, and the idea that instead of thinking of the Other in relation to the One, we have to operate with the Other as Two. If we see the Eastern European paradigm as a "woman para-

digm", it is exactly because of this proposed changed position of the Other. If we think of a woman as the Other it is because we have to count from now one from two. That means that in the process of a philosophical rethinking of the Western tradition, due to the total fragmentation of any monolithic edifice, there is now a chance for Eastern Europe to be understood as Two.

To discuss the theory of the Other as Two means also to constitute a possible radical positioning for other worlds, paradigms of thinking, etc., out of the Western capitalist worlds. That means that these others, the Other, is not simply to be seen as a couple or a twin (in the same way that the dominant interpretation understood woman to be the other part of the male-female couple or the twin soul of man, and Eastern



which APSOLUTNO, with the permission and assistance of the Viennese police, blocked the traffic in these streets. At the same time, each house or building in the streets comprising the letters was marked with a label with the following text in German: "This house absolutely lives in the letter ...". The labels had the same layout as the street-name plates in Vienna and were printed using the same letter font. Finally, a brochure about the action was printed in the Mechitharisten Monastery, in the same printing house where Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic's Dictionary was printed in 1818.

An integral part of the project is a specific replica of the first German - Serbian Dictionary

published by Jovan Kangrga in 1928. In this Dictionary, all words have been erased; only the punctuation marks remained, in their original positions. Five copies of the dictionary were made.

This project was conducted at a time when communication between Austria and Serbia became extremely difficult. By blocking the traffic in the streets of Vienna and erasing the words from the official dictionary, APSOLUTNO referred to the block in communications between Austria and Serbia, in spite of the long tradition of strong cultural links between the two countries.

Europe was understood as the mirror image of Western Europe or as its pure symptom), but as Two.

But let us go step by step, to explain in detail the process described above. While doing so, I will make extensive reference to Alenka Zupančič's text "Nietzsche and Nothingness."

The result of the theorization above is that the One is in a disproportionate relation to the Other. When we put the One against the Other it is obvious that the One needs the Other, but only because it needs to establish a demarcation in the field; otherwise there is no relation between them. Truth functions in relation to semblance in a similar way. Truth is all that is not semblance, and vice versa. When we put them together they form a unity, but this

unity will not give us any third possibility. This is why in such a relation the Other is just a negative of the One. But we can give another interpretation: the Other is not to be perceived as one of the One, but as Two. Two at the same time. That means we do not have a dialectic of affirmation and negation, but two parallel dialectics that do not come one from the other, but are both present at the same time! In such a constellation the history of the world is not the history of the lost mythical One, but the history of the double source. In this way Eastern Europe, perceived as Two, could be seen as one of the sources. To make a reference to the first part of this essay, I would like to remind you that to be present at the same time, not to become one from the other, is also one of the artistic strate-



gies possible today, one that has the effect of radical de-realization: juxtaposing reality and its phantasmatic supplement face to face; one parallel to the other. The idea is to put together the aseptic, quotidian social reality and parallel it with its phantasmatic supplement.

What is more: to say that the Other is two does not mean explaining the difference between the One and the Other, but to point to the difference immanent in the Other. The third possibility is the Other of the Other; that means that the surplus of two is not the third, but that this surplus stays, is already inherent in the Other; the two of the Other stays for its most internal obstacle. The Other of the Other means that the Other is not the double or the repetition of the One.

It is thus an inherent auto-referential moment in the Other that makes it a non-whole. This is why woman, truth and Eastern Europe are perceived as the Other, as the non-whole. Not because there is some lie, some element of non-truth, or because something is missing in woman, but because when the truth is telling the truth, or the woman is telling that she is not a whole, then they are at the same time both telling the truth inherent in them: that is, as already part of their performativity. Not being a whole, not being a totality, is produced exactly by this auto-referential moment, and not because something is really missing in the woman, or because in Eastern Europe people are really not at the level of those in the West. It is not a real failure that is a part of the condition and positioning as a non-whole.



The inclusion of the third possibility is not the third possibility at all, as maybe you think I would like to propose something like the famous third way of socialism. The third possibility is the Other of the Other, is the auto-referential moment already generated through language. This is what constitutes the guarantee of truth, of woman, of Eastern Europe.

The homophony between Eastern European space, truth and woman means that woman is not the symptom of man, that Eastern Europe is not simply the distorted mirror or the symptom of the West. Although it can be a symptom: as far as the West wants to see it as a symptom, and as far as Eastern Europe functions as the Western phantasmatic desire. It is possible to say the

same for woman. She can be a symptom of man but, according to Zupančič, this is not what defines her ontological status! Eastern Europe as the symptom of the West is also not what defines the ontological status of this paradigm.

Moreover, if woman or Eastern Europe were only this, it would be possible to state that a sexual relationship exists. Instead we have a phantasmatic scenario exactly in the place of the sexual relationship and in the place that is covered by Eastern Europe as well. We have to rid ourselves of the temptation to define woman on the basis of what, for man, cannot be included in discourse. Woman perceived as a symptom and Eastern Europe perceived as a symptom allow both to be described as silent, mute territories in which loud



discussions and desires of man and Westerners are going on. Perceived as a symptom, woman is seen (as with Badiou) as a fixed silence which harbors, until infinity, the process of the articulation of phallic enjoyment. It is also possible to say the same of the way Badiou rethinks Eastern Europe. The Eastern European revolution in the 1990s was/is perceived by him and others as a failure, although the revolutionary process in Eastern Europe was carried on in civil society and not through state apparatuses.

But, as you know, I stated that the logic of the non-whole, being the Other perceived as Two, is actually the third possibility; and, according to Zupančič, it is possible to see this third possibility as the affirmation of the Other. As I have

stated elsewhere, Eastern Europe is today in the position of a piece of shit, but being in the position of piece of shit is not bad at all. Eastern Europe is forced to take the position of an excremental remainder. "I am a piece of shit" is actually the first condition required for Eastern Europe to take upon itself all the characteristics of a modern subjectivity. It is from this inherently excremental position that Eastern Europe can finally be perceived as a subject. Still, it seems we have a paradox: how the status of woman and of Eastern Europe can be seen as an absolutely Hollywood success story of affirmation, and not one of negativity. You can say this is not true, that it is an error! Or maybe not!

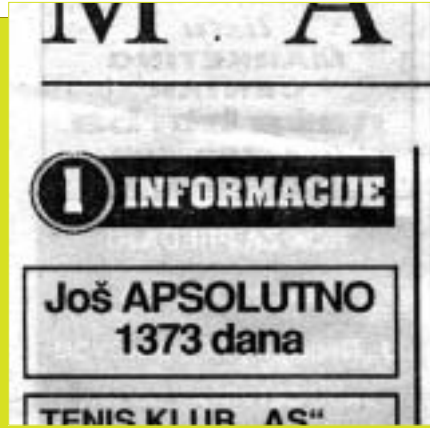
The Other is not something that exists, that simply is! The Other is, according

APSOLUTNO

# PRESS ACTIONS

Newspaper ads as a form of APSOLUTNO communication

At different points from 1995 to 2000 APSOLUTNO placed ads in newspapers for various purposes: to announce its presence in a city where APSOLUTNO spent a period of time, to express its support of the anti-Milošević protests in Serbia, and a series of ads announcing the number of days left until the end of the millenium.



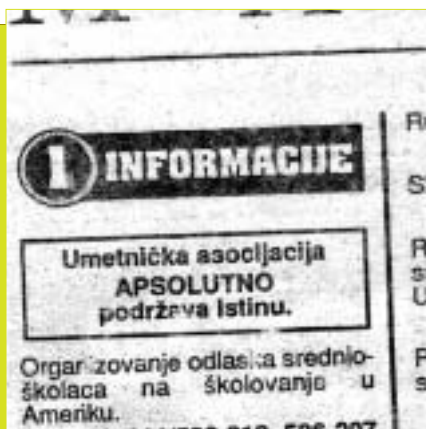
to Zupančič, something that is becoming! This is why is possible to say woman does not exist. This is the crucial difference between the One and the Other, between woman and man, between the East and the West. What is more: the Other is just the name for becoming Two!

And A. Badiou makes an error because he reads the non -whole in the opposite way: that the Other is the name for becoming One of the One. He claims that the Other's enjoyment is a silence within which the articulation of phallic enjoyment is going on. The Other is becoming the one of the One. The Other is this negativity that serves to articulate the One. But this is absolutely different from what Lacan said: the One has nothing to do with

becoming; the One receives power from the signifier that affirms itself in the process of naming. The genesis or the becoming of the One does not exist. The One exists, so to speak, with a dictate. The One exists because of a decree, because of an order. As Zupančič stated: the One exists with a punch, the One exists on blow.

This means that with counting (and this is where Badiou is absolutely right) the One we will never get to two.

Counting as a method of arriving at the Other is a male way, or a Western European way. It counts, one, two, three, states will be part of the "whole" of Western Europe. The counted states are just the object of Western Europe's phantasm. But from our point of view,



nachts Geschenk ad OS 399,- (Acht. 1 Stk.) – Tel. 02247/255 21.  
**Absolut künstlerische Vereinigung** ist in Wien. Absolutely Art Association is in Vienna.  
**Wohlfühlen & Genießen.** Wochenende m. Entspannung (Gesundheitsübun-

the Other is defined by the fact that we start to count at two; two is the first number. And this is where Lacan and Badiou come very close to each other. Two is not  $1+1$ ; this is why, instead of saying it is the other, Lacan says it is two. And exactly here we can see the possibility for a different articulation of Eastern Europe and of woman as well.

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1995 APSOLUTNO 0005

# ABSOLUTELY DEAD

Video

Duration: 8 minutes

The association has conducted an investigation of a death of two transoceanic liners under suspicious circumstances. They are found in Novi Sad, Vojvodina, Yugoslavia, between the 1,258 and 1,259th kilometre of the Danube. The ships lie parallel to each other with their bows turned towards the south-west. The ships are 105 metres long and 16.2



## DEAD BEFORE ARRIVAL. *ABSOLUTELY DEAD* (1995) ASSOCIATION APSOLUTNO AS ARCHEOLOGISTS OF THE PRESENT

Inke Arns

*And God said unto Noab, [...] Make thee an ark of gopher wood, rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And this is the fashion thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty*





*cubits. A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; with lower, second and third stories shalt thou make it. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath*

*of life, from under heaven, and every thing that is in the earth shall die. (Passages of the Bible, Chosen for their Literary Beauty and Interest.*

By J.G. Frazer, M.A., Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. London 1895, p. 6)



metres wide. The main deck is 9 metres high on both ships. Their cargo capacity is 5,700 tons.

There are no visible traces or signs on the spot which undoubtedly indicate a certain cause of death. The position of the ships, as well as the place and time they were found in, indicate an ABSOLUTE DEATH.

The investigation was conducted on 21 September 1995, from 6 pm to 9.30 pm.



In the 1970s, when I was still a child, I loved browsing through the German version of *Reader's Digest* (symptoms of an early *Californication* if you will). I remember that in one of the issues a black-and-white drawing caught my attention. It depicted two skeletons in a 1970s bathroom, one lying in the bathtub with the toilet seat around its neck, and the other sitting on the WC, holding a toilet brush in its hand. There was of course a story accompanying this drawing. Archeologists had found these two skeletons on an archeological digging site in the year 2100, or 2300. Somehow, all the information about earlier civilisations had been lost. So, the archeologists dig up that bathroom from the 1970s with the two skeletons and develop all kinds of theories about the situation. For example, the "fertility ritual" theory which says that these two

persons in this room were involved in some 1970s fertility rituals (the toilet seat around the skeletons neck having some special meaning concerning fertility). Others defended the "king adornment" or "crowning ritual" theory. This theory described the toilet as a throne, and the skeleton seated on the toilet as a king, with the toilet brush as the [German: *Szepter*] in his hand. The bathtub skeleton apparently performed some ritual of submittal. Others said that it was depicting the scene in a marital chamber and described the bathtub as the bridal bed. Still others thought it simply to be the scene of a crime. As a child I found this story incredibly funny and intriguing. It made me laugh when I read all these wild theories about my time, what later generations would think about my present when they considered the remains of our



time. What if this was the way archeologists of "our" time were looking at archeological findings as well? For sure! How funny, and how shockingly wrong they were.

But some things *are* just difficult to make sense of. Especially if there is a great time gap between the archeological finding and the archeologist. Try to imagine an archeologist who excavates in the year 3670 in the region formerly known as the Danube river (region of Vojvodina) near the ruins of a 17<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>th</sup> century city called Novi Sad (between the 1.258 and the 1.259<sup>th</sup> kilometre of the former Danube) the remains of two large apparently man-made objects in the middle of an immense desert. Each of the longish metal entities is 105 meters long and 16.2 meters wide. They lie parallel to each other, with

their bows turned towards the southwest.

Only slowly would our archeologist find out that these two immense objects had formerly been ships. Studying old books (other data carriers like floppy disks, CD-ROMs, tapes, hard drives, EPROMs, etc. will have fallen prey to *bitrot*) s/he would perhaps find out that these objects formerly had been two large transoceanic liners, each with a cargo capacity of 5.700 tons.

Not only would their geographic position (far from any ocean) and their parallel position towards the south-west remain a source of irritation. The fact that these two transoceanic liners had been entirely new, even still under construction, when they were abandoned, and thus never had been used, would



add to the mystery, and certainly to the diversity of scientific theories about the two abandoned new ships. For which kind of passengers had the ships originally been intended? What if they hadn't really been abandoned? And what if a future usage was still to come, what if their current situation represented merely some kind of hibernation?

In 1995 a similar archeological research was conducted by the association *apsolutno* in the Novi Sad dockyard. On 21 September four members of the association conducted their investigation inside the two transoceanic liners from 6 to 9.30 pm. Association *apsolutno's* idea was, in their own words, to investigate "the death of two transoceanic liners under suspicious circumstances". After the inspection which extracted an amazing amount of details from inside

the rusty, but new ships, *apsolutno's* conclusion was that the "position of the ships as well as the place and the time they were found in indicates an absolute death." There were, however, "no visible traces or signs on the spot which undoubtedly indicate a certain cause of death". *Apsolutno* therefore put a thin line of red and white isolation tape [German: *Absperrband*] around the two transoceanic liners. The words printed on the tape read "Keep off! — absolutely dead". The red-and-white tape seemed to indicate danger, possibly the scene of a crime. Plus, there seemed to be also a feeling of [German: *Mitleid mit den Dingen*], of sadness and sorrow for these two twin sisters who never saw the ocean because they were dead before arrival, dead before departure even.



For sure the red-and-white tape emphasized the paradoxical situation on the Novi Sad dockyard. Two brand new, certainly incredibly expensive transoceanic liners, commissioned by some Nordic country, never used, far away from any ocean, now rusty, filled with rainwater and on the inside covered with drawings of the shipyard workers. Two irritatingly shaped paradoxical objects, intensified and accentuated by the red-and-white tape, isolated from their surrounding. Through apsolutno's investigation these objects became more and more strange, increasingly phantasmatic, almost like those mystical unidentified flying objects supposedly kept in Area 51. "A certain cause of death". What could have been the reason for the sudden ships' death in the Novi Sad dockyard? In the documentary video "absolutely

<sup>1</sup> The ships were abandoned due to the economic sanctions on Yugoslavia which were installed by [UNO? EC?] in 1991. Due to a halt of import and export the sanctions radically effected/affected the economic situation of Yugoslavia. In apsolutno's work the two ships become mind-blowing metaphors for Yugoslavia's desperate economic, social and cultural situation in 1995.

dead – apsolutno 1995 - 005" (1995) apsolutno spares us the answer.<sup>1</sup> Their field of work is not formulating answers; it lies rather in directing the spectators' view towards the strangeness of everyday life, in making the viewers become aware of the paradoxicalities of the everyday, and encouraging them to formulate their own answers.

The concept of 'ostranenie', a Russian literary term meaning 'estrangement', was first formulated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century by literary theorist and founder of Russian Formalism Victor Shklovskij. In his famous 1916 essay "Art as Process" (*Iskusstvo kak priem*) Shklovskij writes: "*And precisely in order to restore the sensation of life, to make things feelable, to make stone stony, that which is called art exists. The aim of art is to convey a sense of the object, to make us see it, not recognize it [...]*" – in order to make one 'truly' see an object, to break up automated patterns of perception and to overcome a loss of reality he suggests an estrangement of one's gaze through a prolongement of perception. Concerning the estrangement of the gaze a parallel can be found in the fundamental change within the field of ethnology in the 1960s. While "classical" (colonial) ethnology directed its

+ gaze upon supposedly "exotic" "foreign" cultures, scientists like the French Marc Augé developed a new kind of "European ethnology", or "social anthropology" (German: *Kulturanthropologie*, or "cultural anthropology") which directed its gaze no longer onto "other" cultures, but which applied the methods of ethnology to its own culture. This not only implied a change in the direction of the gaze, but also led to an estrangement of one's view onto the supposedly (kn)own culture. Ethnologists started looking for the "exotic Other" within the nearby everyday.

Apsolutno certainly is in a better position than our future archeologist mentioned above: the association luckily doesn't have to deal with the time gap. apsolutno is researching the here and now, usually called present, while retaining the strangeness of the gaze/view/perspective of an archeologist. It is the strangeness of the everyday object that is being emphasized through their work. While the strangeness of the gaze is something that cannot be avoided in archeology, formalism consciously has turned it into an artistic device, while cultural anthropology developed it into a scientific device. By conducting "research into reality" apsolutno act as archeologists of the present, and as social anthropologists not of the most remote, but of the nearest in time and space.

Berlin, May 2001

1996 APSOLUTNO 0004

## HUMAN

By marking the borderline which divides Europe into East and West, the project HUMAN focuses on an important European issue. This borderline has had a long history during which its form has undergone some changes, but its meaning has nevertheless survived. The border figures as an invisible curtain which either tolerates or prevents communication on various levels. In the course of the project HUMAN the art association APSOLUTNO marked this borderline by installing a traffic sign with the

# VIRTUAL BALKANS: IMAGINED BOUNDARIES, HYPERREALITY AND PLAYING ROOMS<sup>1</sup>

Aleksandar Bošković

(for Marija)

inscription “HUMAN” on the no-man’s-land between the countries situated along this line. The official languages of the neighbouring countries were used.

### Invisible borders

As part of the HUMAN project, APSOLUTNO marked the “invisible” lines dividing a geographical whole or an urban entity, which were caused by war, or political, cultural or legal disputes. Unlike official borders, these borders have no visible barriers nor signs but have a psychological weight, being part of the tacit knowledge that members of the divided community share.



### Introduction: From hyperreality to VR

Borders and boundaries continue to fascinate people. Sometimes it is for purely practical reasons (being on the wrong side of one), sometimes for academic ones. The “Borders” project of the collective *Apsolutno* opened some of these issues in the most direct way. What does it mean to cross a border? How does one construct any boundary? In this paper, I want to deal with some of the connections that boundary-constructing, hyperreality and virtual reality establish among themselves, as well as with some of their practical consequences.

It is quite often remarked that the construction of ethnic or cultural boundaries is arbitrary. This arbitrariness is

### <sup>1</sup> Acknowledgements:

This is a revised version of the paper presented on 25 May 2000 at the Department of Anthropology, University of Parana (Curitiba, Brazil). Another version of this article was published in *CTheory* in 1997 ([http://www.ctheory.net/text\\_file.asp?pick=97](http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=97)). Most of the ideas were presented in late July 1999 at the *Image of the Other* Summer School in Skopje, Macedonia, as well as during 2000 at seminars at the University of Ljubljana and The Peace Institute (Slovenia), and in the Department of Media and Communications, Goldsmiths College (London, UK).

With many thanks to Igor Markovic (Arkzin and *Intelektualna kooperativa Bastard*, Zagreb), and acknowledging my debt to Vuk Cosic (*Literal*, formerly of the *Ljubljana Digital Media Lab*), and *CTheory* (Arthur and Marylouise Kroker, editors). The idea of a virus was suggested by Glenn Bowman (Department of Social Anthropology, University of Kent at Canterbury) in Skopje in 1999.

not open to debate. As a matter of fact, contemporary anthropologists regard the concept of a “nation” as something

In 1996, APSOLUTNO performed an action of marking the invisible border in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Armin [18], division line between east and west Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina



similar to the concept of “race” — namely, it is a concept with which some people do operate, but “in reality,” it has no “objective” meaning. This, of course, does not invalidate the fact that people do act based on their pre-suppositions and preconceptions, which include ideas derived from this concept. Thus, even something that does not exist “in reality” can produce very serious and *real* consequences.<sup>2</sup>

This positioning on either side of what some (or many) people regard as *real* is sometimes regarded by contemporary theorists as something that has to do with *hyperreality*.<sup>3</sup> Hyperreality is a constructed and artificial reality— but with the full awareness of the participants in this reality. It is a reality that *exists* while at the same time negating (or even

<sup>2</sup> Virilio argues that we are witnessing not the end of history, but the end of geography. VR has entered homes of millions of viewers of CBS, CNN, BBC and other major news networks with the latest NATO intervention in Yugoslavia. Paul Virilio, *Un monde surexposé*, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August 1997. ([www.mondediplomatique.fr/1997/08/VIRILIO/8948.html](http://www.mondediplomatique.fr/1997/08/VIRILIO/8948.html)).

On a similar note, one could regard the crashing of the airplanes into the WTC buildings in New York on 11 September 2001 as one superpower’s exit from the sphere of the virtual – cf. Slavoj Žižek’s “Welcome to the Desert of the Real” ([www.lacan.com/desertsym.htm](http://www.lacan.com/desertsym.htm)).

<sup>3</sup> For example, Jean Baudrillard, *Le crime parfait*. (Paris: Gallimard, 1995.); and Umberto Eco, *Travels in Hyperreality*, translated by William Weaver (San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovic, 1986).

denying) other realities, but the fact that the participants (and creators) are conscious of its artificiality opens up



numerous possibilities for paradoxes. Hyperreality is a place (or area, domain, field, etc.) where all the paradoxes meet and co-exist, side by side. The paradoxes are made obvious (apparent) through the media — and this is something that clearly distinguishes the *hyperreal* of the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century from the *surreal* or any similar concept. The media input enables people to see (and become aware of) themselves as others. The nature of contemporary technology (Netscape, film, TV, video, CD-ROM, various forms of electronic art) makes this imagery extremely widespread (especially in the “West”). It also makes all the paradoxes of the contemporary world more apparent.<sup>4</sup> Hyperreality is in some accounts closely related to virtual reality (VR)<sup>5</sup> or cyberspace.

<sup>4</sup> For the paradoxes related to space and time, see Virilio *O Espaço Crítico e as Perspectivas do Tempo Real*, translated by Paulo Roberto Pires (S o Paulo: Editora 34, 1993.).

<sup>5</sup> The term was coined in 1986 by Jaron Lanier, and, despite all the objections from grammarians and “hard scientists,” persisted and entered popular usage.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, “the Balkans” is also a construct – used especially in the last decade to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct different identities (“us” from “the Balkans” vs. “them” from “the West”), as well as to put forward an interesting hypothesis by some scholars from the region (especially some from Serbia now living in the US) that “the great powers” are the source of all the evil, and that it was always their actions that shaped the Balkan politics.

Both Virtual Reality (VR) and certain concepts (especially when it comes to boundaries, traditions, or *naming*) connected with Balkan<sup>6</sup> politics present interesting examples of hyperreal constructions. VR is also known as “artifi-





cial reality," "virtual worlds," and is also taken to represent "a visual form of cyberspace."<sup>7</sup> It has also been defined as "a real or simulated environment in which the perceiver experiences telepresence" (Steur 1992; quoted in Featherstone and Burrows 1995: 5). "It is a system which provides a realistic sense of being immersed in an environment" (Featherstone and Burrows 1995: 5-6). According to Howard Rheingold, Virtual reality is the revolutionary technology that immerses you in a computer-generated world of your own making — a room, a city, an entire solar system, the interior of a human body. With the aid of computer gloves, a Star Wars helmet and some super-sophisticated software, you can now explore the uncharted territory of the human imagination with all your senses intact.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Following Sterling (1990), cyberspace is best considered as a generic term which refers to a cluster of different technologies, some familiar, some only recently available, some being developed and some still fictional, all of which have in common the ability to simulate environments within which humans can interact. Other authors prefer the term computer-mediated communication (CMC) (Jones 1994) to refer to much the same set of phenomena" (Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows, "Cultures of Technological Embodiment: An Introduction," *Cyberspace/Cyberbodies/Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, Featherstone and Burrows (eds.), (London: Sage, 1995.), p. 5. The same authors make a distinction between "Barlovian cyberspace," "Virtual Reality," and "Gibsonian cyberspace."

S. Jones (ed.), *Cybersociety* (London: Sage, 1994.); Bruce Sterling, "Cyberspace (TM)", *Interzone* 41, 1990;

J. Steur, "Defining Virtual Reality: Dimensions Determining Telepresence", *Journal of Communications* 42(4), 1991.

<sup>8</sup> Howard Rheingold, *Virtual Reality* (London: Mandarin, 1991.).



It is also seen as "a way for humans to visualize, manipulate and interact with computers and extremely complex data."<sup>9</sup> It is my belief that *delineating places* in south-eastern Europe can be related to this, insofar as it presents a way of visualizing, manipulating, and interacting with certain highly ritualized notions (such as "nation," "history," "tradition," etc.) and extremely complex data. The trick is that these complex data are made to look simple and straightforward. To give three examples:

**1. The Republic of Macedonia.** For some quite extraordinary political reasons (some of which look as if they have been taken from Ionesco's "Theater of the Absurd"), Macedonia is faced with very specific problems: their neighbors claim that it doesn't exist.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in: Jerry Isdale, "What is Virtual Reality?", MS, Online, 1993.

Albania claims (although unofficially) that the western part of the country (where the majority of ethnic Albanians live) should be given huge autonomy and probably eventually should be annexed to Albania itself. Serbia and Macedonia have some unresolved territorial disputes, and the majority of Serbs believe that Macedonians are just "Southern Serbs" (a term used during the Serbian occupation between 1912 and 1941). Bulgaria claims that, while Macedonia as a country exists, Slav Macedonians do not, and that they are, basically, just Bulgarians who have not yet realized their "true" (that is to say, Bulgarian) identity. More recently, the



Bulgarian government has determined that there is actually a Bulgarian (and not Macedonian) ethnic minority in northern Albania. Finally, Greece believes that Macedonia's close relations with Turkey<sup>10</sup> pose a threat to Greece. This attitude is connected with the Greek denial of the existence of a Slav Macedonian minority<sup>11</sup> in its northern province and the refusal to grant to this minority such basic rights as the use of its own (Macedonian) language.<sup>12</sup>

The Macedonian language is recognized as a distinctive South Slavic language by all the countries in the world *with the exception of its neighbors Greece and Bulgaria*. Because of Greek pressure (the northern Greek province is also called Macedonia), Macedonia was, in April

<sup>10</sup>Bulgaria and Turkey were the first two countries to recognize Macedonia under her constitutional name.

<sup>11</sup>Human Rights Watch and other NGOs put the number of Slav Macedonians in this area at between 15,000 and 50,000.

<sup>12</sup>These issues are very much present in contemporary anthropology. A great controversy arose in 1995 when the Cambridge University Press (at a very late stage, and bypassing its own anthropology editorial board) refused to publish a book by Greek anthropologist Anastasia Karakasidou, dealing (mostly) with the Slav Macedonian minority in northern Greece. Apparently, the publisher was afraid that this book might irritate Greeks. The controversy produced an outrage and caused the resignation from the CUP of two of the best and most respected world anthropologists, Professors Jack Goody (Cambridge) and Michael Herzfeld (Harvard). (The book was eventually published by the University of Chicago Press.)



1993, admitted to the UN (and afterwards to other world organizations) only under a temporary (and it is still in use now, in July 2002!) name: *The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*. It is still being referred to by this temporary name (or by the acronym FYROM) in official communications from the UN, EU, US, and other world organizations — but almost all Macedonians find this term (and being referred to by it) very offensive.

So Macedonia is a new country that perhaps exists and it is inhabited by people claimed, and at the same time denied, by their neighbors. Macedonia not only provides some interesting examples for the concept of hyperreality — *it is hyperreal itself!*

2. **The Republic of Slovenia.** A sense of hyperreality exists for Slovenia as well, for it was throughout its history a country so thoroughly suspended between East and West, for so many centuries, that it actually disappeared. Or, to be more precise, it didn't appear at all — until the spring of 1991, that is. Slovenia's limbo within this East-West "twilight zone" — most recently, between the great Orwellian blocks of the century's second half — did nothing to lessen the struggles fought on her soil. (Hemingway's First World War novel *A Farewell to Arms*, which chronicles the carnage of the Socha Front, never once mentions Slovenia — despite being set almost entirely within the borders of the present-day republic.) Slovenia's obscurity on the global stage, the concomitant inconsequential-

ity of her fate, have made the Slovenes unconsciously attuned to historical and ideological pressure changes.<sup>13</sup>

Of course, the attunement to changes has its limits. They become most obvious in the communication with their neighbors on the political plane. Although most Slovenians would consider themselves as "civilized," this is not a view shared by their northern neighbors in the Republic of Austria. Thus, as Slovenian cultural critic/ideologist/philosopher/psychoanalyst Slavoj Žižek claimed in *The Guardian* in 1992, some European nations tend to regard their southern border as the border between "civilization" and "savagery." The southern border represents "the end of the world as we know it" — it is where the "civilization" ends and where the "savagery" begins. This is the case with Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia.

Obviously, no one denies that Slovenia exists (although there seem to be some problems with the *existence* of ethnic Slovenians in south-western Austria), but it is quite interesting to see something (a country, a nation) arising out of nowhere. *Creatio ex nihilo* at its best.

**3. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.** Another good example of hyperreality is the present state of FR Yugoslavia, which until very recently claimed direct continuity with the (for-

<sup>13</sup>Michael Benson, "The Future is Now," in: *How the East Sees the East*, (Piran, Slovenia: Obalne Galerije, 1995), p. 83.

<sup>14</sup>Cf. Aleksandar Boskovic, "Hyperreal Serbia", in Arthur and Marylouise Kroker (eds.), *Digital Delirium* (Montréal: New World Perspectives, 1997); also at *CTheory* online: [http://www.ctheory.net/text\\_file.asp?pick=172](http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=172).

mer) SFR Yugoslavia. The main problem of the present Yugoslavia is that it is founded on a constitution that was (on 27 April 1992) voted for by the Parliament representatives of the *former* Yugoslavia. They had no legal authority to vote for this constitution, but they nevertheless did, and a strange new entity (a federation of Serbia and Montenegro) was born.<sup>14</sup> By creating this new entity, Serb politicians (who dominate Yugoslavia) tried to establish a link with the mythical era of Serb history, while at the same time preserving what many people in Belgrade now remember as "the good old days" of communist Yugoslavia, when everyone (who did not go looking for work abroad) was employed and everyone had reasonable amounts of money.

The attitude of the international community towards this entity might be described as hyperreal as well — after 1995, all European countries established their embassies in Belgrade, but without formally recognizing this new state (which is not a member of any of the international institutions — like the UN, IMF, World Bank, etc.).

More recently, negotiations started on the re-defining of the union of Serbia and Montenegro, under the watchful eye of the European Union. Montenegro does not consider itself to be a part of the federal country, but it is regarded as such by the EU and the "international community". Kosovo is perhaps an integral part of it (according to the UN Security Council Resolution 1244), and perhaps not c. So maybe Yugoslavia exists, maybe not – it all depends on the circumstances.

### VR in the Balkans

The software and specialized equipment for the VR (including image generators, manipulation and control devices, Data Gloves and Head Mounted Display [HMD]) help create an environment where almost<sup>15</sup> everything is possible. In the VR world, an individual is fully immersed into a world which he/she *feels and experiences as real or objective*. All the senses adjust to this. The feeling of "belonging" to a VR environment is complete. A user adjusts herself/himself to a different rate of motion (slower than "outside" the VR environment), since sudden moves can create a sense of nausea and great discomfort. However, there are some problems and possible health risks.

In 1993, the *CyberEdge Journal* # 17 published a summary of the findings of a study done at the University of

<sup>15</sup> That is to say, it has to be programmed first.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Isdale 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Adam Heilbrun, "Jaron Lanier: A Vintage Virtual Reality Interview," 1988, available at: <http://www.advanced.org/~jaron/vrint.html>.

Edinburgh (Department of Psychology, Edinburgh Virtual Environment Lab) on the eye-strain effects of the use of the HMD.

The basic test was to put 20 young adults on stationary bicycles and let them cycle around a virtual rural road setting using a HMD (...) After 10 minutes of light exercise, the subjects were tested...

"The results were alarming: measures of distance vision, binocular fusion and convergence displayed clear signs of binocular stress in a significant number of the subjects. Over half of the subjects also reported symptoms of such stress, such as blurred vision."<sup>16</sup>

Some stress symptoms can also include falling on/tripping over real-world objects, simulator sickness (disorientation due to conflicting motion signals from eyes and inner ear), eye strain, etc. (according to John Nagle in Isdale 1993). It seems that the adjustment to the VR is not very compatible with living in (and experiencing) the actual (or *physical* — a term used by Jaron Lanier<sup>17</sup>) reality.

✦ I believe that this is an important point to be taken into consideration when discussing the matters of south-eastern European and Balkan politics. In their own particular ways, politicians and theorists<sup>18</sup> from this part of Europe tend to construct their own VR environments, creating (and re-creating) their countries as *Virtual Places*. These Virtual Places exist in both time and space, and their presence can be fully experienced by their virtual citizens.

For example, some of the leading Serb historians regard the 13<sup>th</sup> century as the beginning of Serb "statehood." It is perfectly useless to try to explain to them that the notions of "state," "nation," or "statehood" (as they are used today) originated in post-Renaissance Europe (from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards). For most Serbs, the battle of Kosovo that allegedly took place in 1389 is seen as the defense of Europe against the Ottoman (or Muslim, Islamic, etc.) threat. The collapse of the Serb medieval state that followed (in the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century) is seen as the ultimate price paid *for the free* (that is to say, *Christian*) Europe.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Europe owes to the Serbs its understanding, recognition, financial assistance, etc.

In another example of a Virtual Place positioned in time, Slav Macedonian nationalists claim their right to a Greater Macedonia, based on the conquests of Alexander the Great, approxi-

<sup>18</sup> I should add here that I do not regard politicians or theorists as acting by and for *themselves*, they come from *the people*, frequently have huge popular support for their actions, so it can also be said that they act *in the name of people*.

<sup>19</sup> I would like to add that both the official representatives of the Balkan nation-states and most "ordinary people" see their being "at the crossroads of the East and the West" as the main cause of their troubles — both past and present. However, many other parts of Europe were at this crossroads at some points in their history, like Russia, Finland, or Spain. This is perhaps a remnant of the belief (quite often found in some "traditional cultures") that a specific ethnic group is located in the very center of the universe, along the *axis mundi*, so that anything happening to an ethnic group affects the universe as a whole.

mately 1,000 years *before Slavs even came to the Balkans*. This strange construct would include what is today the Republic of Macedonia, as well as parts of Greece, Bulgaria, and Albania. As such, in the virtual space, it overlaps with other Greater constructs: Greater Serbia (which should, apart from Serbia and Montenegro, also include parts of Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania, and the whole of Republic of Macedonia), Greater Bulgaria (Bulgaria, Macedonia, parts of Greece and Albania), and Greater Albania (Albania, parts of Greece, Macedonia, and Serbia). As already noted above, the very existence of some countries (like the Republic of Macedonia) is incomprehensible for some others (in various aspects, for Serbia or FR Yugoslavia, Greece, and Bulgaria). From the official Greek

standpoint, for example, its northern neighbor is totally "virtual."

While these constructs are logically incoherent, inconsistent and mutually incompatible, they function quite well in virtual space. They also feed each other and are in a sense dependent on each other. The problems of (possible) communication are solved in an elegant manner: there is no communication; chosen representatives of "the people" usually just repeat what they are told to say and what they always believed they should say: that *their* nation is the oldest, the best, and always right, and that they have suffered the most. Thus, they should be granted all the privileges for "their" version of these Virtual Places. They are supposed to blend with and eventually supersede *real* places.

### Virtual Exits?

An important thing to be noted here is that any or all versions of these Virtual Places cannot be regarded as either true or false. They are all true — within their respective historical/cultural/ethnic/traditional premises. Within a VR reality, a Virtual Environment simply *exists*. As put by the Critical Art Ensemble in their VIPER Lecture: "VR's primary value to spectacle is not as technology at all, but as a myth."<sup>20</sup> It is put to (practical) use only when a user puts on Data Gloves, HMD, stereo headphones and computerized clothing

<sup>20</sup> Critical Art Ensemble, "Posthuman Development in the Age of Pancapitalism," in ZKP 3.2.1 (Ljubljana: Ljubljana Digital Media Lab, 1996.).

<sup>21</sup> Arthur and Marylouise Kroker, "Fast War/Slow Motion," *CTheory*, 1999 ([http://www.ctheory.net/text\\_file.asp?pick=209](http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=209)).

("datasuit") and turns on her/his computer. Hence, it is both impractical and impossible to argue with the proponents or creators of Virtual Places — they are always right, since they are forever locked in their own virtual environment.

In an example that was very relevant between late March and early June of 1999, the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia was presented to the Western viewers as something purely *virtual*<sup>21</sup> — it was the war that was not really a war, bombing to save the Albanians, even though NATO planes occasionally hit and killed dozens of Albanians — but it was for their own good! The bombing was also not aimed at civilians, but most of the civilian infrastructure was destroyed, hospitals, residential areas, buses and passenger trains hit — but, again, nothing personal, it was for the good and ultimate enjoyment of the people of Serbia. It was the war to end all Balkan wars. (It still remains to be seen whether it will succeed in this.)

In the Serb official discourse the bombing was a living proof that the whole world is and always has been against



† the Serbs, and that is just another reason why people should retreat to their virtual shelters, protected from any silly ideas like “democratization,” “freedom of thought,” or “freedom of expression.” When the survival of the nation is at stake, all its members must stand as one and bravely face up to the wrath of the world powers. Their death would be just a re-enactment of the heroic Battle of Kosovo of 1389, another proof that even in death and destruction, the defeated ones tower over their oppressors. It is only fitting that, in a strange twist of fate, the people who once saved (Christian) Europe from the (Muslim) Turks should fall as victims of that very same Europe (in reality, just Britain – along with the US).

One of the most obvious effects of the prolonged use of VR is that a user feels a little dizzy afterwards and moves a little slower than “normal” — adjustment to a different environment takes some time (this is sometimes referred to as a “VR lag”). It would be unproductive (except, perhaps, to make fun of such a person) to ask a person who has just taken off his/her HMD to perform some strenuous physical task, to jump or run, etc. A “fundamental loss of orientation” occurs (as Virilio would say<sup>22</sup>), a feeling of dizziness which, in case of ex-Yugoslav nations and Serbs in particular, prevents people from making any distinctions between the real and the imagined.

<sup>22</sup>Paul Virilio, “Speed and Information: Cyberspace Alarm!”, translated by Patrice Riemens, *CTheory*, 1995 [http://www.ctheory.net/text\\_file.asp?pick=72](http://www.ctheory.net/text_file.asp?pick=72).

Accordingly, I do not see any point in expecting that ideologists, theorists, politicians or advocates of Virtual Places should act or behave in a manner more in tune with what is sometimes regarded as a “proper behavior” (that is to say, to use rational arguments, to be able to discuss points of views of other participants in a discussion, to accept that they can sometimes be wrong, etc.). One should always bear in mind the particular environment which they see and feel as theirs, in which they feel comfortable, and act accordingly. One way of coping with them would be to always include qualified psychologists and computer experts familiar with VR in all the negotiating teams and intermediary missions dealing with south-eastern Europe. I believe that this could greatly enhance mutual understanding and probably ensure much better communication. The other way would be quicker and more efficient, but perhaps too abrupt and not very diplomatic: to just switch off the computer. Of course, there is also a possibility of introducing a virus – a virus of democratization, which has to be introduced from outside the region, since the local populations have neither strength nor will to try it. But then, are the countries that condone mass killing of civilians in

order to stop mass killing of civilians morally capable of proposing it? Or is their ultimate answer just more violence to end violence?

Taking all of that into consideration, one might wonder why any of the Balkan nations should exit their Virtual Worlds, when that is where the things, concepts, places, people and (most important for the national unity) enemies that they know so well, know how to deal with and how to feel are. There are even small NGOs that can function providing a simulation of democratization, while in effect nothing ever changes. Any change would just plunge them into chaos – which is the last thing that global policy-makers want in the Balkans. In the end, it seems that both peoples from this part of the world and their well-wishers, critics and occasional bombers will agree that some people should never leave their playing rooms, and should have their data gloves on. At least for now.

# NO BORDER! A SHORT HISTORY OF NETWORKING FOR THE FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Florian Schneider

It wasn't exactly the right place or really the right time to launch a political campaign which publicly called for a series of offences against the law; yet when the call "No one is illegal" went out exactly five years ago at the documentaX, the usual reservations counted little. In the Orangerie, which had been temporarily arranged as a media laboratory at the end of the visitors' circuit of the well-known Kessler art exhibition, a dozen political and media activists from all Germany's bigger cities met up at the end of June 1997 in order to adopt a common text. The expressed aim was to issue a public call for the provision of accommodation to illegal migrants, help with their entry into the country and their onward journeys, work procurement, the organization of health care, and for their children to have easier access to schooling. This was more than just mere provocation; it concerned the propagation, preparation and implementation of practical and

political support for people without regular papers, a kind of support that had in fact already existed for years, although mostly in secret. Public opinion in Germany seemed almost to forbid talking about refugees and migrants in any other terms than as swindlers, cut-rate workers or criminals. In the nineties in Germany, six months seldom went by without further serious legal restrictions being introduced: employment and occupational bans, reductions in maintenance costs, procedural and constitutional changes, not to mention the insidious rearmament of the eastern German border in the battle against illegal immigration and the so-called "Schlepperbanden" (bands of people smugglers).

"No one is illegal" chose a fundamentally different perspective: the discussion here was not about illegal immigrants and their supposed motivation, but about people who were systematically denied civil rights and, above all, the right to have rights at all. There was no bandying-about of numbers and statistics; rather, a response was called for that is normally a matter of course, but has now been declared a criminal offence: aiding and abetting illegal entry and residence.

But the offence of not possessing regular documents does not turn the migrants into compliant creatures delivered up unresistingly to the rapidly expanded apparatus of state repression

and late capitalist exploitation - creatures who can, at most, beg for a little sympathy. There was no lack of concrete approaches, ranging from unspectacular attempts at self-organisation in communities and lodgings and everyday resistance at the work-place or in deportation detention centres to spontaneous protest actions. However, there existed no political framework of reference or efficient structures that could actually question the political asylum discourse of clemency rights.

A few months previously in Paris, hundreds of undocumented immigrants, so-called "sans papiers", had occupied two churches in short succession, initiating one of the most important movements of the close of the 20th century. Led by charismatic speakers, the "sans papiers" dared to step out of the shadows - out of insecure, disenfranchised working conditions, but also out of the dubious protection of the village structures in the hostels - into the light to face a public that, in the middle of the summer holidays, evidently had no other topic of discussion. The "sans papiers" movement had ignited like a straw fire, and the experiences from the battles in France spread quickly to the whole of Europe. The strength and the astonishing self-confidence of the "sans papiers" expressed itself in their insistence on strict autonomy: these people, who didn't even exist in the eyes of the state, who weren't represented by any party

or association, and who could not claim any common identity took their fate into their own hands and themselves decided what further steps were to be taken. The exploding self-confidence of the "sans papiers" was coupled with a great preparedness to discuss problems and an enormous willingness to cooperate with other social movements: the trade unions, fortified after the December strikes of '95, the emerging movement of the unemployed, intellectuals, and a radicalizing young support scene all alternately took part as reliable partners in the multi-layered discussions. At the time, any reasonable assessment of the situation seemed to preclude even the dream of similar developments taking place in Germany. It is true that, as in the USA, there were relatively well developed support structures for illegal refugees, inspired by the crisis of freedom struggles in the Third World and the onset of the migration movement towards the north; and these structures continued to exist, drawing on the tradition and motivation left over from the militant movements of the '80s. It is true that, since the mid-'80s, starting with the asylum-seekers' campaign run by the revolutionary cells, the theoretical and practical implications of a new solidarity movement had already been thought out in many fragments, and attempts had been made to anticipate violence. It is true that, owing to the wave of racist attacks in the wake of German

reunification, most of the young autonomous left concerned themselves in detail with options of political protest and the postulates of anti-racist and anti-fascist counterculture. But from the mid-'90s at the latest, these battle fronts threatened to become buried under biographical fragments, growing specialization, clandestine, isolated work and political lethargy. The decimated energies had exhausted themselves by a fatal fixation on the state apparatus and its procedural methods. In this situation, "No one is illegal" suggested a kind of "legalization from below" which was decisively influenced by the events in Paris. The idea was to take the strategies and tactics used in the struggles of the "sans papiers", to transpose them, more or less intact, into the local context in this country, and to generate as many new approaches for action as possible from the peculiarities of the German situation. The concept, at first hesitantly articulated, worked surprisingly well: often with not much more than a common slogan, the widely varying approaches worked hand in hand, without entering into the competition that was otherwise habitual. The actions ranged from individual struggles for residency rights to supra-regional anti-deportation campaigns; from supporting the political self-organization of the refugees to practical criticism of the border regimes. Even if most of the forms of action hardly left the framework of the familiar, the

† tremendous potential of a movement in which different starting points, different approaches and contrasting positions were no longer shortcomings, but rather the basis of a new form of political organization seemed, for a brief time at least, to reveal itself. Although actions like the "migrating-church asylum" in Cologne, where up to 600 illegal migrants fought for papers for over a year, were by no means as spectacular as the occupation of the churches in Paris, they achieved considerable partial success, which has now led to the legalization of almost all the participant refugees. And, despite all difficulties, they have proven that to stand up for one's rights is more beneficial than sitting still.

A campaign like "No one is illegal" could not have been carried out without the use of new media and network technologies. Immediately after the call was adopted, it was disseminated on websites and through mailing-lists on a scale and at a speed that would have otherwise only been possible with an immense organizational apparatus. The Internet not only promised new and efficient publication strategies, but also opened a realm of communication that held immense possibilities for a decentralized campaign without material resources or its own apparatus of organization. Shortly before the commercial boom in the Net, for the first time and at many different levels, the opportuni-

ty arose for a common, everyday practice that went beyond the mostly very narrowly defined limits of the local actions: all at once, the Internet facilitated an exchange of experience that was as uncomplicated as it was discrete, numerous forms of direct and indirect collaboration on projects which were no longer limited spatially or temporally, and a form of continuous, self-defined communication that did not require people to be always at the same place at the same time.

Soon there was no question that, with the Internet, a European-wide communication network could be set up on a broad foundation. Up until then, it had only been possible to maintain international contacts by dint of great personal engagement and effort, be it through individual acquaintances, extensive travel or written correspondence; alternatively, contacts arose purely by chance. Systematic networking was seen mostly as a privilege of non-governmental organisations, which were as well-equipped as they were lacking in ambition, and for whom it was principally a question of the legitimation and perpetuation of their own hierarchies.

It all began with a meeting in Amsterdam on the fringes of a big demonstration against the EU summit in 1997, where about forty activists from anti-racist groups, some immigrant initiatives and refugee support initiatives

from central and northern Europe gathered. The priorities and also the objectives of the political work in each country differed greatly. But what the groups had in common was the demand for practical, political intervention at the base, i.e., grassroots politics. The new network, with the title "admission free", was, as they stated, not concerned with adopting a common political programme or even with representing a movement, but with systematically creating the preconditions for a European-wide collaboration whose principal purpose was to enrich everyday activities in the individual countries.

Yet, although a regular exchange of information was arranged amongst the participants of the first network-meeting, the initial zest soon died away. The practical demands were too abstract, the criteria for the admission of new groups into the network and mailing lists were too rigorous, and the communication amongst the participant groups, who had already known each other for years through successful cross-border co-operation outside the Net, was too hermetic. The alliance's actual potential at first remained hidden behind a certain formalism which, in spite of growing confidence, still revealed little understanding for the necessities and possibilities of European-wide co-operation. Opportunities such as the journey of the 'Tute bianche' to Valona passed by without

any European dimension of resistance leaving the realm of pure rhetoric to become a practicality. This was, however, about to change: in 1999 the network was renamed

"Noborder" and relaunched with a European-wide protest action to mark the occasion of the EU's special summit "Justice and the Interior" in Tampere, which was expressly dedicated to standardizing policies on asylum and migration in a European context. In the run-up to the summit, some Noborder groups had managed to connect up with promising contacts in France and, above all, Italy. On this basis, a common European "day of action" was arranged that took the EU migration summit in the Finnish town of Tampere as an opportunity to protest in a decentralized but coordinated manner against a new chapter in the politics of separation: "the gradual establishment of an area of freedom, security and of justice" - the formulation of the Amsterdam treaty, in force since May 1 1999, was as flowery as this. In reality this meant: more exclusion, more control, more deportation. On 15 and 16 October, in France, Belgium, Italy, Denmark, the Netherlands, Poland, Switzerland, Germany and, naturally, Finland, numerous actions, small and large, spontaneous and spectacular, were initiated. The direct exchange of information and the co-ordination of the actions over the period of the EU summit was the task

† of a temporary media laboratory in Kiasma, Helsinki's museum for contemporary art. As in the early days of "No one is illegal" at the documentaX, the terrain of contemporary art seemed to be a suitable operation basis for an internationally constituted team of media activists, who, with the help of mailing lists and websites, sought to cover, network and reinforce the different actions in front of the conference centre in Tampere and everywhere in Europe. What today seems a matter of course was at the time still a small sensation: the successful co-ordination and synchronization of reports and materials from the various countries laid the foundations for the new start of the Noborder network, which from here on aimed to put much more emphasis on actions that were interconnected at a European level.

One year before, shortly after the death of the asylum seeker Semira Adamou in Belgium, there had been protest actions in many countries which were heard of well beyond the respective national borders. When, in the following months, so-called "deportees" in Austria, Switzerland and Germany also met violent deaths in the course of their deportation, the Noborder activists initiated joint European-wide operations. "Deportation-alliance" was the provocative title of a campaign targeting the airlines that offered their services as willing henchmen to the European

deportation machinery. The campaign concentrated on soiling the airlines' reputations with few, but well thought-out, virtual attacks. The airlines, whose prestige was inseparable from the myth of global mobility and invented figures such as the businessman-nomad roaming freely without borders, were systematically confronted with the shocking reality of violent deportation. The cynical practices of a deportation business that left dead bodies in its wake were exposed using guerrilla communication methods and activism on the Net. Fake brochures in the usual trade jargon publicizing preferential treatment in a special "Deportation Class", hidden theatre and performances, endless, deceptively authentic-looking advertising material, interventions at shareholders' meetings and press conferences on company performance, and a large-scale online demonstration in which over ten thousand Net activists paralyzed the online flight reservation server for almost two hours had been putting pressure on the German Lufthansa GmbH since the spring of 1999. But other airlines were also being punished: from "British Airways" to KLM, from "Siberia" to the Rumanian TAROM, who threw in the towel after the first protest action and cancelled their business with the deportation charters. With the "deportation-alliance" campaign, it became possible not only to cleverly avoid direct confrontation with the national govern-

ments - which in many countries was a lost cause - and to prevent sudden deportations not only at an individual level and literally at the last moment, but in fact to impede deportation proceedings on a large scale. In a refreshing manner it also became clear how experiences and successful methods could be transferred to different countries and contexts. Networking took place on a new level: actions and activities were developed, planned and executed across national borders. The campaign met with great resonance, despite coming from a position which at first sight didn't stand a chance, and had growing success in harnessing very different experiences, contacts, knowledge, resources and creative abilities in the battle against the mighty corporations, and above all in coping with the consequent pressure. The collaboration on the second project which the Noborder network set to work on was similarly promising. Since July 1998, when a few hundred activists set up their tents for a ten-day stay only a few metres away from the border river, the Neisse, this example had set a precedent; in the following years, the summer camps along the outer borders of the European Union had multiplied. But they weren't about campfire romanticism. Instead of "back to nature", the motto was: "Hacking the borderline!" A main characteristic of the border camps was a multiple strategy consisting in the exchange of experience and political debate, classical

political education in remote areas, and direct actions aimed at disrupting the smooth running of the border regime. Following the first two camps on the German-Polish border, offshoots sprang up along the Polish-Ukrainian, Polish-Belo-Russian and Slovenian-Croatian borders, which quickly led to an independent networking of Noborder activists in Eastern Europe. The primary discussion theme here was the consequences of borders' being advanced in the course of the European Union's expansion into the East. Particular attention was focused on the role of the International Organisation of Migration (IOM), which, contrary to the humanitarian aims of the UNHCR, had crystallized into a transnational agency for the worldwide expansion of repressive migration management.

But soon there were also Noborder camps on the Strait of Gibraltar, the beach of Tijuana on the US-Mexican border, and in Woomera in the middle of the Australian desert. Although the situations were totally different, with each camp setting different priorities, all the actions took place within the loose context of the Noborder camps, which were visibly expanding. One climax was reached in summer 2001 in connection with the G-8 summit in Geneva, when five camps took place on the European borders and networked not only by using live streams in the Internet, but also by means of a large-



+ scale media project which later acquired particular fame: the People's Theatre Caravan was an attempt to get border camps and the so-called anti-globalisation movement to relate more closely to one another and, in so doing, not to trust so much in ideological preferences as in practical exchange and contemporary means of media communication. The manifold experiences of the summer of 2001 peaked for the Noborder activists in the fourth German border camp, which was organized in the shadow of the international Rhine-Main Airport in Frankfurt only one week after the protests surrounding the G-8 meeting in Geneva. By merely announcing forthcoming protest actions, the activists managed to lead the police to cordon off the airport with several task-force squadrons for almost a whole week. This blockade, which led at times to chaotic conditions in the middle of the holiday season, did not have a solely metaphorical meaning; with the role exchange the supposed guardians of the law were in the end landed with an enormous problem of co-ordination that left them with no alternative but to demonize the activists as even bigger Chaoten (chaotic person, but also a slang name for left-wing anarchists). However, instead of emerging as a black bloc whose sole aim was the demolition of the airport, the Noborder camp triumphed with classical music concerts, radical cheer-leading and all the methods of refined

diplomacy. On this basis it then became possible for varied and differentiated forms of action to complement one another without needing to be planned and agreed upon in advance, as long as the common intention was to systematically expand the scope for action and not to narrow it.

"Borders are there to be crossed". The first sentence from the call to the German border camp in 1999 probably clarified best what the actions in the no-man's-land at the other end of the nation state were all about: the demand for unrestricted freedom of movement as a basic right for all the people of this world, the mobilization of all possible available forms of resistance against the degrading, inhuman border regime, the development of a form of global communication marked by the free and lively exchange of ideas, experiences and abilities in their respective uniqueness. This demand and the resulting debates are not abstract text-components in an ideological ivory tower, but are experienced day to day when people, for whatever reasons, go over the borders which the arbitrariness of the imperial command forbids them to cross.

Neither false labelling - when, in the context of the ruling world order, an alleged "globalization" is proclaimed - nor sentimental nostalgia over the traceless disappearance of the national welfare state even approach the current

political challenges. On the contrary, by sticking to trusted interpretational patterns and traditional recipes, a predominant tendency in some of the globalization criticism after Seattle, one can't but systematically fail to recognize the actual potential of both the new migration movements as well as transnational networking. Reduced to purely humanitarian aspects or senselessly combined with the long obsolete idea of national independence, the migration question continues to exist, rather sadly, as a sideline contradiction, only as a low-priority consequence of the excesses of world-wide capitalism. It's no coincidence that this ignorance often goes hand in hand with a Biedermeier-like attitude to the new communication technologies, which, once it has misjudged their potential, sees them at best as a necessary evil. It is thus no wonder that, instead of delivering a matrix for a form of "globalization from below" that goes beyond a mere rhetorical form, the agendas of the numerous congresses, counter-conferences and counter-demonstrations of the anti-globalisation movement explicitly include neither migration nor new media. The big Thursday demonstration in Geneva made it clear that tackling globalization was not possible without the express acknowledgement of the world-wide migration movement. How can this, however, become more than a symbolic gesture? A large part of the group of the Noborder network

used the media festival "Make World" in Munich to debate the current situation of international networking. Artists, trade unionists, media activists and political activists from all over Europe and many parts of the world met up only a few weeks after the events in Geneva and a few days after the attacks of September 11. Basically, the festival focused on bringing together the different experiences had in connection with two key themes of the nineties: digital media, new networking technology and the resulting labour crisis on the one hand and, on the other, the issue of freedom of movement, the current struggle of an international and multi-ethnically constituted working class, and the insidious change of paradigm in the ruling politics of migration. The results of the conference were as varied as the participants: From the Munich Volksbad declaration to the first public presentation of plans for a common European-wide Nobordercamp in Strasbourg, from the presentation of the data-base project "Everyone is an expert" to a spontaneous tour taking in several German towns, which was organised by two groups from the US - the American Trade Union and migrant movements.

These two last approaches also delivered the basis for the attempt to define anew the previous politics of refugee support: more than ever, it was a matter of no longer seeing migrants as victims

+ and simple objects of state repression or political functionalism, acts of charity or demographic statistics, but rather as political subjects with a variety of motivations, experiences and abilities that, however, are generally demolished the moment the border is crossed to create the pre-conditions for exploitation in an informal working market.

Against this background, reports on the current struggles of the textile workers in the sweatshops of downtown Los Angeles and the cleaning people from the "Justice for Janitors" campaign were assigned a key role in the same way as the "sans papiers" in Paris five years previously. On the other hand, the challenge was to adapt the practical experience of multi-ethnic organization in the workplace to conditions in this country.

In June 2002 the temporary network „every person is an expert" (called into being by some activists from the border camps and "No one is illegal") started the next attempt to gauge the potential for concrete co-operation with trade unionists and the initiators of a new legalization campaign based around the project "Kanak attack". But in spite of the promising contact and the exciting new insights gained, for example, during the builders' strike in early summer, in which many workers, especially illegal workers, participated, it remains to be seen how serious the intentions within the German trade union apparatus are to truly represent the interests of illegal workers and those employed

under precarious conditions. In any case, the database project "expertbase.net", which was publicized in a first test version at the "Make World" conference, is a provocative attempt to counteract the realities of an unofficial labour market by means of a virtual job-mediating machine, which doesn't ask for papers and where those interested can present themselves anonymously and define their abilities and skills as they wish. But there is more: over and above the actual finding of jobs, the forum offers an excellent chance to determine the new composition of the migrant working class, above all at the lower wage levels of the new "affect labour". As a virtual, militant investigation, certain information could be acquired, under various different focuses, on the subjectivity of the hired house-helps, care workers, cleaning personnel and programmers who are currently hired in masses and come primarily from Eastern Europe.

The prevailing migration discourse has long since shifted from the wholesale hermetic isolation of the national labour market to a highly efficient process of filtering out the exact work force needed on an only temporary basis. This change of paradigm fundamentally transforms the special role and function of the borders: as in many other areas, networking technologies are replacing the banal methods of visa endorsement and face checks that were previously common. Borders are no longer material lines of fortification

made clearly identifiable by barbed wire or highly developed surveillance instruments. The border regime, often still played down by using the well-meant metaphor "the fortress of Europe", is becoming omnipresent. Under the pressure of increasing mobility and in view of the autonomy of massive immigration, the drawing-up of borders is becoming virtual, and one can scarcely generalize any more about its repressive character: it could just as well happen here as there, for this reason or another, and with a series of different consequences. Borders fold and shift inwards or outwards, they are advanced into safe third states and expanded into the hinterland. For some time now, controls have not just been limited to nation states, and now cover the inner cities' traffic junctions and supraregional traffic routes to the same extent as they do half- or non-public spheres, the most prominent of these being the workplace.

The post-modern control society, which is becoming a reality in the most internalized border, tends to individualize power and to anchor itself in the process of subjectification instead of getting rid of less pleasant subjects by means of inclusion and exclusion, as was previously the case. 'Border' today is everywhere where people who want or have to spend an uncertain length of time in another country are turned into illegal immigrants; where people who do not have the privilege of a regular wage are not ashamed to be thus crimi-

nalized; where neighbours are turned into voluntary informers in the service of the border patrol; when to stand by others and grant support is no longer the most normal thing in the world, but has been turned into a serious crime.

The new borders are virtual not only because an inspection must be anticipated at practically any time, but because the physical realm is short-circuited with databases and data-currents from which the corresponding access rights are drawn. In almost all areas of digitalized life information is checked, which in real time is degenerated and regenerated into innumerable data. It's a question of collecting indicators of habits, preferences and convictions, which are as easily evaluated as they are arbitrarily interpreted. User profiles give information about one thing above all: who or what is useful right now and who or what isn't. This has long been about much more than a mere proof of identity. Borders are inverted and privatized, and not only because it is now not so much the state that monitors personnel, passengers, couples and passers-by but enterprises and private people. What once were purely private matters are now exposed to the merciless eye of a general public and what was previously publicly accessible is suddenly, and without further ado, restricted. The creeping inversion of public and private spheres, territory and hyperspace has progressed to the extent where communication, not private property, has become the determining

production factor and where people no longer own anything but their information value. Traditional basic rights such as freedom of movement are becoming increasingly linked with the question of informational self-determination. The Noborder camp in Strasbourg in July 2002 was not only an attempt to criticize, with a joint Europe-wide action, the border and migration regimes of the countries that are party to the Schengen convention, but also, by putting the political focus on the Schengen information system (SIS), to highlight restrictions on freedom of movement and information. Personal information about illegal migrants has been collected for years in huge data banks in order to bring under the greatly expanded jurisdiction of state control those very people who have been robbed of all possible rights.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the numerous participants, the Noborder camps managed to communicate this new dimension of migration control at a European level in a rudimentary manner at best, let alone being able to translate it into action. During the ten days in Strasbourg, the two to three thousand participants from over twenty countries in Europe were predominantly concerned with themselves and their own differences, and from the start did not manage to shift the focus, i.e., to abandon the attempt to level out these differences and to use them instead as the starting point for a new political

capacity to act which goes beyond borders and innumerable differences, or even thrives on them. At first sight, the experiences from Strasbourg were, for many, quite shocking: a striking inability to communicate, inwardly or outwardly, and an incapacity to take and democratically legitimate decisions; these abilities are all the more necessary in situations like this, where communication takes place in different languages, where ideas come from countless contexts, and where action occurs against widely varying backgrounds. However, the Noborder camp could quickly prove itself as an extraordinary case which illustrates all too clearly how a political and practical fixation on the apparatus of state repression can only mislead, and how long overdue a collective of movements is that adds up to more than the sum of individual gestures. A modern concept of militancy must above all be creative and produce new forms of resistance that proceed from the flexibilization and deregulation of the conditions governing the production of subjectivity and that operate, experiment and intervene at precisely this level. In the end, nothing and no one can tell what people might make of themselves if they were only allowed to.

association APSOLUTNO

# THE ABSOLUTE SALE

The Absolute Sale is a web project based on an ironic view on the position of the East European artist in relation to the Western art market. The piece simulates an auction, in which viewers play the role of prospective buyers. They are presented with detailed information on the process of buying at this auction, as well as on the lots offered for sale. The description of the process of auctioning

reflects the style of auction houses' promotional catalogues.

However, at this auction of East European art, the lots on offer are not works of art, but artists from the East European region, who were born on 1 January 2001, at the beginning of the new millenium. The prospective buyers can, therefore, only make reservations for the artist(s) they are interested in. Although the destiny of these East European artists is already determined and stated in the database, buying at this auction is nevertheless a risky business and the prospective buyer is constantly reminded of this fact. Any of the

# APSOLUTNO ABSOLUTE SALE 1997

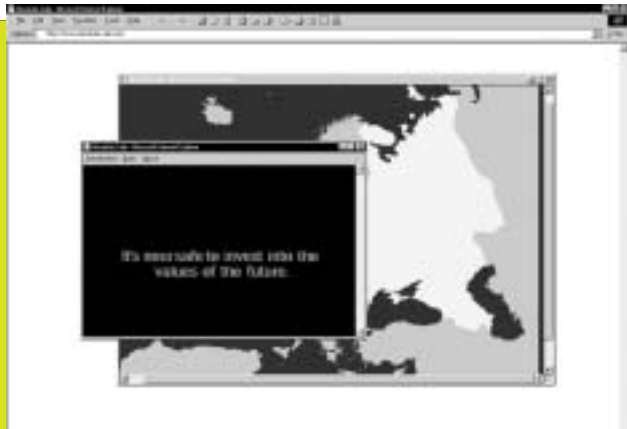
Rossitza Daskalova

With dark humour and an unbearable lightness, Apsolutno launches a virtual auction of lots from the former Eastern bloc countries. It all seems to go fine as we read the rules of the auction, which are plain and clear, follow the instructions, choose a method of payment. At one point, however, we find out that the items for sale are human individuals,

mostly artists from this region. The sale of being is indeed an "absolute" one...

Once, a street sign with the word HUMAN (in English and in the language of the country from which the "lot" comes from) written on it appears in the middle of the screen, and then there is the map of Europe always present as a big reality full of questions. The silent, unchangeable, expressionless image of the map acts as a sponge, silently absorbing the information about the lots and other sales details from a separate window in which the auction is taking place. As the information in the auction window accumulates, the map invisibly turns from a receiver into a transmitter, confronting us by simply being there, sending unwritten questions and messages

lots can be withdrawn at any moment without notice, and, what is more, the buyer is informed that the information in the database is not to be relied upon. The organizers of the sale insist that they do not take any responsibility for the transactions. Furthermore, the sale is constantly postponed, as is the integration of Eastern European countries into the European Union.

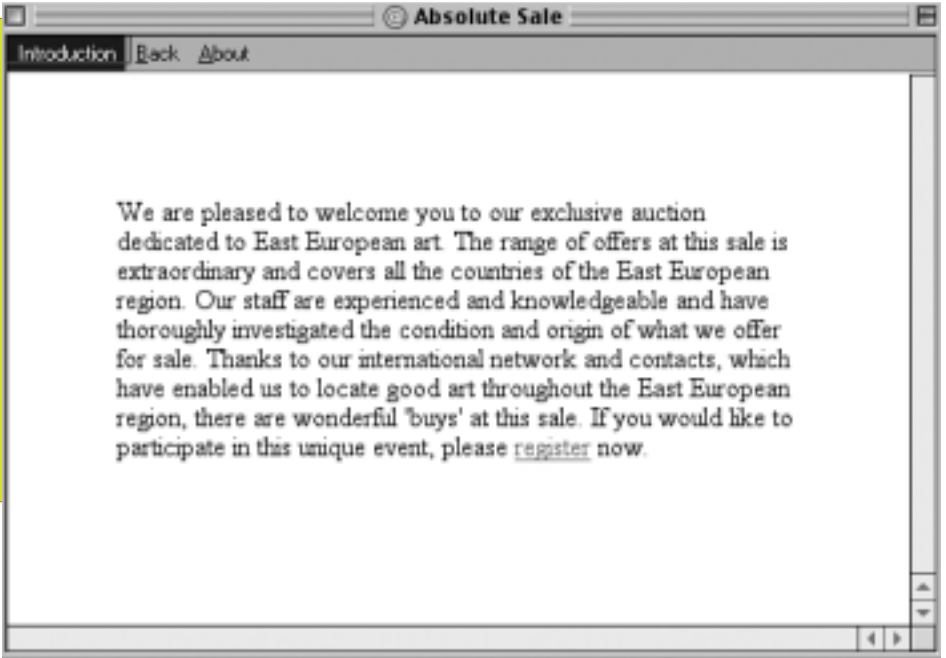


toward us. The map, motionless, hangs onto the screen as a constant, pending reality and becomes imbued with meanings. Its initial weightlessness transforms into a significant weight thrown into the hands of the viewer. Its silence becomes a wake-up call. Viewed in the context of Absolute Sale, the words "I've never seen the face and that's what I have always wanted. I've never seen the face and that's what I fear the most" (found in the About section for the Apsolutno collective) sound like an alarming signal pointing to the Internet as a yet unexplored magnifying glass through which we can view reality in new, revealing ways that can find us unprepared.

The use of cold, to-the-point words is kept throughout the whole project,

including in the identifications/descriptions of the lots. With the presence of only two visual signs (the map and the street sign), this overall controlled rendering prevents the project from falling into a higher dose of dramatization, something to which the idea of the project is susceptible. Furthermore, the "lots" are semi-fictitious characters who are artists from the former Eastern bloc. Buyers need not worry, as they will not have to face their purchase until in twenty years' time, because most of the "lots" were born in 2001 and will not be available until they reach the age of eighteen. The clever net.art kind of shift in handling this identity/non-identity saves the project from sinking into self-indulgence and cynicism.

Absolute Sale revolves around the issues of divided/united Europe, and

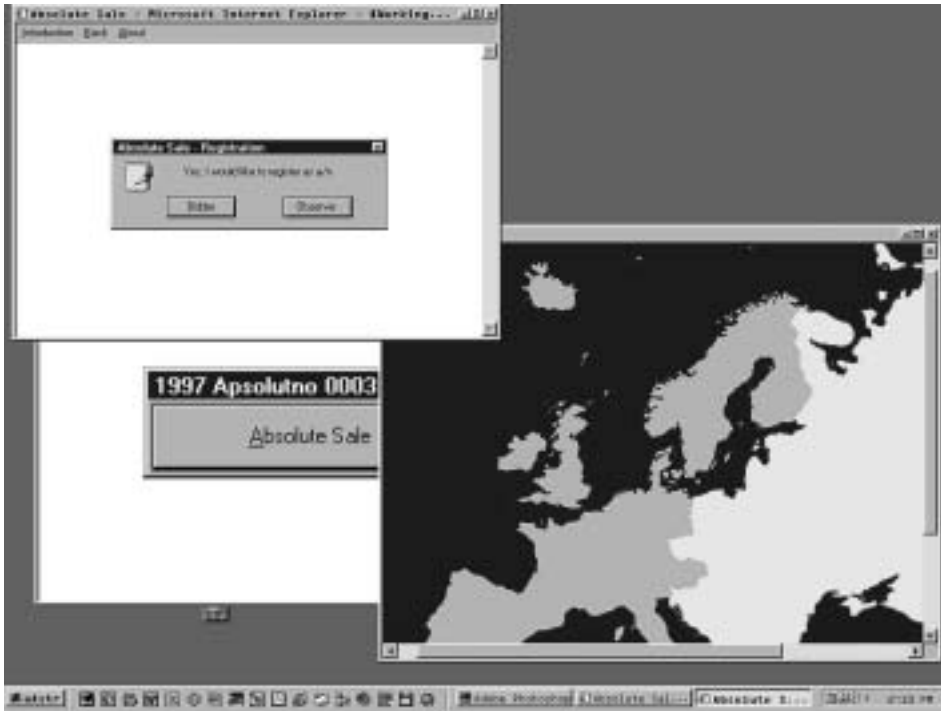


points critically at ideas, ideologies and geopolitical and economic aspirations which are taken as absolutes and leave no room for human identity. From a post-totalitarian, post-communist, ex-Eastern bloc perspective, the artists are questioning not only absolutes but also the sales activities spread over the Internet space. A particular battleground of interests and beliefs, the Internet is revealed in this project as a critical tool and as a mediator, balancing between destructive tendencies of globalization on the one hand and ethnocentrism on the other. The destructive tendencies are those which disconnect the individual from his humanity,

which is embodied in an identity anchored in life.

Within the framework of the "auction", there is also a post-net.art, ex-Eastern-European vision to the work. As Lev Manovich brilliantly points out in Art-margins, "Roundtable Ten Years After": "As it turned out, these countries have something to contribute to this global society in a few areas: new consumer markets, cheap labour, superbly trained musicians and sportsmen (in the case of Russia), and millions of "Internet brides" who would marry anybody just to leave the East.





However, in the area of the arts, the long-term isolation of the East from the West has had a negative effect. As a result, its art turned out to be by and large excluded from a global cultural marketplace. One exemption to this general inability to compete in a global art culture in the 1990s was the new area of net art, where, owing to the lack of an established institutional Mafia in the West, and to the financial support from the Soros Foundation, a number of artists from the East were able to quickly become brand-name international players. However, today, we are witnessing the rapid institutionalization

of net art in the West, which will probably marginalize the players from the East once again."



1999 aA 0001

# MEDIENFASSADE

Date: Berlin 27 August 1999  
 Place: The VEAG media facade,  
 Chausseestrasse 23, Berlin

The starting idea for the installation on the media facade was the notion of energy, the main product of the VEAG company. In the installation association APSOLUTNO aims to point out both the energy produced, controlled and used by humankind, and also the energy of a human being and its creative potential.

This idea is developed in the installation through a number of complementary elements: human - machine, black - white, letter - number, sound - movement. The idea can also be seen at the level of the realization of the video sequence, which includes computer animation on the one hand and footage with an actor on the other.

The installation is clearly divided into two complementary sets of screens: horizontal and vertical, taking into account the architecture of the building and the position of the screens. While each set has its independent existence as a visual whole, together they represent a

# APSOLUT ASSOCIATIONS

LeE Montgomery

As an American whose sense of geography swirls ever so politically, it would do me some good to look at a map once in a while. I might then understand where the USSR was and where the Balkans are. Instead I am left to see "the Balkans" as a roughly shifting motion blur of conceptual borders in the middle of the European continent. Formerly Eastern Europe, then Central Europe. Where once there were bridges of glory there are bridges no more. Where once there was a pontoon

bridge, now there is a "morally superior" pontoon bridge. Where once there was Yugoslavia there are so many smaller places. Suddenly, a land of psychological geography. A land where my avoidance of maps might actually serve me well c might serve us all well. Association Apsolutno reminds us that it is all "Absolutely Temporary".

When I arrived in Budapest and was to meet with two members of Apsolutno that I had heard much about but never seen, I found myself in an interesting and gradual position of discovery of two individuals. Two individual parts of a larger collective. Later, I would tell them that I had for a long time mistaken one quarter of the association for the whole thing. Only after seeing the enduring bond formed by a true psy-

dynamic composition with a specific rhythm of both synchronised and separate sections. As the architecture of the VEAG building gives an impression of solidity and stability, with its emphasized vertical elements, our idea is for the installation to create an effect of the building in movement: at one moment in the horizontal screens the 'generators' start moving faster and faster, which will create an illusion that the building is moving on its "wheels".

Taking into account that the installation will be viewed from various distances and perspectives, a passer-by walking on the pavement, a driver in a passing car or a passenger on a bus

will see the video wall as an animation sequence at different speeds.

The installation is realized in three colours only: black, white and red; black and white as two opposite poles, and red as energy.

chological geography stretching from Budapest to San Francisco was I able to truly understand the larger entity which is Apsolutno and which is perhaps not so temporary as their 5-year plan might suggest.

Of two weeks spent in Budapest I spent one in the "apsolutno base" apartment. Some e-mails had been exchanged, but I had no idea what to expect. I arrived in the night with little sleep on the flight. With help, I found my way to the apartment. Sparsely decorated, but somewhat revealing. Ice-cream in the refrigerator can Ost/West anthology to read. In it an essay whose ideas I had seen presented a year or more before in San Francisco in the form of a slide show. It was a discussion of automobiles and license plates. The vanity plates of

life in California were subjugated in my mind to the nationalistic expressions of Balkanized license plate and automobile decoration. Thoughts of nations contained in private spaces scattered throughout c. mobile, private spaces, crossing borders and boundaries. The art of this association reminded me of where I was while tugging me back home to images of a slide show with very different implications in a very different context. In California, these moving borders and nations swirled and blurred with all of the conceptual beauty of anti-Oedipal schizophrenia. In Budapest, there were nations whose borders had shifted more recently than the last time I had changed the furniture in my apartment, and just a train ride away; the essence of real-world schizophrenia. The substance that this associa-



tion used was not film or language or the Internet. "Apsolutno views the use of these technologies as a natural process, which has its positive as well as its negative sides. The use of this medium will not in itself bring a unique quality to a piece of work. ... The choice of a particular medium is an important element of any project." It may seem clichéd, but Apsolutno's medium and materials are the world around them. Apsolutno are masters of reality.

"Weird dancing in all-night computer-banking lobbies. Unauthorized pyrotechnic displays. Land-art, earth-works as bizarre alien artifacts strewn in State Parks. Burglarize houses but instead of stealing, leave Poetic-Terrorist objects. Kidnap someone & make

them happy. Pick someone at random & convince them they're the heir to an enormous, useless & amazing fortune—say 5000 square miles of Antarctica, or an aging circus elephant, or an orphanage in Bombay, or a collection of alchemical mass. Later they will come to realize that for a few moments they believed in something extraordinary, & will perhaps be driven as a result to seek out some more intense mode of existence.

Bolt up brass commemorative plaques in places (public or private) where you have experienced a revelation or had a particularly fulfilling sexual experience, etc."

-Hakim Bey, "Chaos: The Broad-sheets of Ontological Anarchism"



Sell the myths that have been built around you. Shape the commodification of your being. Get rid of the middle man. Sell artists instead of art. As the borders of Eastern Europe become the borders of Central Europe, Apsolutno trawls the countryside for future artists and holds an "Absolute Sale". These artists from the countries of Middle Europe or perhaps Deep Europe in 1997 were not yet born. Buyers could be in on the cultural boom ahead of the curve purchasing photographers, video artists, and more for discount prices. Choose a country first, and see what's available. Presented to a room full of bewildered non-tech savvy artists this internet piece was doomed before it started, as those assembled felt their distance from the piece by virtue of the technology. Little did they know that

this piece was about so much more than the technology. This "Absolute Sale" was a comment on and engagement with the anonymity and crass commercialism of the Internet, while simultaneously standing in critical engagement with the idea of an exoticized artist or community of artists by the surrounding (i.e. Western) world. Firing broad shots at the concept of a work of art purchased because of the celebrity value of its producer, we are forced to decide: are we appreciative of the art or the artist, and even then, what are we appreciating about the artist?

Apsolutno is not about the artist. Apsolutno is not about celebrity. It took some time for me to learn it, but the association is the important



part. I would see one quarter of the association negotiating shows and demanding the work be presented as the work of Apsolutno. The curators always wanted a star. Apsolutno would not give them one.

Terrorists we know in America as mythical figures. Celebrities in their way. Celebrities are heroes that can be torn down. Figures to whom we can attribute habits and evil deeds. Saddam Hussein, Osama Bin Laden, Momar Qadafi, Yassir Arafat for a time; but what about Poetic Terrorists from a more European "Middle-East"? One wonders when looking at the "Absolutely Temporary" plaque: which came first, revelation or the plaque? Did the plaque change the bridge's importance any more or less than the pronouncements

of a national figure? When the bridge was once again destroyed, did the plaque become an oracle in retrospect? When walking through Budapest with one half of the association, they showed me photographs of the bombed bridge and the rebuilt bridge posted in front of the Yugoslav embassy. Milošević had made declarations of glory for the new (temporary in its very construction) bridge. This new bridge was by virtue of Milošević's words "a morally superior" bridge. What causes one proclamation to trump another? Is it only political power? Is there a place for cummm ccultural capital?

morally superior ..... absolutely temporary ... you be the judge

# + 1995 - 2000 AND ON...

For Apsolutno from PLATFORM  
with love and respect

PLATFORM is an interdisciplinary group of artists, campaigners, educators and activists who, since 1983, have been creating projects, interventions, debates and change at the interface between ecology and democracy. In 1989, PLATFORM based itself in the metropolis of London and made this city the subject of its study and the object for change. The group operates between activism, campaigning and art strategies, and seeks its economic stability from these fields, bidding for funding from the state and charitable foundations and trusts, and also from earned income.

Our contribution discusses how the period in question impacted on PLATFORM's three core members individually and collectively, politically, environmentally, artistically, and above all in terms of imagining possible futures.

**26th March 2001**

*Jane Trowell, art history teacher, musician, and PLATFORM member.*

Reviewing this period has been quite a tumultuous experience for me. I hope I've managed to transmit this in what follows.

In 1995, Great Britain was entering its sixteenth year of Conservative Party rule, a period of an immense shift in values tantamount to a cultural revolution. The Thatcher years brought with them a wholesale attack on the notion of the Welfare State (state-subsidised mass education, health, and essential services) moving towards a US-style 'safety-net-for-the-very-fewest' model and placing hospitals and the medical profession under tremendous ethical and practical strain. The very concept of trade unionism was assaulted as union after union, strike after strike was ignored or violated by the government, and scabs encouraged. Privatisation of nationalised industries and services meant that, one by one, telecommunications, water, gas, coal, oil, electricity, rail, bus...became part of a scramble for profit in a so-called egalitarian move that made the person in the street a potential stock marketeer. Council house building programmes were slashed, and mass home-ownership was encouraged, promising false dawns for many who attempted to buy their previously low-rented homes, only to find they could not keep up the mortgage payments. Thousands found themselves being repossessed, and even homeless. Government-led waves of xenophobia







## Q. What gets buried in The City ?

'Image created for 90% Crude project, 1998'



— were also part of this period : fear of the immigrant, fear of the refugee, fear of the asylum seeker. The island that is Britain indeed can access its isolationist psychogeography at the drop of an ideological hat...

The 80s were a period of rampant capitalism in our country, led by our city and a electorate that was dazzled by all that glitters. The 'Big Bang' of 1986 deregulated the City - the financial heart of London - and the era of big bets, big rewards, and big bonuses became a cultural obsession. To work in finance became sexy. To make millions with the click of a mouse became the ultimate high.

Nationalism was also on the rise, demonstrated graphically by government and tabloid media rhetoric around the Malvinas (Falklands) War (1982), the Gulf War (1991 - )... Our 'special relationship' with the US government was cemented by the Thatcher-Reagan years and attitudes to Iraq : the legacy of which can be illustrated well by the fact the Britain and the USA together have been dropping bombs on this country on a regular basis for ten whole years. Maybe tonight again? or tomorrow? This is on top of punitive sanctions, and coercive 'food for oil' tactics. This alliance further manifested itself years later in the confused, alternately passive and bloody military reaction of Britain to the wars in Croatia, Bosnia

and Kosovo, possibly now the struggles in Macedonia. Yes, Britain still likes to see itself as the world's policeman, issuing punishments and wagging fingers disapprovingly, disastrously. If it has to be the yes-man to the USA, that seems to be second best...

We voted in this set of values four times. I say 'we' voted, yet the fact that our electoral system does not represent the true feelings of the electorate - average 40% turnout for a limited selection of candidates with a 'first past the post' method of 'winning' which ignores the diverse wishes of the populace - coupled with the extraordinary charisma of Thatcher in the popular imagination, meant that for those of us committed to the development of democracy and social justice, those of us committed to ecological issues, to anti-corporate futures...these years were bleak, if defiant.

By the time Thatcher was ousted by her own party, the damage was done. The country of consensus, where Left and Right celebrated the establishment of the Welfare State (whilst of course differing on detail), was gone. Our country is now nakedly capitalistic, and big business - profit - has a hand in almost every branch of former public life. But Britain has also had its shocks - and some of them good. One of the incoming Labour Party's first acts was to bring about a referendum for devolution of

power : a vote for an independent Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly. Despite the much-criticised tokenism of the Welsh Assembly (not a full parliament), this has been a radical step towards decentralisation and a much needed recognition of difference within these islands. The uneasy peace in the North of Ireland achieved by John Major's government has largely been maintained, with of course many difficulties and, indeed, continuing outbreaks of sickening violence.

Environmentally, Britain saw an explosion of activism in the 90s. The momentum of the anti-roads movement 'Reclaim the Streets' and the land-squatter grouping 'The Land is Ours' snowballed into a mass network of activists partying against car culture and the increasing domination of the world by transnational corporations. The sudden and very dramatic flooding that hit Britain in autumn 2000 has awakened many people for whom the changing climate due to the burning of fossil fuels was not an issue. Britain has been seemingly under an endless grey cloud of rain for the past five months : the warmer wetter winters and drier summers predicted for Britain by climate experts are indeed becoming a threatening reality. Britain seems miles behind its northern European neighbours - a trip across the Channel can be both inspiring and depressing, as one witnesses immaculate public transport,

car-share schemes, renewable energy schemes in the form of photo-voltaic panels and wind turbines found commonly in the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium...

As for London, well, the city has never been dirtier or more disastrously served by 'public' transport (the buses are owned and run by private companies, while the Underground totters along under financially deprived state-ownership). The average speed on London's roads is the same as in the days of the horse and carriage - 8 miles per hour.

Yet there is a glimmer of hope. London has, for the first time in 14 years, an elected body to oversee it. In 1986, Thatcher achieved one of her most brutal domestic aims : to disempower the left-wing Greater London Council and six other metropolitan authorities. She did this quite simply by abolishing them. Between then and 2000, Londoners had no elected body to represent them, to look after their interests. London was run by non-elected bodies directly responsible to central government : in other words, the capital and the other major cities were run along party political lines. In 1997, the incoming Labour Party proposed an Assembly with a mayor, and this was approved by Londoners, even though many of us felt that it was a poor shadow of a properly representative local government. Interestingly, the Labour

✦ Party wanted to block the former leader of the Greater London Council - left-wing Ken Livingstone - from standing for Mayor, in favour of a more moderate Labour candidate. They failed in their attempt, due to high-profile popular revolt, but forced him to resign from the Party in order to stand as an independent. Ken Livingstone - at a fourteen-year interval - was elected back to his former role as leader of London's government. (The new Assembly building - a glass egg - is going up only 300 metres from where I sit in PLATFORM, in the shadow of Tower Bridge on the Thames.) Through the re-election of 'Red Ken', Londoners gave the Labour and Conservative Parties the finger. Justice can happen.

And what of PLATFORM in this turbulent period? Our work as artists, activists and campaigners has been intimately bound up with all these issues and more. In the period in question, we initiated our most ambitious production to date, called **90% Crude** (1996 - ). **90% Crude** focuses on the impact and implications of the increasing grip of globalised capitalism, specifically examining London and Londoners' role in this. We are looking deeply at one of its most powerful instruments, one that has perhaps the most devastating impact on the planet and its peoples : the oil industry. To date, issues such as human rights, ecology, land rights, climate change, sustainable development,

renewable energy and the seductive nature of big business have been explored through performance, public-space activism, discussion events, mass publishing and art interventions. This long-term project will run for at least ten years, and to date has comprised nine sub-projects (see chart).

PLATFORM is artist-led, but works interdisciplinarily, believing that through such collaborations solutions and possible futures can be arrived at with more imagination, more veracity, more depth and - through consensus - more chance of taking authentic root.

We have an increasing network of colleagues and associates internationally, although the focus of our work remains on how to understand and influence our own situation here in England. Between 1995 and 2000, PLATFORM forged especially strong links to radical pro-democracy artists working in Yugoslavia (Vojvodina and Serbia) and also in Germany. It is interesting to us that our strongest connections should be with artists in these countries. Is it that there is common ground? Britain is a former Empire, and white English people remain in a deep struggle with an outdated superiority complex. Britain's imperial legacy reverberates on through the dominance of Anglophone culture in the world, on the internet, and the legacy of war and internal strife that Britain engendered on its withdrawal

from its former colonies in Africa and the Indian sub-continent. At home, Britain struggles with 'Little Englander' racism on a profound and disturbing level - sometimes, despite extraordinary work by extraordinary people, there seems no end to the institutional and internalised disdain of centuries. It seems to us that on some level PLATFORM has instinctively been drawn to artists and activists from countries with historical problems related to our own. Indeed, one of our **90% Crude** projects, 'killing us softly', examines 'white-collar' perpetrator psychology, with relation to the administrative bureaucracies underpinning Nazi Germany, the British Empire and contemporary corporate culture.

Perhaps one of the most radical acts of those born in former imperial or imperially-minded countries is to work on that legacy as it manifests itself within oneself and in others : to work at dismantling the mindset which keeps surfacing and perpetrating, way beyond the proclaimed official end.

Author John Berger has said:

'I can't tell you what art does and how it does it, but I know that often art has judged the judges, pleaded revenge to the innocent and shown to the future what the past suffered so that it has never been forgotten. I know too that the powerful fear art, whatever its form,

when it does this, and, that amongst these people such art sometimes runs like a rumour and a legend because it makes sense of what life's brutalities cannot, a sense that unites us, for it is inseparable from a justice at last. Art, when it functions like this, becomes a meeting place - of the invisible, the irreducible, the enduring, guts, and honour.'

(from 'Keeping a Rendez-vous').

### 11th March 2001

*James Marriott, sculptor, naturalist, and co-founder of PLATFORM*

#### Foreword

I wrote the following text 'Seven Thoughts...' on 1st October 1995, right in the opening moments of PLATFORM's current project **90% Crude** - nearly five and a half years ago. Reading back over it I realise how much, and how little has changed.

A mere forty days after the essay was written, on 10th November 1995, Ogoni writer and environmental activist Ken Saro -Wiwa was executed by the Nigerian military along with eight other pro-democracy activists on trumped-up charges which disguised the military's blatant aim of silencing mass protest against the polluting abuse of oil companies in the Niger Delta. Royal Dutch/Shell is an oil company

† jointly owned by Dutch and British interests, and has been heavily involved in oil extraction in the 'bread basket' of the delta area since the '60s, when Nigeria was still a British colony. Shell's relationship to these murders came under close scrutiny, and since that time there have been sporadic but high-profile demonstrations against Shell - pickets of AGM's, occupations of offices, boycotts of petrol stations. Shell has responded, contrite words and the annual publication of its 'Profits and Principles' reports since 1997 have gone some way to dampen criticism in its 'home countries' - the U.K., the U.S.A. and the Netherlands. However, the most effective weapon this century-old company has employed is time itself - just surviving the fierce heat of international criticism and waiting for it to fizzle out. Largely this has been the case in Europe and America, but in Ogoniland resistance continues. Shell is still barred from entering Ogoniland, and despite the murder of leaders and repeated harassment of activists, the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni Peoples (MOSOP) has retained its strength. At PLATFORM the story of Ogoniland has not faded, but seems to return ever stronger - in performances such as 'killing us softly', and 'Carbon Generations'; in exhibitions such as 'Water, Land, Fire' and publications such as 'From Delta to Delta'. This story - seemingly distant - we believe is intimately bound up with British histo-

ry and the national psyche. Only by staring it in the face can lasting change take place.

Since October 1995, much else has changed. Scotland has achieved devolution, it has its own parliament for the first time since 1707. However, the oil in the North Sea remains very much U.K. oil, and has not 'become' Scottish oil. Further South, London has arguably become more of an oil city than ever before. Over the last five years there have been significant changes in the structures of the oil industry: whereas there were seven 'oil majors' known as the Seven Sisters, there are now just Three Sisters - BP Amoco, Royal Dutch/Shell and ExxonMobil. Two of the Seven Sisters were based in London, now two of the Three Sisters are based in our home city. The importance of London to the oil industry has grown significantly, although the ranking of oil corporations in the 'Worlds' Largest' listings has shifted : Shell is now the worlds 21<sup>st</sup> largest company, dropping from number four; BP Amoco has risen from number 27 to number 14. These two giants still dominate the U.K., and indeed European economy. They form the subject of PLATFORM's ongoing performance work 'Gog and Magog'.

Finally, over this period the perception of Climate Change has shifted dramatically. In 1995 it was, tellingly, referred



to as Global Warming - now the talk is of Climate Change, or Climate Chaos. In November 1997, the Kyoto Conference took place and targets for the reduction of CO2 emissions were laid down; they were to be ratified at the Hague Conference in November 2000. However this latter gathering collapsed without agreement. Some have argued convincingly that it collapsed because several parties had come to recognise that the issue is too serious for the agreement to be a fudge. Certainly the U.K. government's statements on Climate Change have shifted dramatically over the last few years, particularly in the midst of the substantial flooding in England in the autumn of 2000, when the Prime Minister spoke of these disasters being attributable to Climate Change and of the need to make substantial alterations in our energy systems. Blair's pronouncements were fuelled by the reports produced by the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), a world body of top climate scientists, who in February 2001 announced that their predictions about climate change that had informed the Kyoto Conference were inaccurate - the situation is far worse than they had outlined in their report of 1995, the planet is heating up at a faster rate than they had previously thought.

What does all this mean for the coming century? And what can art do in the face of it all?

## SEVEN THOUGHTS ON 90% CRUDE

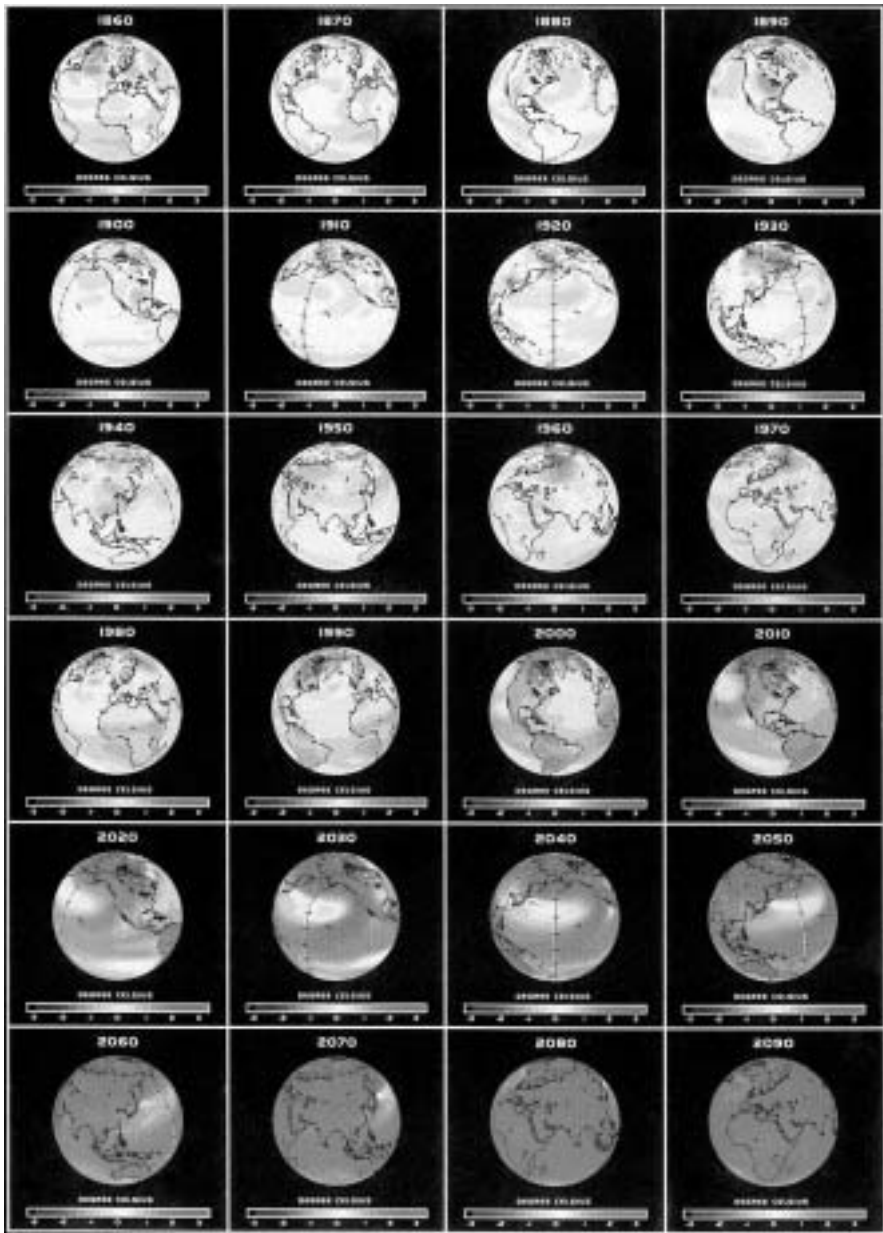
1

*"A shared expression of feeling is the foundation of any change.*

*Is it possible to create such a 'shared feeling', not just within a town or a city, but across vast international trade systems? What is the connection between our Home and other people's Land? Whose lands do we depend upon for our needs to be met? To what extent do we as citizens of London feel any link with those thousands, millions of people in other cities and countries across the world who are mining and manufacturing and producing materials that we consume? And if the answer is 'none at all', then clearly the social and ecological implications are extremely serious."*

PLATFORM, 'Homeland', 1995

Seated at this word processor I am aware, just the same as anyone in this position, that the activity I am engaged in depends upon some far distant source of fuel - fuel to make the plastics for this keyboard, fuel to make the semi-conductor chip that runs this machine, fuel to generate the electricity that lights the screen before me. What is the origin of this fuel? What of the social and ecological impacts of the means by which this fuel comes within my control, comes to assist the movement of my hand and the amplification of my thoughts? PLATFORM has been trying to explore these questions on and off for the past six years; our last journey being Homeland, created as



UK Meteorological Office Climate Model



part of London International Festival of Theatre 1993. We are presently preparing for a new journey; this time with a particular focus upon Oil - what follow are some pointers on the direction of travel.

2

*"In the decades following World War II ... oil emerged triumphant, the undisputed King, a monarch garbed in a dazzling array of plastics ... Total world energy consumption more than tripled between 1949 and 1972. Yet that growth paled beside the rise in oil demand, which in the same years increased more than five and a half times."*  
Daniel Yergin, *'The Prize'*, 1991

Oil runs through the bloodstream of this metropolis, flows beneath the surface of everything from a biro to the key commodity in the City, from the lubricant of a bicycle chain to the third largest company in the world Royal Dutch/Shell. Oil, along with coal and gas, provides the very substance of this city. From the eighteenth century, London began to grow exponentially, making itself into the largest city since the fall of Rome, a Megacity that became a model for the forty megacities that now dominate the planet and provide `home` for over half of humanity. Key to London's growth was its control, and use, of a fossil fuel - coal - and key to its continued survival, in its present form, is the maintenance of its power over sources of not only coal, but also

of gas and oil. Without the ability to draw on secure resources of fossil fuels we will not be able to satisfy the insatiable appetite of our metropolitan culture. Without these secure resources the contours of our urban life would be unrecognisable.

3

*"For the past two hundred years, since the `Wealth of Nations`, we have known that the cities we happen to be born in depend for the satisfaction of their needs on the labour and resources of strangers."*  
Michael Ignatieff, *The Needs of Strangers*, 1992.

I am writing this in the valley of the Tidal Thames, dwelling place of approximately eight million people; together we consume 200,000 tonnes of fuel per week - equivalent to two super tanker loads. There are a few oil rigs on the mainland of England, in Yorkshire and in Dorset, but there is no oil to be found in this valley and the size of the demand for oil that I make with my fellow citizens has to be met from beyond the confines of my home and my bioregion. For the current metabolism of London to maintained it has to make an impact on upon the ecological and social resources of other places, of distant elsewhere. The accumulated impact of all (not just energy) of my city's demands on all those distant elsewhere is London's `Ecological Footprint`. The surface area of London is



✦ 15,980 hectares; the ecological footprint of London has been assessed at 19,668,000 hectares; therefore the land area that London needs to survive is 1,230 times its own metropolitan size.

4

*"In order that England may live in comparative comfort a hundred million Indians must live on the verge of starvation, an evil state of affairs but you acquiesce in it every time you step in a taxi or eat a plate of strawberries and cream. The alternative is to throw the Empire overboard and reduce England to a cold and unimportant little island where we should have to work very hard and live mainly on herrings and potatoes."*  
George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier*, 1937.

The United Kingdom is self-sufficient in oil. Ours is an oil exporting nation; in 1994 we produced 130 million tonnes of crude oil and exported 80 million tonnes. Yet this production takes place far from this city, indeed takes place in another country, in another sea - five miles deep in oil fields with names like Brent and Ninnian. All, except for a tiny fraction, of the U.K.'s oil production takes place in the northern North Sea, in territorial waters of Scotland. The Scottish National Party holds that this oil is Scots Oil and will belong solely to an independent Scotland. Intriguingly, under the devolutionary plans of the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, the oil will continue to be British oil.

Throughout the twentieth century, London's desire to keep control of places of oil production - to feel that the means of satisfying the metropolitan appetite are secure - has been interwoven with the defence of the British Empire. The colonies of Burma, Brunei, Papua New Guinea, Malaya, Aden, Nigeria, the protectorates of Kuwait and Iraq attempted to ensure that the Empire had a 'British' source of oil and that British companies, notably Shell and BP, had a secure foundation from which to build their global position.

Last week the U.K. and Argentina signed an agreement providing for a joint approach towards offshore oil exploration around the Falkland Islands. Next week oil companies will bid for licences to carry out this exploration in an area which has long been thought to hold vast reserves. All this seems to make it more explicable why the U.K.'s government chose to fight a war to defend one of its last nineteen colonies, the fragments of the British Empire. Perhaps the Falklands War should be added to the list of oil wars that have punctuated my lifespan?

5

*"Despite the worldwide process of decolonisation, there is today many times more land being used in the Developing World to meet the food and other biomass needs of the Western Countries*



*than in the 1940's before the process of decolonisation began."*

Anil Agarwal, *Centre for Science and Environment*, 1994.

Nigeria gained its independence from Britain in 1960, three years after oil drilling began in the Niger Delta region. Today, petroleum and its derivatives dominate the country's economy, forming 98% of exports. Nigeria is the fourth biggest oil producer in O.P.E.C.. Shell produces 50% of Nigeria's oil and this accounts for almost 14% of the company's global production. Between 1976 and 1991 official figures quote 2,976 oil spills in the Delta region as a whole, which averages at almost four every week, amounting to 2.1 million barrels. Combined with atmospheric hydrocarbon pollution, the damage to their staple agriculture and fishing has meant that the Delta peoples face a stark choice between starvation or resistance, which incurs the wrath of the repressive Nigerian regime.

Shell and BP working together in a joint venture discovered oil in Ogoniland, part of the Delta region, in 1958 and an estimated 30 billion dollars of oil revenue have flowed from the area over the past 35 years. Ogoniland remains poor - the average life expectancy is 51 and only about 20% of the population is literate. Ogoni Day in early 1993 saw 300,000 people participate in peaceful marches throughout

Ogoniland protesting at 30 years of pollution caused by Shell and its joint venture partners. After their demands for environmental compensation and oil royalties were ignored, tension rose in the area. Shell closed down their operations in Ogoniland after a worker was attacked. Fearing that other oil-producing areas might follow suit, the Nigerian government used covert military operations to break the Ogoni community's resistance. By autumn 1993, ten villages had been anonymously attacked, leaving 750 dead and 3,000 homeless.

Ken Saro-Wiwa is President of the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) and a leading figure in the nationwide pro-democracy movement. An internationally acclaimed novelist, he has been actively involved in promoting the cause of his people for more than thirty years. This culminated in the setting up of MOSOP with other leaders in 1990. Saro-Wiwa was arrested in May 1994 and held without charge for nine months. He is currently on trial before a military-appointed tribunal, accused of the murder of four Ogoni leaders in early 1994. He faces the death penalty.

6

*"And that earth that is within this creation, made common storehouse for all, is brought and sold, and kept in the hands of a few, whereby the great creator is mightily dishonoured."*

✦ Gerrard Winstanley, *'The True Levellers Standard Advanced'*, 1649.

If, as it appears, the peoples of Scotland and Ogoniland - as in many other oil producing areas of the world - are denied control over what is rightfully their common wealth, it is we in the metropolis who are the beneficiaries. After all, not only are we guaranteed a resource, and at a remarkably cheap price, but we gain from the taxes that two of the three largest British companies, B. P. and Shell, pay into the national coffers.

Our position is not entirely one of gain, for what is imported into the city is used in the city and a quarter of London's fuel is burnt in the combustion engines of the cars, lorries and buses on its streets. Winstanley would have found it remarkable that today, in the valley that he knew, not only is the earth controlled by the few, but so too is the air. Only 41% of Londoners own cars, but all the two and a half million inhabitants of the Inner City have to breath the air and suffer the consequences. According to Greenwich Action to Stop Pollution, four out of every ten boys in the borough has asthma caused by air pollution.

7

*"On a per capita basis the U.K. needs to cut its carbon emissions by over 90%, i.e. a 5% annu-*

*al reduction from now until 2040 ... What does this mean for a typical household with its current annual emissions of over 25 tonnes? Each household's share of power station and refinery emissions is about 11 tonnes, industry 5.5 tonnes, domestic heating etc 3.5 tonnes, and transport 4.5 tonnes. A `ration` of 2.5 tonnes would only stretch to the most essential activities. Flying across the Atlantic once would use up a large part of this."*

*Dr Mayer Hillman, Policy Studies Institute, 1995.*

We are all aware that the most dramatic form of air pollution that derives from the burning of fossil fuels is Global Warming and that to prevent likely catastrophe we need to reduce as quickly as we can the amount of fossil fuels we use. Over a third of the fuel that we use in London comes from oil and in this, as in all fossil fuel types, we need to make a cut as dramatic as Hillman suggests, a cut of 90%. From this PLATFORM derives the title of its current project, **90% Crude**.

What effect would such a dramatic cut have on the nature of our city? Sure, we can make progress towards this cut through energy conservation and a greater use of renewable energy resources; perhaps even half the reduction can be met in this way. But clearly we will have to make changes in our lifestyles; the amount we travel, the number of objects we possess, the range of appliances we regularly use. What will it do to the way our hospitals run?

The shape of our schools and welfare system? The pattern of our democracy?

Standing on the banks of the Thames at night, looking out at the oil refineries of Coryton and Shellhaven, the power stations of Tilbury and Northfleet and the glow of London's lights beyond, I am wondering what this valley will look like when it no longer draws in the oil wealth of the world?

\*

In this project, **90% Crude**, PLATFORM is beginning research on how the life-blood of oil flows through the body of our industrial society, is beginning to design a vessel to facilitate it in this exploration and beginning to delineate the artistic media and scientific practices that can enable and express this journey. We are also looking at the inextricable link to globalised corporate-dominated culture, business, and finance that depends so heavily on oil to continue its work.

We would like to hear from people who are similarly interested in these matters, and particularly from anyone who would like to collaborate in this interdisciplinary project.

*(written 1st October 1995)*

\*

## 21st February 2001

*Dan Gretton, writer, teacher and founder member of PLATFORM*

LONDON-MADRID-SANTIAGO:  
SANTIAGO-MADRID-LONDON

### 7 DAYS IN A JOURNEY OF HOPE

1st May 1997: General Election in Britain. I have waited 18 years for this day. The end of a terrible period in the history of my country when greed became established as a justifiable, almost necessary, attribute; when capitalism lost any pretence at being 'caring'; when it became normal to see my fellow citizens sleeping on the streets; when teachers and those working in education became despised. From the time I was a not-very-politicised 14-year-old at school to being a 32-year-old man I had to witness these changes. In many ways who I am today, the work I do, grew out of the darkness of those 18 years, helped to shape my politics and my life. On the night of 30th April 1997 at 2.28 a.m., I wrote this in my journal:

'A strange calm has descended. A windless night. Only the occasional whisper of a distant car. I look out over darkened trees; houses sleep. And in 4 hours, 32 minutes, the first cross will be made on the first paper. An action so simple yet so beautiful - an action repeated 30 million times that will

— release a country's spirit again. That will let humanity breathe again. And a rage within me, burning for most of these 18 years, will begin to soften. Six thousand, four hundred and fifty days - I was a boy then, curious but unruffled by the world. Now I am a man. Sometimes in a tube window I catch my unsmiling face, reflecting the aches of an often desperate world. But today that face will crack into a smile unseen before. In 4 hours, 28 minutes. I switch the light off again - I want my eyes to rest for the last time on this darkened and mean-spirited country. I want to distil this moment, this essence of change, the soft calm before the storm of hope. I will wake to a new place that I will not recognise, but I have helped to form. In my own way. It feels that we can breathe again. It feels that a suffocating blockage is over.'

29th November 1997:

"In 'The Autumn of the Patriarch', Gabriel Garcia Marquez's novel about a seemingly immortal Latin American dictator, the fictional tyrant shelters deposed military rulers from other countries in a house by the sea. The general visits his disgraced cronies to 'look at himself in the instructive mirror of their misery'.

As the autumn of Chile's real-life patriarch slips into winter, General Augusto Pinochet sees in the mirror a former

dictator who has neither been deposed nor disgraced. His 82nd birthday this week was a landmark in Chile's political evolution - his last birthday as army commander-in-chief... In March he will retire to become senator-for-life, a job he created for himself."

[The Guardian' newspaper]

16th October 1998:

In response to a request from a Madrid judge investigating Spanish nationals killed and tortured in Chile, Pinochet is arrested at the London Clinic, Harley Street, London while recovering from a back operation. For all Home Secretary Jack Straw's talk that "this is not a political act, purely a judicial one", everyone in Britain knows that this could not have happened under a Conservative Government. For one of the few times in my adult life I feel unambiguously proud to be British - that this extraordinary event demanding world attention happened in my country, in my city, under a Government I helped to elect. For the next days and weeks I find myself smiling at strangers in the street, often breaking into song. We could be entering a new era of global human rights, where finally tyranny will be held to account, wherever and whenever it has happened.

11th December 1998:

Pinochet is ordered to appear at Belmarsh High Security Court in South-East London on a cold, grey winter's afternoon. PLATFORM, in conjunction with the artist Peter Kennard, create 3 huge posters 'The Struggle of Humanity Against Power is the Struggle of Memory Against Forgetting'. Today I am singing again: "Oh wicked man, where you gonna run? You can't hide on the Judgement Day!" It is a day of extraordinarily raw emotions - as the green van carrying Pinochet arrives at the court at 2.10 p.m, there is a crescendo of whistling and screaming 'A-SE-SINO!! A-SE-SINO!!'. As the van leaves after an hour with the old tyrant covered in a blanket, the fury of chanting dies away and many of the hundreds of people around us are crying and holding each other, in elation but also suddenly and keenly remembering their losses. This is a day that the people here can hardly believe they are seeing. When the man responsible for the death and disappearance of their husbands, wives, brothers, sisters and friends is finally facing judgement. A day when you expected the angels to break through the clouds and start singing.

2nd March 2000:

Pinochet flies back to Chile after 17 months of detention under house arrest



in Britain. The authorities in Chile say that he may face justice there; many Europeans are sceptical this will ever happen.

8th August 2000:

The Supreme Court in Santiago strips Pinochet of his immunity as a 'senator-for life'. President Lagos urges the country to respect the decision.

29th January 2001:

Pinochet is placed under house arrest in Santiago after Judge Juan Guzman charges him with direct responsibility for 57 murders and 18 kidnappings. Responding to doctors' reports Guzman declares Pinochet to be "extraordinarily normal", meaning that he will finally face a trial in Chile. As the political landscape changes with bewildering speed so do the words spoken. Only a short while earlier President Ricardo Lagos had broken with the language of the past (which treated the 'disappeared' as 'unfortunate victims' of a 'civil

war') when in an emotional national broadcast he referred to those Pinochet had killed as "our fellow countrymen, children of the nation".

"This is a great victory for Pinochet's thousands of victims, for the rule of law and for the principle that the perpetrators of atrocities should be brought to justice," said Reed Brody, advocacy director for Human Rights Watch. "None of this would have happened had Pinochet not been arrested in England. That arrest broke the spell of his impunity."

[The Guardian' 30.1.01]

It feels that Chile can breathe again. It feels that a suffocating blockage is moving. And all over the world tyrants have started to shift uneasily in their sleep.

## POSTSCRIPT

1st April 2001

Former President of Yugoslavia Slobodan Milošević is successfully arrested by Yugoslav Special Police at his Belgrade villa on criminal charges of embezzlement and corruption, after an armed stand-off lasting 36 hours. There are no plans as yet to hand him over to the Hague International War Crimes Tribunal.

What does it mean that such a man - the inciter of so much violence, hate

introverted and isolationist thinking - is arrested by his own people first, regardless of others' desire to punish him? Surely this is a better way to lasting change, if it is at all possible? To face and stop the rot from within. To take responsibility. This is what needs to happen in our own country, so credibly cloaked to the outside world in gentlemanly decency...the skull beneath the skin.

All power and deep respect to cultural and political activists and internationalists in Yugoslavia - from the bold International Festival of Alternative and New Theatre (INFANT) in Novi Sad, to Apsolutno, to Belgrade Women In Black, who have shown us all a tremendous light in the darkness.

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*e-mail : platform@gn.apc.org*







code



1996 APSOLUTNO 0004

# UPOZORENJE! WARNING!

Date: April 1996

Place: Andrićev venac Gallery, Belgrade

“Warning! You are entering the gallery on absolutely your own responsibility.”

This text, printed on a notice card placed at the entrance to the gallery, was part of an APSOLUTNO piece created as a response to the understanding of the gallery as an autonomous space, insulated from the social realities of the 1990s in Serbia.



# TACTICAL EMBARRASSMENT HOW IT WORKS

When trying to understand how a machine works, it helps to expose its guts. The same can be said of powerful people or corporations who work hard to make themselves richer—regardless of consequence for everyone else.

By catching powerful entities off-guard, you can momentarily expose them to public scrutiny. This way, everyone sees how they work and can figure out how to control them. We call this tactical embarrassment.

### In a Nutshell:



Find a target (some entity running amok) and think of something sure to annoy them—something that's also lots of fun.



If you're stumped, imagine the target losing control and acting stupidly. What would it take to make them do that?



Capitalize on the target's reaction. Write a press release and e-mail it to hundreds of journalists.



Accelerate how the article, just like anyone else. The more for the story, the more likely it is to get covered.



**Preparing the Press Release**  
Imagine an "obscure" newspaper article about the event. How would it read? Be realistic. Don't write that story, just quotes! (This is just what reporters do every day to tell parents or students.)



**Fishing for Leaks and Device Letters**  
The easiest way to obtain sensitive information is to show how pretty you are. Leaky knowledge legal threats and use their avoidance to the court of public opinion.



### A Few Highlights in Embarrassment History:



In 1986, Tupperware threw a hundred one-dollar bills from a balcony onto the New York Stock Exchange floor. The groundskeeper brought along a cat, dropped them (and scattered) and scattered around for the money.

Get to Yippy! 1986: Use a NYSE due to investment mistakes of others—wait to watch their steps.  
<http://yippy.com/yippy/press>



Fighting George W. Bush's run for President: 30' took out a majority of GW Bush's run that looked just like Bush's corporate site, but that poked fun of Bush and criticized the corporate handling of elections. When Bush saw the take website, he got very angry and said some really stupid things on TV.

30' took revealed press releases about Bush's behavior to thousands of journalists. The resulting press embarrassed the Bush campaign (and embarrassing their legal threats as well as their complaint to the Federal Election Commission)

Get to 30'! 30' took was shown to be substantially wrong and quality of bringing anything other than original  
<http://www.30.com/30>



To highlight the Seattle city government's "planned development" of a combined multi-use office and residential—aka plan to force people to leave property owners and make residents leave. Like paying the way the government—advertisers planted thousands of alternate logos in the city's newspaper that were telling the very neighborhood. Voters in an upcoming election on "sustainable cities" could not help remembering why the city was operating along that.

Get strategic: invest. Identify alternative available services needed in the Atlanta. How important the plan (the plan was still more costly local residents, and not relevant to the city's problem.  
<http://www.30.com/30/30/30/30>

SEEK TO USE THE RTMARK'S RESEARCH AND SERVICES TO VISIT RTMARK.COM/TACTICS TO REQUEST THE RTMARK'S RESEARCH AND SERVICES TO VISIT RTMARK.COM/TACTICS

# UA!US

United Artists Under Sanctions

**UA!US**  
United Artists Under Sanctions



United Artists Under Sanctions is an association which aims at gathering artists from the countries punished by the international community by being put in "quarantine".

**UA!US** encourages the exchange of artistic ideas and various experiences from the life with sanctioned opportunities, in real reality (RR).

**UA!US** is not limited to promoting the artistic production which directly relates to the political, economic and cultural sanctions imposed by the international community. It also deals with the position of the artist within the sanctioned society, since in such a society there are sanctions from within in addition to those from the outside. Therefore **UA!US** particularly empha-

sises the importance and responsibility of the artist's critical attitude towards that society.

**UA!US** deals with the phenomenon of excluding whole communities from the global flow, at the end of the millenium, when the world has truly become a global village. In such communities and systems sanctions become a reality, a way of life, which in turn shapes the art production in specific ways. Currently there is a large number of countries in the world which are punished in this way, with different levels of sanctions depending on the gravity of the offence (eg. economic, political and/or cultural sanctions, 'outer vs inner wall' of sanctions etc.), such as Cuba, Iraq, Lybia, India, Pakistan, Yugoslavia. However, even



in the countries which do not belong to this group, there are invisible sanctions towards certain groups of artists, based on political, racial, gender, class and other criteria. The common denominator for all artists under sanctions is discrimination, which is essential, real and inevitable. Sanctions are meant to punish a community by blocking its communication with the rest of the world on political, economic or cultural levels. By various measures, the flow of information, goods, money, traffic or people is made more difficult or completely stopped and the community is 'sealed'. This creates an apathic atmosphere within the community and causes a regression into a tribal form of culture and an invisibility of those who oppose this trend. At the same time, such a form of pressure creates an authentic

frame for artistic practice. The aim of UA!US is to explore the specific characteristics of the artistic production and ways of thinking in such conditions, as well as the ways in which such artistic production is able to communicate with the outside world.

UA!US was founded by art associations APSOLUTNO and p.RT in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia in 1998.

1999 APSOLUTNO 0001

# THE SEMIOTICS OF CONFUSION



1

## Introduction

The idea for this piece of writing arose from the visual research association APSOLUTNO conducted from 1995 to 1998. The research was focused on the national symbols in official use in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia during that time. APSOLUTNO documented flags, border-markers, coats-of-arms and other national and state symbols, banknotes, passports and other official documents issued by the authorities, as well as various public individual responses to these. In addition to this visual material, other symbols and reactions to them were documented as well (e.g., the reactions of the audience to the national anthem played at international sport events). This text will be based on a segment of the visual part of the documentation.

The aim of this action of documenting was to record a phenomenon in our immediate surroundings by collecting *absolutely real facts* here and now. It is important to note that the absolutely real facts are arbitrary to a certain extent, determined by the time and place where they were collected (on various irregular occasions from 1995 to 1998, in Novi Sad and Belgrade, Yugoslavia). They nevertheless illustrate the variety of semiotic activities, both official and individual, which in an interesting way reflect (sometimes follow, sometimes anticipate) events in the social and political sphere.

The reason why this text has no conclusion is very simple: the state of affairs in this area is still in flux and as we are writing, the confusion is only being multiplied.



2

I

Since 1991 five new states have emerged on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia, and it is very likely that this process has still not been completed. On the semiotic level, this process of disintegration and formation has been followed and in some cases preceded by feverish symbol-engineering: old national and state symbols have been discarded, ancient ones revived or recycled and completely new ones designed. New authorities attached enormous significance to the introduction of new symbols, as through these it was possible to create a new sense of national identity, national pride and a new political and ideological framework for future orientation. In other words, the change on the symbolic level was

seen as an important vehicle of political change, as communication via symbols was a language that people understood and to which they responded.

The urgency and importance of the introduction of new national symbols are easy to illustrate if the dates when laws regulating the use of national symbols were passed are compared with the dates when the new states were officially established. In Croatia, for example, the constitution of the Socialist Republic of Croatia was amended in July 1990, when the word *socialist* was dropped from the name of the country, the red star removed from the country's national flag and the socialist coat-of-arms replaced by Croatia's historical coat-of-arms. Law on the Coat-of-Arms, the Flag, and the National





3



4

Anthem of the Republic of Croatia was adopted in Parliament on 21 December 1990. A day later, on 22 December, Croatia passed a new constitution, which allowed for secession from the former Yugoslav Federation.<sup>1</sup>

The process was similar in Slovenia, which declared itself a sovereign state on 25 June 1991 and, at the same time, introduced a new flag and coat-of-arms. On that day the new flag was hoisted officially for the first time in front of the Slovenian Parliament, and beside it, the old flag with the red star was lowered, in a symbolic gesture of replacement.<sup>2</sup>

However, this process of changing national and state symbols was not always clear and straightforward. In

<sup>1</sup> for more information, see the official site of the Croatian government: <http://www.vlada.hr>

<sup>2</sup> for more information, see the official site of the Slovenian government: <http://www.sigov.si>

some cases it meandered, touching upon various issues and sometimes coming across unexpected reactions internally or externally. Problems in the semiotic area only reflected either external pressures (as in Macedonia), or the unresolved issues within the state itself (Bosnia), or they indicated a basic lack of a clear idea about the future direction (FRY). We shall briefly give an overview of some of the related issues, focusing on the flag as one of the central national and state symbols, and excluding for the moment the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.



5



6

As already mentioned, in Slovenia and Croatia, the national flags used in those countries while they were part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (tricolours with the red star) continued to be used after the removal of the red star. However, in Macedonia and Bosnia completely new flags had to be designed.

In Macedonia, a new flag was adopted at independence in August 1992. The design was selected from more than a hundred proposals which entered an open competition. The flag immediately came under attack from Greece, which maintained that the Vergina Sun, the central symbol on the flag, belonged to Greek cultural heritage. Greece also protested against the use of the word *Macedonia* as the official name

Article 7, Paragraph 2 of the agreement states: Upon entry into force of this Interim Accord, the Party of the Second Part (Macedonia) shall cease to use in any way the symbol in all its forms displayed on its national flag prior to such entry into force.

of the new state. The dispute was resolved in 1995 by a UN agreement<sup>3</sup>, according to which Macedonia was recognised as "The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and was required to design a new flag within 30 days. The present flag of Macedonia, proposed by a group of Members of Parliament, was finally adopted in 1995, three years after independence. Nevertheless, the name of the country remains temporary.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the current flag was adopted in February 1998 by



7



8

UN High Representative Carlos Westendorp. Prior to this, there had been a long process of designing and selecting an appropriate flag. The first flag, adopted in 1992, before the war in Bosnia broke out, bore a fleur-de-lis as the central symbol, a symbol associated with the Muslim tradition in Bosnia, and was therefore to be replaced following the Dayton Peace Accord and the recognition of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a tripartite state (1995). After several years and numerous proposals<sup>4</sup>, the Bosnian Parliament still could not reach agreement on a solution that would be acceptable to all three national entities. Finally, in 1998, UN High Representative Westendorp appointed an expert commission which designed three proposals. After the Parliament failed once again to adopt any of these,

<sup>4</sup> for more details and images, see *The Flags of the World*: <http://fotw.digibel.be/flags/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://fotw.digibel.be/flags/>

the High Representative selected a flag for Bosnia and Herzegovina himself. The flag bears the colours of the European Union, without any national symbols, since, as explained by Duncan Bullivant, Office of the High Representative (at the press conference at which the new flag was presented): "This flag is a flag of the future. It represents unity not division; it is the flag that belongs in Europe".<sup>5</sup> The inability of the Parliament to find common ground and the imposition of the solution by external authorities only emphasised the fragility of Dayton Bosnia and questioned the possibilities of its existence.

As this brief overview shows, the establishment of new national symbols in the countries formed on the territory of the former Yugoslavia reflected the political processes in these countries. Periods of confusion in politics were mirrored by periods of semiotic confusion; likewise, political solutions that were initially considered final were succeeded by final decisions about the design of national symbols.

## II

If we look at the national symbols of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, or Serbia-Montenegro, (since the domestic official title has not received widespread recognition), the first point to note is that the authorities have been extremely hesitant in replacing the national symbols of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Unlike the other states in the Balkans, FRY did not regard it as important to invest much effort or resources into creating a new semiotic reality for its citizens.

The new constitution, which marked the beginning of the 'third' Yugoslavia, was adopted in April 1992. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia clearly demonstrated an aspiration to represent a continuation as the sole successor to the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, changes were to be introduced in the political, ideological and national domain,

<sup>6</sup> After several unsuccessful attempts to start discussion about the division of assets belonging to the former Yugoslavia, the matter has remained unresolved between its former republics until today.

<sup>7</sup> On several occasions at international sport events, supporters from Yugoslavia boycotted the Yugoslav anthem, whistling and booing while it was played.

supposedly responding to the general public's dissatisfaction with the old system. This tension between the intention to be regarded as a continuation of the old and, at the same time, as the bearer of the new is also visible on the semiotic level.

Although the red star was removed from the national flag, it remained in use much longer, even up to today, on most official documents, as well as on public buildings. For example, the red star on the City Hall in Belgrade was removed only in 1997, when the opposition parties came to power after the local elections. Similarly, passports of the former Yugoslavia are still in official use in 1999, together with the new ones, which were introduced as late as in 1997. ID cards still bear the former Yugoslavia's coat-of-arms, with the red star and six torches representing the six republics of the former federation, although the new coat-of-arms was introduced in 1994. The national anthem of the former Yugoslavia is still used as the national anthem of today's Yugoslavia, to which certain parts of the society are strongly opposed.<sup>7</sup> As

for national holidays, although new ones have been introduced, the holidays of the former Yugoslavia are still officially celebrated, including the Day of the Republic, the day when the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was formed (29 November 1943).

To sum up, at first glance, it would appear that there have been two opposing directions during the last ten years in FRY as far as the national symbols are concerned: one towards change; the other towards maintaining the existing symbolic structure of the SFRY. However, if we look closer into the symbols that have been changed, it is not difficult to notice that the change referred mostly to the removal of the red star. This gesture was in accordance with the general atmosphere in the whole of Eastern Europe, a gesture which could not provoke public dissent. It was an expected change, and therefore neutral, insignificant, a change on the surface without any real consequences – in the same way as the ruling Communist Party changed its name to the Socialist Party, while its protagonists have remained the same. Nevertheless, in terms of changes which would indicate a possible future direction, or which would give a new identity to the nation, little has been done. The reasons certainly lie in the lack of a clear political vision, or more precisely lack of any vision whatsoever. Or is it a ploy to deliberately create a state of confu-

sion in the minds of the people? What does the political establishment communicate to the nation through these symbols? Does it convey the message that FRY is a new country or a continuation of the SFRY? And consequently, are people living in that country now a different nation?

Rather than analyzing the deeper meanings behind these semiotic activities, we shall now turn to examples of semiotic actions by citizens, or politically aware visual activism by individuals who have felt the need to express their views in a specific form – through interventions on the license plates on their cars. These gestures, which range from anger to humour, some creative and some stereotypical, illustrate the pragmatic force of symbols, i.e., the power of symbols to trigger actual, concrete, physical responses. Through these responses, it is perhaps possible to gain an insight into some answers to the questions above, namely, how these people respond to what they interpret that the semiotic reality imposed by the establishment communicates to them.

### III

License plates on vehicles in the former Yugoslavia contained three elements: a letter code for the town where the vehicle was registered, the red star, and the registration number. New license plates differ from the old ones only in

that the red star is replaced by the Yugoslav flag (blue-white-red tricolour). Although the new plates were introduced in 1998, the old ones are still in use, and since the new plates were still a novelty at the time when this material was being collected, no cases of intervention on them were recorded.

To start with the most common type of intervention: denial of the red star. Numerous examples show license plates with the red star erased, destroyed or covered with adhesive tape (see pictures 1, 2).

Another group of examples shows license plates in which the red star remains, but the stickers on the car reveal the person's view on what the orientation of the country should be. It is important to note that the only official sticker for FRY is YU. In the first example (picture 3), the person would obviously like to live in a country whose name would be Serbia, rather than Yugoslavia (sticker SER, plus the colours of the flag of Serbia: red-blue-white). The second example (picture 4) shows a case of a local patriot within the old boundaries – the sticker V, which stands for Vojvodina, the northern province of Serbia, is accompanied by the sticker YU, unlike the example in picture 1, where the province is the preference for identification (an independent Vojvodina?). The third plate in this group (picture 5) is an example of

wishful thinking, or a humorous response to the general situation in the country – Yugoslavia as a member of the European Union.

The third group of reactions offers ideas for alternatives to the red star. Not a great variety of solutions has been found. Picture 6 shows a Serbian tricolour in the place of the red star, while picture 7 is even more explicit in that direction, featuring both the flag of Serbia and the Serbian historical coat-of-arms. What is particularly interesting in this example is that the car was not registered in Serbia, but in Montenegro, whose capital, Podgorica, was previously called Titograd (Tito City), hence TG. Finally, we present a response which is neither nationally nor territorially based (picture 8), where the red star is replaced by the red heart.

It would be simplistic to say that these responses are based on interpretations of the meaning of the red star. The meaning of a symbol is not a precisely defined category; its boundaries are fuzzy and in constant flux, depending upon the context and paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations of the symbol with other symbols and the interpreter/her/himself. It would be more precise to say that these reactions are based on the interpretation of the meaning of the fact that the red star was still the official mark on license plates in FRY in the late 1990s.

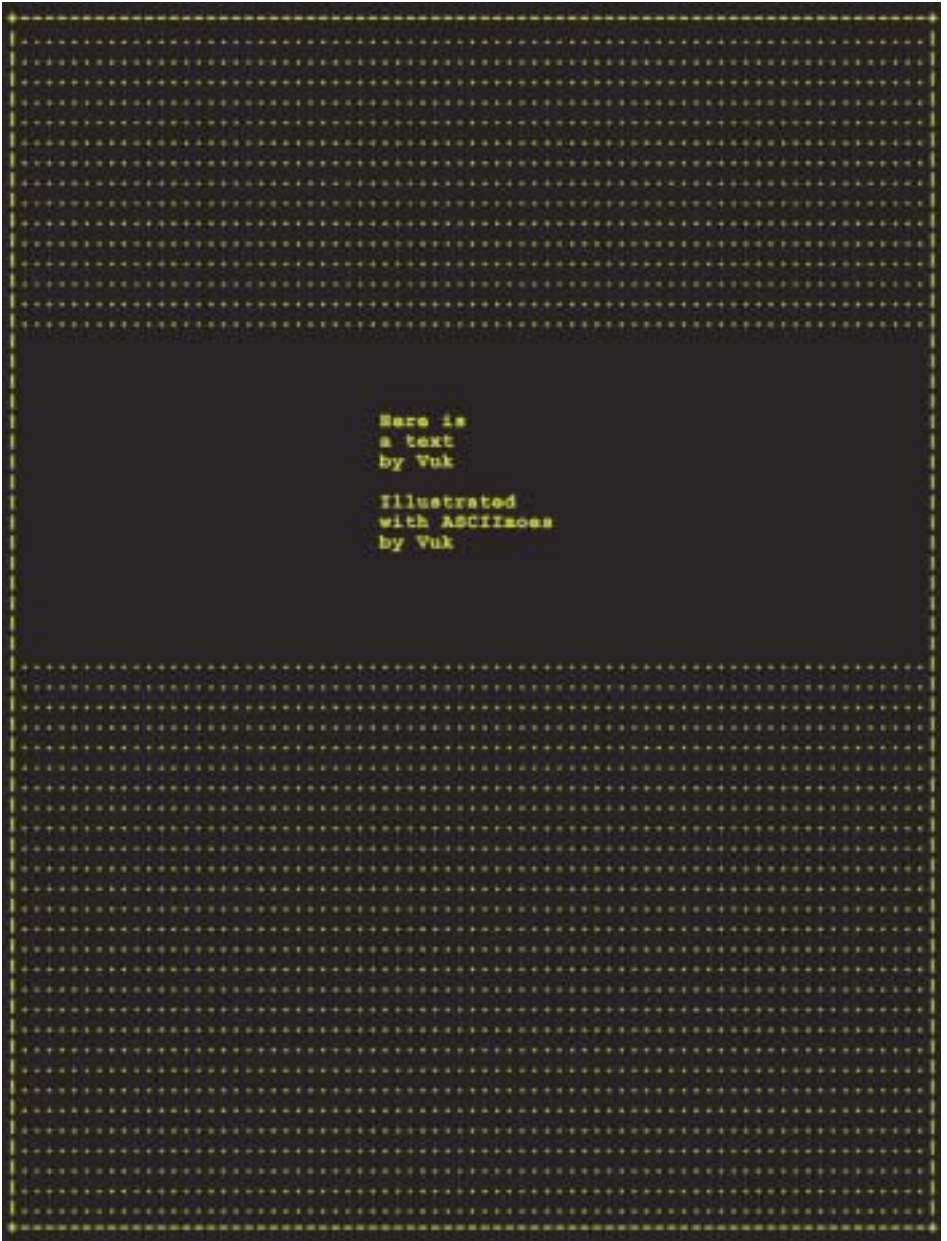
The red star was a dominant symbol in Eastern Europe for fifty years; it not only represented a vehicle of expression of the dominant ideology, but also marked both the official and the dissident culture of the whole period. That period ended in Eastern Europe with the events which commenced with the fall of the Berlin Wall, and FRY was no exception to the general feeling that a change had occurred: the mere fact that these individuals felt they *could* desecrate the red star, once a sacred symbol, meant that there was a general implicit consensus in the society that the era of the red star (in the sense of what it meant in Eastern Europe) was over. This is why these semiotic actions do not represent a serious violation of the order nor an act of rebellion, and for the same reason, they were not treated as instances of punishable offence, though in fact, that is what they would have been under 'regular' circumstances.

Rather, these semiotic gestures can be regarded as a specific form of communication in which symbols have a central place, in a society where forms of political dialogue have ceased to function or have become distorted. They represent a sort of a public act, directed not to a specified address, but to anyone who happens to see them. They express disagreement with the social identity that belongs to the former period but is still maintained, and dissatisfaction with the fact that a new

identity is still non-existent. Some of these gestures are personal statements of a particular national or territorial identity and, though naive and politically inarticulate, they indicate a need and search for a new sense of direction. The crisis of identity and the lack of a sense of direction, which have persisted for nearly a decade in FRY, have caused semiotic and various other confusions.

As this text is being written, it seems that new flags are being designed in the Balkans. It remains to be seen what *absolutely real facts* with their changing meanings will emerge.

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1997 APSOLUTNO 0003

# INSTRUMENTAL

1. a musical composition played by an instrument or a group of instruments
2. serving as an instrument or means
3. Gram. [in certain inflected languages, as Old English and Russian] noting or pertaining to a case having as its distinctive function the indication of means or agency

(Random House Dictionary)



In the sound installation **instrumental** the art association APSOLUTNO uses two instruments, the letter and the bullet. The two notions are generally regarded as antipodes; the letter signifying cultural values, literacy, transmission of knowledge and communication, and the bullet standing for destruction, devastation, communication breakdown. However, language as a powerful weapon has always been misused and abused. In order to emphasise this, the art association APSOLUTNO equates the letter with the bullet, two instruments which are too often used for the same purpose.

The letter and the bullet in **instrumental** are not used as visual symbols, but rather, as the title of the work suggests, as instrumental (aural) elements. The

common ground for these two antipodes was found in Morse code. In Morse code, each letter is represented by a sign made up of one or more short signals (dots) and long signals (dashes) in sound. In **instrumental**, APSOLUTNO replaced short signals by the sound of shots (1 shot = 1 dot), and long signals by machinegun fire (1 burst = 1 dash).

**Instrumental** is a message encoded in Morse code. It is accessible by telephone, from an answering machine installed on a telephone line. In this way, the message is presented just like any other information given by public services.

The information about the telephone number where the message is installed



is printed on cards, which are distributed in the exhibition space. The symbols of the Morse code are also printed on the cards, so that the audience can decipher the message.

The message begins with the announcement of a song - Lilli Marleen. The song is played in its **instrumental** version, in which the lyrics are converted into the sounds of shots and machinegun fire used as signs of Morse code. The radio announcement at the beginning of the message is taken from the soundtrack of Fassbinder's film "Lilli Marleen". It refers to the historical fact that this song was broadcast for the first time by Radio Belgrad, in 1941. At the end of the 'song' there is a quotation from Fassbinder's film, a sentence spoken by Hanna Schigula, who plays

Lilli Marleen in the film: "Aber das ist nur ein Lied!" ("But this is just a song!").

*Lilli Marleen* features in **instrumental** as a frame of reference to regimes, both historic and present, in which the letter is given the role of the bullet.

Lilli Marleen  
(Lieb eines jungen Wachtpostens)

Vor der Kaserne vor dem grossen Tor,  
 ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... /  
 ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... /  
 Stand eine Laterne und steht sie noch davor,  
 ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... /  
 ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... /  
 So woll'n wir da uns wiederseh'n,  
 ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... /  
 ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... /  
 Bei der Laterne woll'n wir steh'n,  
 ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... /  
 ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... /  
 Wie einst Lilli Marleen, wie einst Lilli Marleen.  
 ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... / ... /

Unsre beiden Schatten sah'n wie einer aus,  
 Dass wir so lieb uns hatten, das sah man gleich  
 daraus.

Und alle Leute soll'n es seh'n,  
 Wenn wir bei der Laterne steh'n,  
 Wie einst Lili Marleen, wie einst Lili Marleen.

Schon rief der Posten, sie blasen Zapfenstreich,

Es kann drei Tage kosten Kamarad ich komm'-  
 sogleich.

Da sagten wir auf Wiederseh'n,  
 Wie gerne wollt'ich mit Dirgeh'n,  
 Mit Dir, Lili Marleen, mit Dir Lili Marleen.

Deine Schritte kennt sie, Deinen zieren Gang,  
 Alle abend brennt sie, doch mich vergass sie  
 lang.

Und sollte mir ein Leids gescheh'n,

Wer wird bei der Laterne stehn,  
 Mit Dir, Lili Marleen, mit Dir, Lili Marleen?

Aus dem stillen Raume, aus der Erde Grund,  
 Hebt mich wie im Traume Dein verliefte  
 Mund.

Wenn sich die spaten Nebel dreh'n,  
 Werd'ich bei der Laterne steh'n,  
 Wie einst Lili Marleen, wie einst Lili Marleen.

Morse code alphabet:

- A -
- B -
- C -
- D -
- E -
- F -
- G -
- H -
- I -
- J -
- K -
- L -
- M -
- N -
- O -
- P -
- Q -
- R -
- S -
- T -
- U -
- V -
- W -
- X -
- Y -
- Z -









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Thts rght stp m txt_
--
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
--
"http://www.Ét*V.Ø*m/t*V/"
--
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
s mrs l fnd l dms slt l vst_
kk scks_
nd s l q prc _

XX...
_"LÍCKÍNG HÉRÉ">>----> [X]_
XX
«"CLÍCK-LÍCK-ÍNG-HÉ-[X]-RÉ"»
XX
_[X]<---<<"LÍCKÍNG HÉRÉ"_
XX _
'-X_-----X-' _
«_"-|4|_|_...".L.)_ "
[).1.Ø.'-'.'~
β.4.β.'-'4.Ø.[]_»
'-X_-----X-' _
«_*%2*._---.W)-[ô...?_
_*%2*._---.W)-[ât...?_
_*%2*._---.W)-[èn...?_
_*%2*._---.W)-[éré...?_
_*%2*._---.W)-[ÿ...?_»
'-X_-----X-' _
«_*%2*_-[_3ØØ³t³_ØºØØig3_]*_ _»
«~~~~~~<<

```



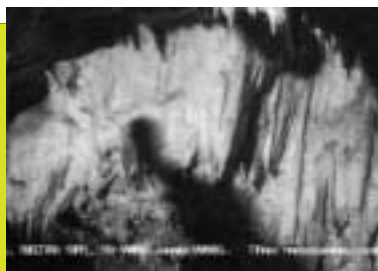


1996 APSOLUTNO 0004

# VOYAGER 0004

Duration: 9 minutes

This video has been made as a message sent to the outer world from a cave. There are three elements of the video structure: the message, consisting of the images and sounds produced in the cave; the text tracking across the screen, which explains how and where the message was recorded; and the real time information, showing there is less and less time for the message to be received.



The video questions the possibilities for communication from a cave, i.e., a particular geographic, social and political point such as Serbia in 1996.

## Text of subtitles in the video VOYAGER 0004:

The art association APSOLUTNO has launched the **VOYAGER 0004**. The message carried by the **VOYAGER 0004** is available in the following formats: CD ROM, BETA SP, S-VHS and VHS. The message carried by the **VOYAGER 0004** was recorded in Rajko's Cave, 2,5 km from Majdanpek, East Serbia, Europe. Rajko's Cave is between 469,81 and 427,58 m of height above sea level.

Length: 2,380 m. Total surface: 12,803 m<sup>2</sup>. Volume: c. 100,000 m<sup>3</sup>. Temperature: constant; 8C. Humidity: constant; 100%. The message carried by the **VOYAGER 0004** was recorded by the Sony DCR VX 1000E camera with the

VELBON PX 704 tripod. Light: artificial; KOBOLD 1000 VL, 220 V, 1000 W, F6,3A NACH DIN 41660. The message carried by the **VOYAGER 0004** was edited by non-linear editing system based on PC computer with Pentium processor working on 200 MHz, 256 KB Cache memory, hard disc digital recorder from digital processing system with 64 MB of memory and 6.5 GB hard disc capacity. The message carried by the **VOYAGER 0004** contains authentic sounds from the cave. Sound editing: triple DAT sound card with 32 KHz, 44,1 KHz and 48 KHz sampling frequency. The message carried by the **VOYAGER 0004** was recorded on 29 and 30 July 1996. The message carried by the **VOYAGER 0004** was realized by APSOLUTNO art association.

# CONNECTIONS: THE POWER OF CONVER- GENCE.

Nina Czegledy

Imagine a network that knows who you are, where you are, and can reach you whether you're on your mobile phone or at your desktop. Even better, imagine that, instead of finding your Web content, it finds you. Sounds personal. Exactly.

## Nortel Networks [1]

Despite its captivating style, for this writer the Nortel advertisement quoted above evokes chilling recollections of surveillance and spyworks, recalling the dichotomies and double-talk tradition of iron-curtained Hungary.

While the Iron Curtain crumbled a decade ago, in the aftermath of September 11 the "network word" gained fresh significance and yet another implication. Bizarre as it sounds, remarkable similarities can be traced between all networks - terrorist, financial, biological and espionage networks

included. The main purpose of most networks is channelling information. Networks generally operate on the model of a cell or unit system, within which the tracing of the whole structure - as well as the exact nature of the operation - is intentionally or unintentionally difficult for the individual member or unit. At the same time, the effectiveness of a network is highly dependent on its interconnectedness. Network functions and networking patterns operate on a far wider base than surveillance and retribution, and while snooping is a most intriguing topic, this brief analysis attempts to present some concepts and examine a few network models, looking for universal characteristics, commonalities, which are relevant to sustainable networks and equally meaningful for scientists or cultural activists.

These days, the expression "network" is widely used - often within an advertising frame of reference - as a topical buzzword for public-access information and communication purposes.

What is a network? As defined by the Standard Dictionary (2), "network" is a system of interlacing lines, tracks or channels - in other words, an interconnected system of mutually influential variables and their casual relationships. Beyond this dictionary definition, one finds a bewildering variety of archetypes ranging from electrical system structures to commercially networked

1998 APSOLUTNO 0002

# THE GREATEST HITS BY ASSOCIATION APSOLUTNO

The Greatest Hits [TGH] is a CD Rom project which in an ironic way deals with the idea of progress at the end of the millennium. This concept is developed in two fields of

human achievement, digital technology on the one hand and medicine on the other, using the notion of a virus. Both computer and human viruses are elements which disturb the balance in the system, computer or human, however sophisticated and protected the system may be. The emergence of a greater and greater number of both types of viruses at the end of the millennium indicates the boomerang effect, i.e. the vulnerability of man and technology despite the progress achieved.

The Greatest Hits [TGH] contains two TOP TEN lists of these two types of viruses, composed according to the statistical data about their

alliances. What, then, are the common features between these diverse (and often informal) network systems? How do physical, biological, cultural and social factors of the environment influence these structures? What is the relationship between network structure and individual personality? What can we learn in our networked media practice from other paradigms? While a brief outline of general principles combined with practical examples might be of use to all, the lack of interdisciplinary studies, not to mention the great diversity of network models, regrettably frustrate concise answers at this date.

Networking and the examination of network-like forms have found new currency in our present technology-driven information society. Within this frame

of reference, general interest has shifted from considerations of mechanical or biological structures to communication networks, including commercially viable configurations. Consider the currently fashionable terminology: "network hardware", "network business solutions", "network protocols", "network security" and, of course, "network consultants". Arguably, Nortel's personal internet network "revolutionizing the way users and content come together", with its special reference to the Internet, serves as a contemporary example of this trend. The Nortel advertisement thus conforms with our present-day usage, when, due to the ubiquity of technologies and subliminal promotional influence, established terms such as "networks" immediately invoke topical applications of connectedness. In reali-

harmful effects (hits, or blows which ‘hit’ the mankind).

The project itself is conceived as a kind of a virus, which plays a game with the viewer, and is, as any other virus, completely user-unfriendly.

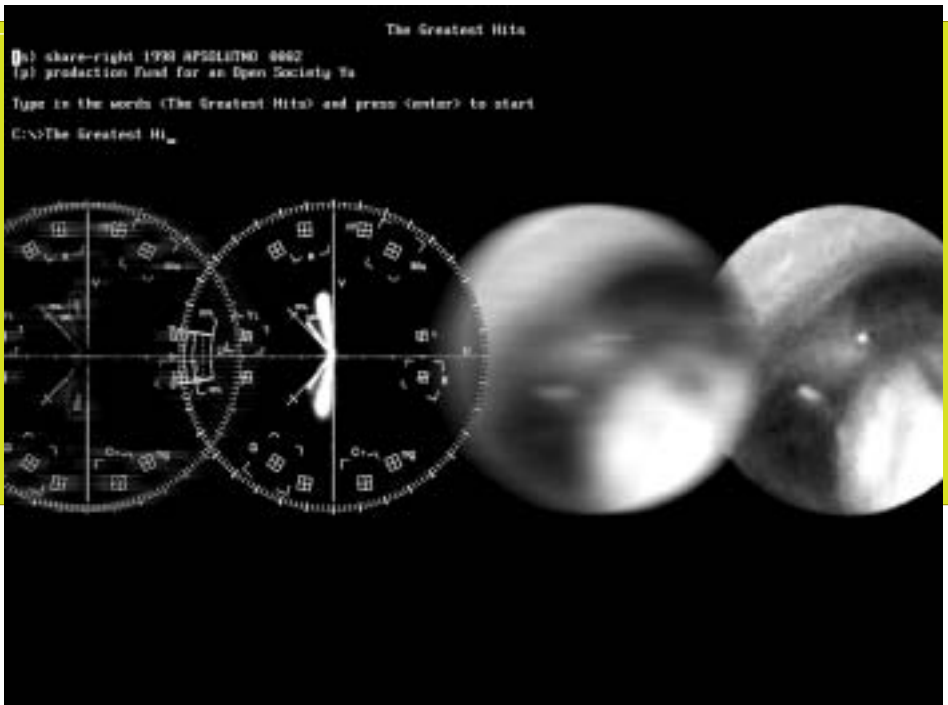


ty, from time immemorial a diverse variety of network models have been characteristic features of natural and man-made structures, including discrete interrelated arrangements.

Prior to any consideration of network characteristics, it is necessary briefly to evaluate cybernetics or systems science. Cybernetics, according to the *Encyclopedia of Anthropology*, is a scientific paradigm originating from electronic engineering and now widely applied to the analysis of an expanded range of systems (3). The key principles of cybernetics are first, that any system has one or more goals or conditions that it strives to maintain, and secondly, that the components of the system are linked through feedback mechanisms so that a change in one component will

produce compensating changes in the others that will maintain the total system in good condition. In short, networks are systems that constantly re-create themselves.

Cybernetics as a specific discipline emerged in the 1940s. The investigations in the early years considered mostly inanimate structures. Since the 1970s, cybernetics has increasingly focused on living systems such as neurophysiological interrelations and the biological basis of perception and knowledge-acquisition processes. Some of the main concepts of current (or more precisely “second-order”) cybernetics studies include principles of self-organization, self-reference, and self-steering. Recent studies have progressively centered on the sciences of com-



plexity, including neural networks, chaos, artificial intelligence (AI) and the analysis of interacting processes (4). It is in view of these principles that, following a description of additional network features, three models will be presented.

Networks as a rule consist of individual components, bonded together by a mutually accepted purpose and often forming a subculture or a subset. In most cases networks are 'bottom-up', non-hierarchical systems. Configurations of networks are seldom static; more often they operate in a dynamic

mode. Typically, networks function for the exchange of information and goods as well as to protect the common (or individual) interest of its members and/or elements. Among the few critical characteristics common to most networks is size, which has important functional implications contributing greatly to the net's effectiveness. The value of a network service for its members increases as a network expands. Since large network size is desirable, smaller networks are motivated to interconnect and form a larger network of networks. Multinational franchises, kinship structures, immune systems, ecolo-

gies, and especially the Internet are good examples of comprehensive networks made of sub-networks. A continuity in structure is characteristic of all networks, even though individual components might be randomly or systematically changing. The interaction between these components is often controlled by norms, rules or patterns, yet, in contrast to formal organizational systems, many networks operate with various degrees of flexibility. Economic, social and environmental factors greatly influence and periodically modify the components, operation and the aims of various network systems.

Three entirely different network models will be briefly considered in the following. These include a biological, a social and a commercial model. The synaptic connections in the human brain, our biological example, represent an individually based, bodily localized archetype. Kinship studies, the second example, extends the network parameters to genealogically linked family groups. The historical model of the protectionist Hanseatic League expands the network boundaries even further to include unrelated strangers linked by common goals and interests. Such diverse models have been deliberately presented, as the intent of this text is precisely to recognize the variety of patterns within different systems.

## 1. Biological networks: The synapse.

Nature is often considered a "whole organic system", and, as such, offers abundant examples of network structures. The multitude of biological networks comprised of components linked as a rule by a common aim are perhaps the most precisely operating interlaced systems in evidence. While the human body is thoroughly mapped by such interconnected systems, the brain's synaptic connections arguably serve as one of the most elegant of network examples. Synaptic connections represent a point-to-point information flow, one which is greatly enhanced by mutual interconnectedness; consequently these network connections and their supporting structures present intriguing metaphors and eminent symbolic paradigms for network analysis.

What is a synapse? The grey matter of the brain consists of a dense network of synaptic connections and contains close to 10 billion neurones. A synapse is defined in medical literature as the junction point between neurones where nerve impulses and information from one neurone flow to another (5). Looking at it from another point of view, the synapse indicates a small gap separating (or connecting) two neurones. The word "synapse" comes from the Greek: "syn" meaning "together" and "haptain" meaning "to clasp." The term "synapse" was first used in a neuroscientific con-



✦ text by Michael Foster in his medical textbook published in 1897. The goal of all synaptic processes is to cause an effect on intracellular mechanisms, especially the post-synaptic neurones. Although a neurone is a simple element with little information-processing influence, the mutual interconnectedness of the neurones results in a network of highly effective processing power, not only because of the complicated structure, but also because of the neurones' ability to work simultaneously. This is one of the reasons our brains are eminently able to process extremely complex information with seemingly little effort. Synapses and associated organelles only became visible in the eyes of medicine after the invention of the electron microscope in 1932. Considerable progress has been made since and today a wealth of information on this subject is publicly available even for children on the Neuroscience for Kids website including references such as Michael Foster's historical publication on the topic. (6).

## 2. Kinship networks.

Kinship is considered one of the most distinct network structures in all realms of human experience, especially as, in one way or another, all societies are organized on the basis of kinship. Kinship refers to a social relationship linking people through genealogical lines. In many societies, however, the concept

of kinship extends beyond family ties, and may include various forms of social adoption, even fictive relations (7). Kinship, due to its elaborate and specific patterns, has been an important focus of anthropological study. The system of genealogical family relationships is not itself a kinship system, but it provides the foundation subnet for the net of kith and kin networks. Kinship presents us with multifunctional networks, each incorporating the capacity - often through effective channelling of information flows - to shape other domains such as politics or economics. The communication and exchange content, as well as the pattern of how the information passes through the networks, modifies the information accordingly. Other factors such as stability and continuity of relationships affect connectedness by limiting and shaping the decisions that groups/ families make. Definition of the nature of the multifunctionality of the networks has been made difficult by the fact that there seems to be considerable variation in the very "connectedness" of the kinship structures.

In kinship studies, the concept of network as part of an examination of the social process has been significant in determining whether or not it keeps groups going in their current state or leads to the emergence of new social forms and the decay of old ones through the manoeuvring of interacting



individuals. Some, but not all, kinship ties are substantially economic in nature. The connectedness of a given kinship network is always enhanced if relatives hold property rights in common enterprises. Kinship also defines extra-territorial loyalties which transcend boundaries and survive migrations. Partly for this reason, the kinship structure of Australian tribes has been studied extensively by anthropologists. Radcliffe-Brown, in his pioneering study of kinship systems of the Australian aborigines, defines tribes as territorial units consisting of persons speaking the same (one) language or dialects of one language (8). The name of the tribe and the name of the language are usually the same. Radcliffe-Brown notes that, in addition to a linguistic connection, there exists also a unity of customs throughout the tribe. These customs serve as further signifiers to differentiate between various tribes. Over the centuries, the tribes developed an intricate (initially self-organized) classification system that defines kinship relations and regulates marriages. There is no central authority for the tribe as a whole; however, in terms of function, it has been found that a certain pattern of behaviour exists to which individuals are expected to conform. Beyond marriages and family alliances, the kinship system regulates and influences the whole operation of social life. It is important to note that, augmenting the kinship structure of formal genealogical

groupings, there exists a larger societal structure bound by rituals and mythology. The survival over the centuries of clan-based family structures has been recognized as a key validation of networks, and the analysis of kinship has greatly contributed to our understanding of human social processes in general and networking practices in particular. The recently developed Linkage Projects, the assembly of a large database containing kinship data sets and genealogies, is a contemporary effort to further analyze and evaluate the operation and functionality of kinship. (9)

### 3. A medieval commerce network.

Social network analysis focuses on patterns of relationship among people and organizations. While the cutting-edge examples of multinational business alliances might be considered the appropriate contemporary commerce network model, the historical Hanseatic League was chosen on purpose, partly for its classical (initially) self-organized, protectionist, merchandizing network properties (10) and partly as a nearly eight-hundred-year-old reminder of a globalized commerce network model. Spanning the years from 1241 to 1608, the power of the League in its heyday extended from London to Novgorod. The Hanseatic League has been generally considered an alliance of cities; however, it was primarily a league of merchants and merchants associations

† in the Baltic region and the cities of northern Germany. The origin of the “Hansa” name is shrouded in mystery. Regular communication and commerce between nations hardly existed in the Middle Ages, yet medieval trade was far more complex than we suppose. Teutonic merchants, adventurers and vagabonds traversed many regions in Europe on horseback or in ships taking various goods to markets. As the number of traders increased, they began to meet each other at various foreign ports, exchange wares and news and slowly form alliances both at home and abroad. We still have no accurate knowledge of the real origin of this international confederation of commerce and intelligence. We do know, however, that the traders formed guilds and built storehouses clustered around churches far away from their original homes. The Hanseatic settlements were populated by a fluid, ever-changing population, whose inner affairs were decided not by a general council but by the burghers. The flag under which they grouped themselves bore the slogan “Freedom for the common merchant at home and abroad”. The League’s very flexibility (especially in the beginning) contributed to its strength, and provided it with the facility of further expansion. In the middle of the 14th century, the League became involved in military actions, declaring war on Denmark in 1362. The victorious end of this war tremendously

increased the League’s power and interstate status. Thus, gradually, by commerce and coercion, the League grew until it became an independent force, a network of networks, a state within states. At the height of their power, merchants from seventy-seven Hanseatic cities dictated their own terms in the realm of commercial and inter-state relations. Nevertheless, the drawn-out miseries of the Thirty Years’ War, which ended in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia, also marked the demise of the League. It is of interest to note that lately (both figuratively and literally) the Hanseatic ethos has been revived. In 1997, nearly seven hundred and fifty years after the historical League was formed, a move towards establishing a New Hanseatic League was discussed within the framework of a Baltic Conference in Helsinki. The purpose of this conference was to explore the possibility of economic integration, forming the basis of new economic and political structures. The initiative was built on the hope that a New League, by operating as a network, would contribute to the transformation of the Baltic Sea economies into a coherent economic region characterized by the prosperity reminiscent of one of the world’s earliest free-trade zones, the medieval Hanseatic League (11).

Consideration of these extremely diverse network systems leads us back to systems theory. How do the cited

models compare? They present several analogous features on a different scale. Norman Wiener, the father of cybernetics, was convinced that the behaviour of humans, animals and machines could be explained by making use of cybernetic principles. He predicted that in the cybernetic world the information exchanged between man and machines, between machines and men and between machine and machine was destined to play an ever-increasing part in the future (12). More recently it has been suggested by Niklas Luhmann (13) that the flow of communication between units (rather than individuals) defines the operative structure of self-organizing and self-reproducing systems. Biological systems, like social networks, are characterized by goal-orientation, self-organization, self-reproduction and adaptation. However, only social systems possess the ability to reflect on their own environment, structure and operations by means of experiment and deliberation. "The effectiveness of the Network is generated by the Network's self-description," wrote Annelise Riles in "The Network Inside Out", her penetrating analysis on the subject (14).

Ever since Wiener introduced the term cybernetics, derived from the Greek for steersman (kybernetes), the concept of control or steering has been a fundamental consideration of systems theory. Systems have steering properties and

most, if not all, living systems contain an element of self-steering, which makes it difficult if not impossible to forecast their operations. Further to the notion of control, steering is strongly connected to planning. While hierarchical large-scale economic planning efforts have been attempted (see the example of the colossal economic "five-year plans" of the Soviet Union and the Socialist bloc), the futility of these has led to the increasing realization that individuals, some organizations and networks are to a large extent self-organizing. Recent developments in biology, especially in cognitive science, demonstrate the emergence of self-organization as a core concept in living structures. For example, neural components of synaptic connections operate locally but since they are part of a network, cooperation develops when all participating neurones reach a mutually satisfactory state. This path from local (individual) to universal is the essence of self-organization and is valid for all network dynamics, whether they be complex systems of such synaptic connections, the historical Hanseatic Alliance or Australian kinship networks. Indeed, instead of considering system and network operation in an isolated manner, a trend seems to be emerging towards a convergence of paradigms, towards the science of complexity. As noted by systems theorists as well as scholars from a wide variety of scientific disciplines, this approach is in align-

† ment with current rapid technological and social changes, diversity and non-linear relationships between open systems. Complexity in social systems seems to be generated as a bottom-up process, reinforced by the interactivity of local units or components; it seems that the growing rate of interdependence in all manner of networks contributes to increased cybernetic communication. With such developments in mind, it is not surprising that the complexity of cybernetics has been revived lately by theorists of the post-modern world such as Bruno Latour(15) and Donna Haraway (16).

In conclusion, most complex adaptive systems and networks share certain characteristics. The often numerous, constantly rearranged network units - regardless of the diverse archetypes - operate on several levels of interconnectedness, contributing to continuous transition and new levels of complexity. Examining the individual's position in a network, it has been shown that the effectiveness of a network structure is directly related to integrated activity rather than solo performance. Networks create the effects of their own reality by self-reflection, which in turn induces operational processes. Each network transaction allows for system transformation. The "self-referential circles (of the network) loop together," argues the legal scholar Gunther Teubner, "in such a way as to form new elements which

constitute a new system."(17) Network features and, by extension, international networking activities have therefore become the subject of renewed interest and fascination. Recently, a growing number of interdisciplinary research projects have featured the investigation of working patterns, flexibility and the dynamic exchange of information properties of complex networks. Network analyses have provided a tool for explaining structures and procedures of information flow which are difficult to comprehend in a more formal, commercial relationship. Partly as a result of these findings, networks are increasingly valued by political, social and cultural scientists as well as international relations theorists.

It is of special concern to emphasize that the notion of complexity and inter-related activity has developed well beyond the role of traditional paradigms and become part and parcel of many disciplines, including the practice of media art. The self-referential and self-organizational features of sustainable networks have been especially valued by media artists and activists. Recent studies confirm the longstanding preference of artists for more flexible, more progressive and more effective structures than formal organizations or communication systems. While state intelligence and spy nets, even Nortel, might provide successful models at one end of the network spectrum,

Riles provides a more ambitious comment on the future of networks:

"For those concerned with the intersection of modernist epistemologies and liberal political philosophies, the "network" offers a poignant case study of institutionalized utopianism, an ambition for political change, of universalism after cultural relativism and the incredulity toward a metanarrative." (18)

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1998 APSOLUTNO 0002

## IN THE BALKANS

Video, Duration: 2,5 minutes

This video presents a view of the Balkans from the outside of this region.

The material for this video was shot at the Black Sea, in Bulgaria, using the SECAM system. It was then edited on the NTSC based AVID system in the U.S. without being actually transferred into NTSC. The result is a black and white stretched image, rich in glitches and noise caused by the manipulation of the

incompatible source. The NTSC master copy was then transferred into PAL and brought back to the Balkans.

In this work, association APSOLUTNO uses the technical incompatibility of different video standards to emphasise the differences in the ways reality is perceived.

In this video association APSOLUTNO presents the view of the Balkans from the outside as a view which is not direct, but rather mediated through a filter of technology, and media representations based on apriori assumptions. Through these filters the Balkans is presented

## GENERATION FLASH

Lev Manovich

This essay, consisting of a number of self-contained segments, looks at the phenomenon of Flash graphics on the Web, which has attracted a lot of creative energy in the last few years. More than being just the result of a particular software / hardware situation (low bandwidth leading to the use of vector graphics), Flash esthetics exemplify the cultural sensibility of a new generation.<sup>1</sup> This generation does not care whether their work is called art or design. This generation is no longer interested in the "media critique" which

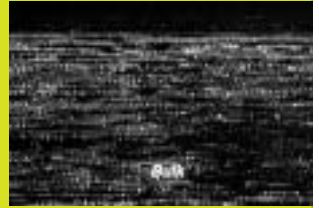
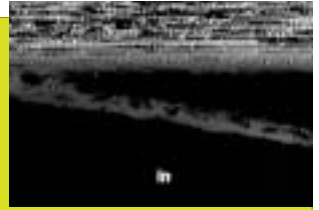
<sup>1</sup> This article is about "Flash Generation" and not about the Web sites made with Flash software. Many of the sites which inspired me to think of "Flash esthetics" are not necessarily made with Flash; they use Shockwave, DHTML, Quicktime and other Web multimedia formats. Thus the qualities I describe below as specific to "Flash esthetics" are not unique to Flash sites.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, the work of Lisa Jevbratt, John Simon, and Golan Levin.

preoccupied media artists of the last two decades; instead it is engaged in software critique. This generation writes its own software code to create its own cultural systems, instead of using samples of commercial media.<sup>2</sup> The result is the new modernism of data visualizations, vector nets, pixel-thin grids, and arrows: Bauhaus design in the service of information design. As opposed to the baroque assault of com-

as something IN BULK, a distant black and white mass, without structure or organization. The image is hardly readable as it lacks clarity. The only sound is silence juxtaposed to an overwhelming noise arriving from this region that could be neither documented nor understood.

The author of this video is Svetla Angelova (Bulgaria), one of the virtual artists from "The Absolute Sale", a web project by association APSOLUTNO. In this video she collaborated with a sound artist Zbigniew Majchrak (Poland), also a virtual artist from the same web project.



mercial media, Flash generation offers us the modernist esthetics and rationality of software. Information design is used as tool to make sense of reality, while programming becomes a tool of empowerment.<sup>3</sup>

### Turntable and Flash Remixing

[for [www.whitneybiennial.com](http://www.whitneybiennial.com) ]

[Turntable is a web-based software that allows the user to mix up to 6 different Flash animations in real-time, in addition to manipulating the color palette, the size of individual animations , and other parameters. For [www.whitneybiennial.com](http://www.whitneybiennial.com), the participating artists were asked to submit short Flash animations that were exhibited on the site both separately and as part of Turntable remixes. Some remixes consisted of ani-

<sup>3</sup> "Generation Flash" incorporates revised versions of the texts commissioned for [www.whitneybiennial.com](http://www.whitneybiennial.com) and <http://www.electronicorphanage.com/biennale>. Both exhibitions were organised by Miltos Manetas / Electronic Orphanage. "On UTOPIA" was commissioned by Futurefarmers.

mations by the same artists while others used animations by different artists.]

It has become a cliché to announce that "we live in a remix culture." Yes, we do. But is it possible to go beyond this simple statement of fact? For instance, can we distinguish between different kinds of remix esthetics? What is the relationship between our remixes made using electronic and computer tools, and earlier forms such as collage and montage? What are the similarities and differences between audio remixes and visual remixes?



✦ Think loop. The basic building block of electronic soundtracks, the loop has also taken a surprisingly strong position in contemporary visual culture. Left to their own devices, Flash animations, QuickTime movies, and the characters in computer games loop endlessly - until the human user intervenes by clicking. As I have shown elsewhere, all nineteenth-century pre-cinematic visual devices also relied on loops. Throughout the nineteenth century, these loops kept getting longer and longer - eventually turning into a feature narrative ... Today, we are witnessing the opposite movement - artists sampling short segments of feature films or TV shows, arranging them as loops, and exhibiting these loops as "video installations." The loop has thus become the new default method to "critique" media culture, replacing the still photograph of the post-modern critique of the 1980s. At the same time, it has also replaced the still photograph as the new index of the real: since everybody knows that a still photograph can be digitally manipulated, a short moving sequence arranged in a loop has become a better way to represent reality - for the time being.

Think Internet. What was referred to in post-modern times as quoting, appropriation, and pastiche no longer needs any special name. Now this is simply the basic logic of cultural production: download images, code, shapes, scripts,

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.potatoland.org/landfill/>

etc.; modify them, and then paste the new works online - send them into circulation. (Note: with the Internet, the always-existing loop of cultural production runs much faster: a new trend or style may spread overnight like a plague.) When I ask my students to create their own images by taking photographs or by shooting videos, they have a revelation: images do not have to come from the Internet! Should I also reveal to them that images do not have to come from a technological device that records reality - that instead they can be drawn or painted?

Think image. Compare it to sound. It seems possible to layer many sounds and tracks while maintaining legibility. The results just keep getting more complex, more interesting. Vision seems to work differently. Of course, the commercial images we see everyday on TV and in cinema are often made from layers as well, sometimes thousands of them - but these layers work together to create a single illusionistic (or super-illusionistic) space. In other words, they are not being heard as separate sounds. When we start mixing arbitrary images together, we quickly destroy any meaning. (If you need proof, just go and play with the classic "The Digital Landfill"<sup>4</sup>) How many separate image tracks can be mixed together before the composite becomes nothing but noise? Six

seems to be a good number – which is exactly the number of image tracks one can load onto Turntable.

Think sample versus the whole work. If we are indeed living in a remix culture, does it still make sense to create whole works – if these works will be taken apart and turned into samples by others anyway? Indeed, why painstakingly adjust separate tracks of a Director movie or an After Effects composition, getting it just right, if the “public” is going to “open source” them into their individual tracks for its own use using free software? Of course, the answer is yes: we still need art. We still want to say something about the world and our lives in it; we still need our own “mirror standing in the middle of a dirty road”, as Stendhal called art in the nineteenth century. Yet we also need to accept that, for others, our work will be just a set of samples, or maybe just one sample. Turntable is the visual software that makes this new aesthetic condition painfully obvious. It invites us to play with the dialectic of the sample and the composite, of our own works and the works of others. Welcome to visual remixing Flash style. Think Turntable.

### Art, Media Art, and Software Art

Recently “software art” has emerged as the new dynamic area of new media arts. Flash’s ActionScript, Director’s

Lingo, Perl, MAX, JavaScript, Java, C++, and other programming and scripting languages are the medium of choice for a steadily increasing number of young artists. Thematically, software art often deals with data visualization; other areas of creative activity include the tools for online collaborative performance / composition (Keystroke), DJ/VJ software, and alternatives to / critiques of commercial software (Auto-Illustrator), especially the browsers (early classics like Netomat, Web Stalker, and many others since then). Often, artists create not single works but software environments open for others to use (such as Alex Galloway’s Carnivore.) Stylistically, many works implicitly reference visual modernism (John Simon seems to be the only one so far to explicitly weave modernist references into his works).

Suddenly, programming is cool. Suddenly, the techniques and imagery that for two decades were associated with SIGGRAPH geek-ness and considered bad taste – visual output of mathematical functions, particle systems, RGB color palette – are welcomed on the plasma screens of the gallery walls. It is no longer *October* and *Wallpaper* but Flash and Director manuals that are required reading for any serious young artist.

Of course, from the early days of the computer in the 1960s, computer artists

✦ have always written their own software. <sup>5</sup> In fact, until the middle of the 1980s, writing one's own software or at least using special, very high-end programming languages designed by others (such as Zgrass) was the only way to do computer art.<sup>5</sup> So what is new about the phenomenon of software art that has recently emerged? Is it necessary?

Let's distinguish between three figures: the artist; the media artist; and the software artist.

A romantic/modernist artist (the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century) is a genius who creates from scratch, imposing the phantoms of his imagination on the world.

Next, we have the new figure of the media artist (the 1960s – the 1980s), which corresponds to the period of post-modernism. Of course, modernist artists also used media-recording technologies such as photography and film, but they treated these technologies in a similar way to other artistic tools: as a means to create an original and subjective view of the world. In contrast, post-modern media artists accept the impossibility of an original, unmediated vision of reality; their subject matter is not reality itself, but representation of reality by media, and the world of media itself. Therefore these media artists not only use media technologies

5 After GUI-based applications such as Hypercard, Director, Photoshop and others became commonplace, many computer artists continued to do their own programming: writing custom code to control an interactive installation, programming in LINGO an interactive multimedia work, etc. This was not referred to as software art; it was taken for granted that even in the age of GUI-based applications a really serious artistic engagement with computers requires getting one's hands dirty in code.

as tools, but they also use the content of commercial media. A typical strategy of a media artist is to re-photograph a newspaper photograph, or to re-edit a segment of TV show, or to isolate a scene from a Hollywood film / TV show and turn it into a loop (from Nam June Paik and Dara Birnbaum to Douglas Gordon, Paul Pfefer, Jennifer and Kevin McCoy). Of course, a media artist does not have to use commercial media technologies (photography, film, video, new media) –s/he can also use other media, from oil paint to printing to sculpture.

The media artist is a parasite who lives at the expense of the commercial media – the result of the collective craftsmanship of highly skilled people. In addition, an artist who samples from / subverts / pokes fun at commercial media can ultimately never compete with it. Instead of a feature film, we get a single scene; instead of a complex computer game with playability, narrative, AI, etc. we just get a critique of its iconography.

Thirty years of media art and post-modernism have inevitably led to a reaction. We are tired of always taking existing media as a starting point. We are tired of always being secondary, always reacting to what already exists. Enter the software artist – the new romantic. Instead of working exclusively with commercial media – and instead of using commercial software – the software artist marks his/her mark on the world by writing the original code. This act of code writing itself is very important, regardless of what this code actually does at the end.

A software artist re-uses the language of modernist abstraction and design – lines and geometric shapes, mathematically generated curves, and outlined color fields – to get away from figuration in general, and the cinematographic language of commercial media in particular. Instead of photographs and clips of films and TV, we get lines and abstract compositions. In short, instead of QuickTime, we use Flash. Instead of the computer as a media machine – a vision that is being heavily promoted by the computer industry (and most clearly articulated by Apple, which promotes a MAC as a “digital hub” for other media recording / playing devices), we go back to the computer as a programming machine.

Programming liberates art from being secondary to commercial media. A sim-

ilar reason may be behind the recent popularity of “sound art.” While commercial media now uses every possible visual style, commercial sound environments still have not appropriated all of sound space. While rock and roll, hip-hop, and techno have already become standard elevator music (at least in more hip elevators such as the Hudson Hotel in NYC), it seems that the rhythm-less regions of sound space are still untouched – at least for now.

### UTOPIA in Shockwave

[UTOPIA is a Shockwave project by Futurefarmers for the Tirana Biennale 01 Internet section.]

[Futurefarmers : Amy Franceschini and Sascha Merg] URL: <http://nutrishnia.org/level/>

UTOPIA is playful and deceitful - because it pretends to be more innocent, more simple, and lighter than it actually is. At first glance it can be taken for something made for children - or for adults whose references are not Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Rem Koolhaas, and Philip Stark, but text messaging, gnutella, retro Atari graphics, and nettime. This is the new generation that emerged in the 1990s. In contrast to the visual and media artists of the 1960s-1980s, whose main target was media - ads, cinema, television - the new generation does not waste its energy on media critique. Instead of bashing the commercial media environment, it creates its own: Web sites, mixes,

— software tools, furniture, clothes, digital video, Flash / Shockwave animations, and interactives.

The new sensibility, which Utopia exemplifies so well, is soft, elegant, restrained, and smart. This is the new software intelligentsia. Look at the thin low-contrast lines of UTOPIA, praystation.com, and so many Flash projects included in the Tirana Biennale 01. If images of the previous generations of media artists, from Nam June Paik to Barbara Krueger, were screaming, trying to compete with the intensity of the commercial media, the new data artists such as Franceschini/Merg whisper in our ears. In contrast to media's arrogance, they offer us intelligence. In contrast to the media stream of endless repeated icons and soundbites, they offer us small and economical systems: stylized nature, ecology, or the game / music generator / Lego-like parade in UTOPIA.

Futurefarmers are among the few Flash/Shockwave masters who use their skills for social rather than simply formal ends. Their project theyrule.net is a great example of how smart programming and smart graphics can be used politically. Instead of presenting a packaged political message, it gives us data and the tools to analyze it. It knows that we are intelligent enough to draw the right conclusion. This is the new rhetoric of interactivity: we are

convinced not by listening / watching a prepared message but by actively working with the data: reorganizing it, uncovering the connections, becoming aware of correlations.

UTOPIA does not have explicit political content; instead it presents its message through a visual allegory. Like *SimCity* and similar sims, the program presents us with a whole miniature world which runs according to its own system of rules. (All the animation in UTOPIA is the result of code execution – nothing is hand-animated.) The cosmogony of this world reflects our new understanding of our own planet – post-Cold War, Internet, ecology, Gaia, and globalization. Notice the thin barely visible lines that connect the actors and the blocks. (This is the same device used in theyrule.net.) In the universe of UTOPIA, everything is interconnected, and each action of an individual actor affects the system as a whole. Intellectually, we know that this is how our Earth functions ecologically and economically - but UTOPIA represents this on a scale we can grasp perceptually.

The lines also serve another purpose. Despite CNN, Greenpeace, the glass roof of Berlin's Reichstag, and other institutions and devices working to make the functioning of modern societies transparent to their citizens, most of it is not visible. This is not only

because we don't know the motives behind this or that Government policy or because advertising and PR constantly work to make things appear different from what they really are – the functioning of societies is not visible in a literal sense. For instance, we don't know where the cells are which make our cell phones work; we don't know the layout of private financial network that circles the Earth; we don't know what companies are located in a building we pass every day on the way to work; and so on. But in UTOPIA, we do know – because the links are made visible. UTOPIA is Utopia because it is a society where cause-and-effect connections are rendered visible and comprehensible. The program re-writes Marxism as vector graphics; it substitutes the figure of "connections" for the old figure of "unveiling."

Behind its playful façade, UTOPIA is serious business— but it is not all business. Drawing on our current fascination with computer games and interactive image-sound software, UTOPIA is a visual and intellectual delight. It is Tetris meets Marx meets data mining meets the club dance floor. It is a game for the new generation that knows that the world is a network, that the media is not worth taking very seriously, and that programming can be used as a political tool.

## The Unbearable Lightness of FLASH

[Tirana Biennale 01 Internet section ([www.electronicorphanage.com/biennale](http://www.electronicorphanage.com/biennale)) was organized by Miltos Manetas / Electronic Orphanage. The exhibition consisted from a few dozen projects by Web designers and artists, many of whom work in Flash or Schockwave. Manetas commissioned me, Peter Lunenfeld, and Norman Klein to write the analysis of the show. This text is my contribution; many ideas in it developed out of the conversations the three of us had about the works in the show. The names in brackets below refer to the artists in the show; go to the show site to see their projects.]

### Biology.

Flash artists are big on biological references. Abstract plants, minimalist creatures, or simply clouds of pixels dance in patterns which to a human eye signal "life" (Geoff Stearns: [deconcept.com](http://deconcept.com), Vitaly Leokumovich: [unclickable.com](http://unclickable.com), Danny Hobart: [dannyhobart.com](http://dannyhobart.com); [uncontrol.com](http://uncontrol.com)) Often we see self-regenerating systems. But this is not life as it naturally developed on Earth; rather, it looks like something we are likely to witness in some biotech laboratory where biology is put in the service of industrial production. We see hyper-accelerated regeneration and evolution. We see complex systems emerging before our eyes: millions of

+ years of evolution are compressed into a few seconds.

There is another feature that distinguishes life in Flash from real life: the non-existence of death. Biological organisms and systems are born, they develop, and eventually they die. In short, they have teleology. But in Flash projects, life works differently: since these projects are loops, there is no death. Life just keeps running forever – more precisely, as long as your computer maintains a Net connection.

Amplification: Flash Esthetics and Computer Games.

Abstract ecosystems in Flash projects have another characteristic that makes playing so pleasurable (Joel Fox). They brilliantly use the power of the computer to amplify users' actions. This power puts a computer in line with other magical devices; not coincidentally, the most obvious place to see it is in games, although it is also at work in all of our interactions with a computer. For instance, when you tell Mario to step to the left by moving a joystick, this initiates a small, delightful narrative: Mario comes across a hill; he starts climbing the hill; the hill turns out to be too steep; Mario slides back onto the ground; Mario gets up, all shaky. None of these actions required anything from us; all we had to do is move the joystick once. The computer program

amplifies our single action, expanding it into a narrative sequence.

Historically, computer games were always a step ahead from the general human computer interface. In the 1960s and 1970s users communicated with a computer using non-graphical interfaces: entering the program onto a stack of punch cards, typing in a command line, and so on. In contrast, computer games have used interactive graphical interfaces ever since they emerged in the late 1950s – something that only came to personal computers in the 1980s.

Similarly, today's games already use what many computer scientists think will be the next paradigm in HCI: the active amplification of users' actions. In the future, we are told, agent programs will watch our interactions with a computer, notice the patterns, and then automate many tasks we do regularly, from backing up the data at regular intervals to filtering and answering our e-mail. The computer will also monitor our behavior and attention level, adjusting its behavior accordingly: speeding up, slowing down, and so on. In some ways this new paradigm is already at work in some applications: for instance, an Internet browser offers us the list of sites relevant to the topic we are researching; Microsoft Office Assistant tries to guess when we need help. However, there is a crucial problem

with moving to such active amplification across the whole of HCI. The more power we delegate to a computer, the more we lose control over what it is doing. How do we know that the agent program identified a correct pattern in our daily use of e-mail? How do we know that a commerce agent we send onto the Web to negotiate the lowest price for a product with other agents was not corrupted by them? In short, how do we know if a computer amplified our actions correctly?

Computer games are games, and the worst that can happen is that we lose. Therefore active amplification is present in practically every game: Mario embarking on mini-narratives of its own with a single move of a joystick; troops conducting complex military maneuvers while you directly control only their leader in *Rainbow Six*; Lora Craft executing whole acrobatic sequences at the press of a keyboard key. (Note that in "normal" games this amplification does not exist: when you move a single figure on a chessboard, this is all that happens; your move does not initiate a sequence of steps.)

Flash projects make extensive use of active amplification. It gives many projects their magical feeling. Often we are confronted with an empty screen, but a single click brings to life a whole universe: abstract particle systems, plant-like outlines, or a population of mini-

malist creatures. The user as a god controlling the universe is something we also often encounter in computer games; but Flash projects also give us the pleasure of creating the universe from scratch.

Active amplification is not the only feature Flash projects share with games. More generally, as Peter Lunefeld suggested, computer games are to the Flash generation what movies were to Warhol. Cinema and TV colonized the unconscious of the previous generations of media artists who continue to use the gallery as their therapy coach, spilling bits and pieces of their childhood media archives in public (for instance, Douglas Gordon). Flash artists are less obsessed with commercial time-based media. Instead, their iconography, temporal rhythms, and interaction esthetics come from games (Mike Clavert: [mikeclavert.com](http://mikeclavert.com)). Sometimes the user participation is needed for the Flash game to work; sometimes the game just plays itself (*UTOPIA* by [futurefarmers.com](http://futurefarmers.com); [dextro.org](http://dextro.org)).

Flash versus Net Art.

Tirana Biennale 01 Internet exhibition: this title is deeply ironic. The exhibition did not include any projects from Albania, or any other post-communist East European country for that matter. This was quite different from many early net-art exhibitions of the middle



✦ of the 1990s, whose stars came from the East: Vuk Ćosić, Alexei Shulgin, Olga Lialina. 1990s net art was the first international art movement since the 1960s that included East Europe in a big way. Prague, Ljubljana, Riga, and Moscow counted as much as Amsterdam, Berlin, and New York. Including artists from the West and the East on an equal basis, net art perfectly corresponded to the economic and social utopia of a new post-Cold-War world of the 1990s.

Now this utopia is over. The power structure of the global empire has become clear, and the demographics of the Tirana Biennale 01 Internet section reflected this perfectly. Many artists included in the Tirana Biennale 01 Internet exhibition work in key IT regions of the world: San Francisco (Silicon Valley), New York (Silicon Alley), and Northern Europe.

What happened? In the mid 1990s, net art relied on simple HTML that ran well on both fast and slow connections – and this is enabled the active participation of artists from the East. But the subsequent colonization of the Web by multimedia formats – Flash, Shockwave, QuickTime, and so on – restored the traditional West/East power structure. Now Web art requires fast Internet connections for both the artist and the audiences. With its slow connections, the East is out of the game. The Utopia

is over; welcome to the Empire. (The Tirana Biennale 01 did include one artist from China who contributed a beautiful animation of martial arts fighters. But we never found who he was. All we knew about him was his email address: zhu\_zhq@sohu.com. Maybe he did not even live in China.)

### Generation FLASH: FAQ

After I posted the preceding segments on popular mailing lists dealing with new media art and cyberculture (rhizome.org and nettime.org), I received lots of responses. Here are my answers to the two most common questions which appeared in a number of responses.

Question:

Isn't the "soft modernism" you describe simply a result of particular technological limitations of multimedia on the Net? You seem to mistake the particular features of Flash designed to deliver animation over the narrow bandwidth for a larger zeitgeist.

Answer:

Now that the new release of Flash (Flash MX) allows the import and streaming of video, it is possible that soon "Flash generation" / "soft modernism" esthetics will leave Flash sites. This is fine. My concern in this essay is *not* with Flash software and its limita-

tions/capabilities per se, but with the new sensibility that was manifested in many Flash projects during the last couple of years. In other words, I am interested in a "generation Flash" that is quite different from the Flash software/format.

Therefore the many people who after reading my text accused me of confusing a technical standard with esthetics missed my argument. The vector-oriented look of "soft modernism" is not simply a result of narrow bandwidth or a nostalgia for 1960s design - it *always* happens when people begin to generate graphics through programming and discover that they can use simple equations, etc. This is also why the "soft modernism" of Flash projects and other software artists replays, sometimes in amazing detail, the esthetics of early computer art (1950s-1970s), when people were only able to create images and animations through programming.

Question:

There is no reason why software art cannot use representational images or any other form. Why do you associate software art with non-representational, abstract, vector-based graphics?

Answer:

Of course software artists can use representational images or any other "con-

ventional" form or media. It was no coincidence that, soon after his arrival at Xerox PARC in the 1970s, Alan Kay and his associates created a paint program and an animation program, alongside overlapping windows, icons, Smalltalk, and other principles of modern interactive graphical computing. The abilities to manipulate and generate media are not after-thoughts for a modern computer - they are central to its identity as a "personal dynamic medium" (Alan Kay.) To put this differently: the computer is a simulation machine, and as such it can and should be used to simulate other media.

So I have nothing against software artists using/creating media, but I hope that the "Flash generation" will extend its programming work to representational media! In other words, if in the early 1970s the paint program and the animation program were revolutionary in changing people's ideas about a computer away from computation and towards a (creative) medium, after almost two decades of menu-based media- manipulation programs and the use of computers as media-distribution machines (greatly accelerated by the World Wide Web), a little programming can be quite revolutionary! In short, we have now are so used to thinking of a computer as a "personal dynamic medium" that we need to remind ourselves and others that it is also a programmable machine.

✦ Now, think about how programming has been used so far to create/use still images, animation, and film/video. There are three trajectories that can be traced historically. One trajectory extends from the earliest works of computer art - the films by the Whitneys (who were the students of Oscar Fishinger and thus represent a direct link with early twentieth century modernism) made with an analog computer as early as the mid-1950s - to today's "soft modernism" of Flash projects and data-visualization artworks. In other words, this is the use of programming to generate and control abstract images.

The second trajectory begins in the 1980s, when Hollywood and TV designers started to use computer-generated imagery (CGI). Now programming was put in the service of traditional cinematic realism. Particle systems, formal grammars, AI and other software techniques became the means to generate flying bats, hilly landscapes, ocean waves, explosions, alien creatures, and other figurative elements integrated into the photorealistic universe of a narrative film.

What about using algorithms not simply to generate figurative elements of a narrative but to control the whole fictional universe? This is the third trajectory: programming in computer games (1960-). Here, algorithms may control the narrative events, the behavior of

characters, camera movement, and other characteristics of the game world - all in real time. Unfortunately, as we all know, esthetically revolutionary computer- and player-driven game worlds feature formula-driven content that makes even a bad Hollywood film appear original and inspiring by comparison. (*Grand Theft Auto 3* is no exception here - despite its breakthroughs in simulating a more compelling open universe.)

I think this brief survey shows that there is still an untouched space completely open for experimentation and creative research - using programming to generate and/or control figurative/fictional media. For instance, in the case of a movie, programming can be used to generate characters on the fly, to composite in real-time characters shot against a blue screen with backgrounds, to control the sequence of scenes, to apply filters to any scene in real-time, to combine pre-recorded scenes with imagery generated on the fly, to have characters interact with the viewer, etc, etc. In short, programming can be used to control *any* aspect of a fictional media work.

Of course, once in a while one encounters projects moving in this direction at places like SIGGRAPH or ISEA, but they are typically research demos created in universities that do not reach culture at large. Of course, you can object

that having an algorithmically controlled complex fictional universe requires the kind of programming investment only possible in a commercial game company or at a university. After all, this is not the same as writing a script that draws a few lines that keep moving in response to user input...yes, but why do our fictional/figurative works have to follow the formulas of commercial media? If one accepts that the characters do not have to be "photorealistic," that the fictional world does not have to be exclusively three-dimensional, that chance and randomness can co-exist with narrative logic, or that stick figures can co-exist with 3-D characters and video footage, etc., programming figuration / fiction becomes less formidable. In short, while I welcome programming Flash, I think it is much more challenging to program QuickTime.

### Postscript: On The Lightness of Flash

When I first visited the most famous Flash site – prystation.net – I was struck by the lightness of its graphics. Quieter than a whisper, more elegant than Door or Channel, more minimal than the 1960s minimalist sculptures of Judd, more subdued than awinter landscape in heavy fog, the site pushed the contrast scale to the limits of legibility. The similar lightness and restraint can be found in many projects included in the Biennale 01 show. Again, the con-

trast with the screaming graphics of commercial media and the media art of the previous generations is obvious.

The lightness of Flash can be thought of as the visual equivalent of electronic ambient music. Every line and every pixel counts. Flash appeals to our visual intelligence - and cognitive intelligence. After the century of RGB color which begun with Matisse and ended with the aggressive spreads of Wired, we are asked to start over, to begin from scratch. The Flash generation invites us to undergo a visual cleansing – this is why we see a monochrome palette, white and light gray. It uses neo-minimalism as a pill to cure us from post-modernism. In Flash, the rationality of modernism is combined with the rationality of programming and the affect of computer games to create the new esthetics of lightness, curiosity and intelligence. Make sure your browser has the right plug-in: welcome to generation Flash.

I am not advocating a revival of modernism. Of course we don't want to simply replay Mondrian and Klee on computer screens. The task of the new generation is to integrate the two key aesthetic paradigms of the twentieth century: (1) belief in science and rationality, emphasis on efficiency and basic forms, the idealism and heroic spirit of modernism; (2) skepticism, interest in "marginality" and "complexity," decon-

+structive strategies, the baroque opaqueness and excess of post-modernism (1960s-). At this point all the features of the second paradigm became tired clichés. A partial return to modernism is therefore not a bad first step, as long as it is just a first step towards developing the new esthetics for the new age.

Of course these esthetics should also fully engage with the difficult questions of globalization. The *remix culture* we are living in now is not only engaged in remixing all previous cultural forms and texts, but also in remixing various features which come from what used to be called national cultures as well as from already existing remixes between immigrant populations and their “host” cultures. The solution offered by multinational conglomerates – a composite which takes certain signifiers from a few national cultures (for instance, the French idea of elegance, Japanese Manga iconography, “cool Britannia” references, and so on) and integrates it all into a rather bland and monolithic text which is then sent back to all the places around the world – is obviously not a satisfactory solution. (It reminds me of the Soviet-style centralized economy, in which all the output of collective farms was sent to the center where it was decided how it was to be distributed nationally.) Luckily, numerous remixes following different logics are being explored around the world by

musicians, theatre groups, dancers, designers, architects, and so on. Nobody knows what will emerge from this global cultural laboratory – and this is what makes our times so interesting.

Although most of my arguments in this book are about visual culture and visual esthetics, it is relevant at this point to evoke a different practice. Music has historically always been the artistic field that was ahead of other fields in using computers to enable new aesthetic paradigms. The whole practice of popular electronic music in the last three decades is a testimony to how empowering new technologies are in welding new, complex and rich remixes between different cultures, styles, and sensibilities. Without electronic and computing technologies – from a turntable and a tape recorder to peer-to-peer file sharing networks and music-synthesis software running on a regular laptop, most of this culture would never have come to be. The field of electronic sound (which pretty much means most sounds today) with its multitude voices and a real bottom-up, “emergent” logic, is a powerful alternative to the “top-down” cultural composites sold by global media conglomerates around the world. Let us hope that other artists and designers in other fields will follow music’s lead in using a computer to enable similarly rich remix cultures.

# GEBSENG - TVPOETRY - VERGESSEN - VINYLVIDEO - VSSTV

Gebhard Sengmüller

In the following, I talk about four projects that I worked on between 1992 and 2002. Obviously, all of them are about television. In some sense, they also deal with putting things into order and trying to preserve them for eternity.

## TV POETRY, 1992-96

(<http://www.itsallartipromise.com/tvpoetry/>)

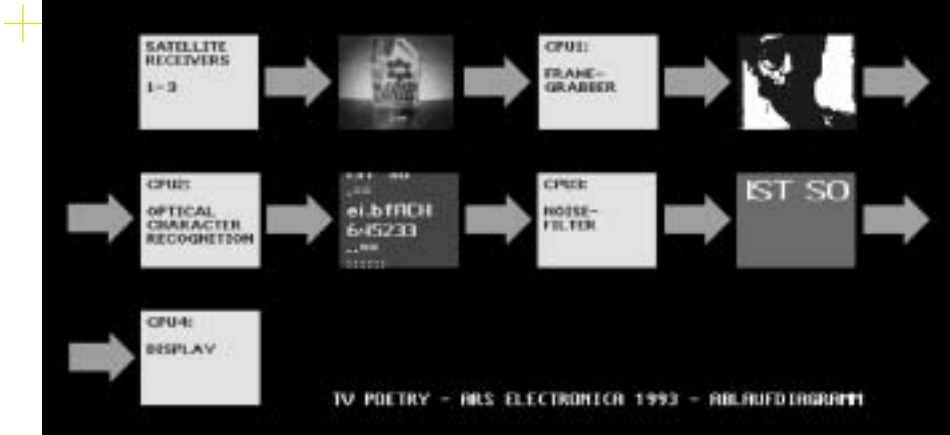
has been shown first at ars electronica 1992, later in different settings at the Medienbiennale Leipzig, St. Gervais in Geneva and V\_2 in Rotterdam. A self-constructed and invented network of satellite dishes, tv-sets and computers that all have one goal: to create poems from television.

"TV POETRY - Set-Up for Experimentation 2/94, Medienbiennale Leipzig  
"The Faster the Machines - the Better the Poetry"

"TV POETRY" is an experimental set-up which can be put together at any location. Combined with precisely adjusted receiving equipment, it rapidly scans the various television transmissions it receives (commercials, news, quiz shows, etc.) for text passages visible on the screen. In an ongoing, real-time process, the text is recognised, filtered out, processed, and output as an endless stream of text, generated by TV programs and CPU programming. Through imponderability, inaccuracy, video noise and misinterpretation within the system, the source text is radically transformed, giving rise to new meanings. Very powerful content (headlines, slogans, ...) "shines through" and tends to remain intact.

Signal processing takes place in parallel process on separate machines and only comes together in the final stage. The quality of the results in terms of density, continuity and recognisable content is in a direct proportional relationship to the available power and capacity of the equipment (number of TV channels, number and operating frequency of the CPUs, bus width of the connections).

TV POETRY 2/94 works entirely decentralised. An arbitrary number of field agencies/points of support located all over Europe (in this case: artists apartments and studios in Rotterdam, Lüneburg and Vienna) gather tv signals



TV Poetry - functional diagram

via cable television or satellite receivers, process this raw information automatically and send resulting poetry to the central computer placed in Leipzig.

This unique design (externalisation and compression to only one CPU per field agency) relying heavily on the existing tele communications infrastructure offers the opportunity of cheaply incorporating even distant locations into a an open network .Compared to previous set-ups this decentralized version results in an increase of channels and available raw information. At the same time, as no expensive and sophisticated online connections are necessary to transfer the data, costs will be reduced significantly. The gathered information is to be sent to the Leipzig central station at scheduled times via telephone.



TV Poetry - outdoors installation view, ars electronica Linz

In the Leipzig exhibition hall a monitor continuously displays the gathered text. Except from 3 photographs of the field agencies, the observer will not be aware of the poems distant origin.



Furthermore the system spreads towards a higher degree of virtuality as the text is fed to the Unitn - room in M.I.T.s MediaMOO. Internet users have access to this virtual reality, where TV POETRY will be available in a verbal/virtual "room". Using an internet terminal in the Leipzig exhibition hall, real visitors can experience and perceive this level.

**Vergessen© - Erasure Coils, 1997-1998**

([http://www.itsallartipromise.com/vergessen/erasure\\_coils/](http://www.itsallartipromise.com/vergessen/erasure_coils/))

Produced for the Vergessen© Project, initiated by Herwig Turk - a collaboration of about 20 artists and art theoreticians, working on the topic of forgetting in different ways, trying to cope with a phenomenon which seems inaccessible to known methods of epistemology.

"The project is an attempt to actively embrace one aspect of life which is almost entirely ignored by our usual machines of knowledge. forgetting is usually mentioned in relation to diseases, mistakes, trouble of all kind. we forget history. is there a pattern to it? a system? is it possible to talk about it, is it possible to work with it, is it possible to become aware of it? Do we want to know more about forgetting? is it even possible to know more about forgetting? we are working on projects deal-



Vergessen© erasure coils - ORF regional studio Innsbruck, type Weircliff model 8



Vergessen© erasure coils - ORF television studio Wien-Küniglberg, type Garner Eliminator 4000

ing with various aspects of forgetting and its limitations, projects which should move forgetting into the realm of our experience, that we might better see and hear it.", as Herwig Turk writes. (please also see <http://www.vergessen.com>)

I travelled to all regional studios of the ORF (austrian public broadcasting cor-





VinylVideo™ - viewing a Picture Disk on the VinylVideo™ System

poration) and made photos of so-called "erasure coils": huge electromagnetic devices, designed for the purpose of instantly erasing the content of magnetic audio- and videotapes. I see those machines as an industrial/mechanical form of "forgetting".

### VinylVideo™, 1998-2002

(<http://www.vinylvideo.com>)

My main work for the last years, existing in many different settings and still growing.



VinylVideo™ - still from the infomercial

Apart from the obvious aspects of media-archeology, timetravel etc., it is also about artists that create their own

tools and environments instead of using the ones provided by the industry.

From the press release:

*"VinylVideo™ - an invention by Gebhard Sengmüller, in cooperation with Martin Diamant, Günter Erhart and Best Before.*

VinylVideo™ is a new, wonderful and fascinating development in the history of audio-visual media. For the first time in the history of technological invention, VinylVideo™ makes possible the storage of video (moving image plus sound) on analog long-play records. Playback from the VinylVideo™ picture disk is made possible with the VinylVideo™ Unit which consists of a normal turntable, a special conversion box (aka the VinylVideo™ Home Kit) and a television.

In it's combination of analog and digital elements VinylVideo™ is a relic of fake media archeology. At the same time, VinylVideo™ is a vision of new live video mixing possibilities. By simply placing the tone arm at different points on the record, VinylVideo™ makes possible a random access manipulation of the time axis. With the extremely reduced picture and sound quality, a new mode of audio-visual perception evolves. In this way, VinylVideo™ reconstructs a home movie medium as a missing link in the history of recorded moving images while simultaneously encompassing contemporary forms of

DJ-ing and VJ-ing. *For further information please also visit our website: <http://www.vinylvideo.com> "*

## **VSSTV - Very Slow Scan Television, since 2002**

(<http://www.vsstv.com>)

My recent project, still under development.

### 1) VSSTV - Very Slow Scan Television

VSSTV - Very Slow Scan Television - is a new television format.

It builds upon SSTV, an image transmission system developed and used in the parallel universe of Ham Radio amateurs. Remarkably, this SSTV standard (see section 2) has been available for decades. In contrast to regular TV, SSTV runs on a dramatically reduced frame rate.

VSSTV uses broadcasts from this historic public domain television system - available anytime over freely accessible frequencies - to construct an analogy: it recreates a cathode ray tube (CRT) with regular bubble wrap taking the role of the aperture mask. Just as a CRT mixes the three primary colors to create various hues, VSSTV will use the surprisingly similar yet magnified structure of bubble wrap (see section 3), commonly used as a packing material.

✦ We will develop a device to receive images and output those images onto a new visual medium. A plotter-like machine will fill the individual bubbles with one of the three primary CRT colors (red, green, and blue), turning them into pixels on the VSSTV screen. Observed from a distance, the clusters of pixels/bubbles will merge into the original image.

Large and permanent television images will be the result, images that take the idea of slow scan to the extreme: due to our process, the frame rate decreases to only one frame per day, down from one frame in 8 seconds possible with the underlying SSTV format!

The combination of Ham Radio SSTV television and the new output medium's extremely reduced frame rate suggests the name for this system: VSSTV - Very Slow Scan Television.

A few further remarks:  
The VSSTV device incorporates analogies on many levels: the transmission of images vs. the transmission of sound; digital vs. analog technology (in a sense, VSSTV employs analog technologies to result in digital images); CRT screen vs. bubble wrap.

VSSTV makes us recall the elements present in every television image. VSSTV reveals a hidden universe of amateur television broadcasting (going

back to 1957). A world of public domain television, accessible even with simple technology, independent of the commercial or monopolized television networks prevalent in Europe and the US.

At the same time, VSSTV adds an ironic twist to the use of a material familiar to every artist. Bubble wrap, normally used to wrap and protect art, becomes a medium and an artwork in itself.

## 2) SSTV

Slow Scan Television (SSTV), developed in 1957, uses the shortwave radio band (Ham Radio) to transmit television images.

Ham Radio not only broadcasts information (going back to Marconi's 1895 invention of the radio), but also uses the radio spectrum for personal communications, usually on a point to point basis over a previously negotiated frequency. In contrast to telephone conversations, this communication is open and can be listened to by anyone who happens to be tuned into the same frequency.

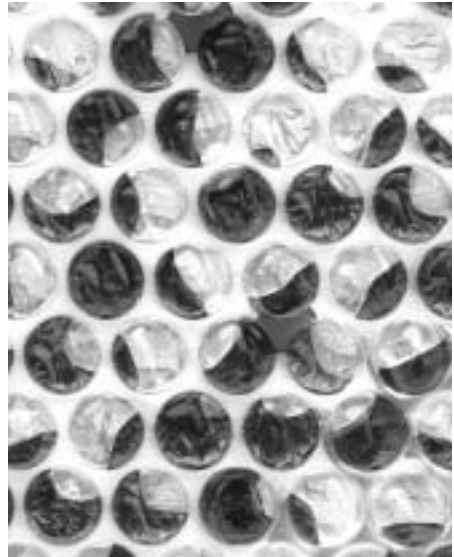
The Ham Radio band was reserved for the purpose of voice transmission, therefore using only a small bandwidth. Broadcasting images within this narrow bandwidth requires reducing their quality and rules out transmitting

moving images. Furthermore, the visual information has to be converted into an audio signal.

Martin Diamant, co-author of VinylVideo™ (see [www.vinylvideo.com](http://www.vinylvideo.com)) remarks: "For the technician it's quite simple: if he listens to [the signal], it Ls audio, if he synchronizes, decodes and watches it, it's video."

Still valid today, the SSTV standard was formulated and realized by Copthorne Macdonald in the late 1950s.

British Ham Radio operator Guy Clark (N4BM) writes: "SSTV was originally invented by Copthorne Macdonald and first used by Radio Amateurs. The original idea was to find a method of transmitting a television picture over a single speech channel. This meant that a typical (at that time) 3MHz wide television picture had to be reduced to around 3kHz (1000:1 reduction). It was decided at the outset that the scanning rates must be very slow, which precludes the use of moving pictures. The choice of time base for synchronizing was the readily available domestic power supply at 50 or 60 Hz (depending on the country of origin). This gave a line speed of 16.6Hz and 120 or 128 lines per frame (against the then UK standard of 405 lines (now 625) per frame), giving a new picture frame every 7.2 or 8 seconds. The composition of a single



VSSTV - close-up view of bubble wrap, filled with ink



VinylVideo™ - still from the infomercial

SSTV line to the original specification of 8 sec is as follows: The maximum bandwidth is 3kHz, therefore the SSTV signal's bandwidth is restricted to 2.3kHz; Black is represented by a

✦ 1500Hz tone and white by a 2300 Hz tone together with a sync pulse at 1200Hz (well below the black level so that it is invisible). The Sync pulses are sent at the end of each line. These are 5ms in length, and 30ms at the end of each frame. The original SSTV systems were based on ex-government Radar screens and long persistence cathode ray tubes. SSTV started out with surplus radar display tubes with very long persistence ("P7") phosphors. This allowed an image to be painted on the screen over a period of a few seconds."

The modulation technique often transmits defective images, evident in trapezoid distortions in the image caused by time synchronisation problems.

The images (see figures 1-9) have a very personal flair. Texts and pictures refer to the location of the sender and his or her identifier. Self-referential features dominate. Guy Clark (N4BM) writes: "What kinds of pictures are sent? Reviewing pictures saved during the last few weeks I found: Hams in their shacks, lots of pet dogs, a frog, kangaroo, astronauts in the Space Shuttle (SSTV has been transmitted from some missions!!!), bridges, birds, Elvis Presley, rock formations, an old fashioned microphone, antique cars, flowers, children, Jupiter, a cow, someone playing bagpipes, a UFO, many colorful butterflies, boats, and cartoon characters with personalized messages. Even the Russ-

ian Space Station MIR has been transmitting SSTV pictures recently!"

We might see SSTV as a parallel TV universe, dating back to an era of television monopolies. But it also shows similarities to current streaming and netcasting technologies (in a sense, internet chat rooms today resemble the role of Ham Radio in previous decades).

### 3) Bubble Wrap

Bubble wrap is a common material used to pack fragile goods. Obviously VSSTV is a variation on bubble wrap's usual role in the art world. (There are perhaps only two ways to turn a profit in the arts: running an art shipping company and manufacturing bubble wrap.)

Bubble wrap consists of small transparent plastic bubbles, filled with air, arranged in a honeycomb pattern on transparent plastic sheeting.

The aperture mask-like structure of bubble wrap and its similarity to a cathode ray tube constitutes an important basis for VSSTV (see figure).

### 4) Implementation

The technical implementation of VSSTV and the construction of the actual device poses challenges in the areas of telecommunication, computer

technology, control engineering and electromechanics.

Starting with the assembly of a short wave radio receiver station, the images must be transferred to the computer via an SSTV converter. Furthermore, a computer program (to be written) has to parse the incoming images into lines, pixels, and hues, corresponding to the "resolution" of bubble wrap.

The greatest effort will go into the assembly of a machine to deliver the correct amounts of ink from the appropriate color tanks to the individual bubbles via tiny nozzles. This process will result in groupings of three bubbles/pixels (red, green, and blue) that merge into one shade of color when observed from a distance. Three full bubbles correspond to "black"; three empty ones (illuminated from behind) correspond to "white."

We will develop methods and sensors for the precise vertical and horizontal alignment of the sheeting. Furthermore, it will be necessary to select an appropriate, lightfast dye. For manufacturing of parts, programming and electro-mechanical assembly, we will cooperate with partners in technology.

We plan to have the project up and running within one year, with a fully functional prototype to be exhibited in May of 2003.

## 5) Shows

The VSSTV machine is the main focus of the exhibition: as with an oversized plotter, bubble wrap will unroll, monitored by sensors controlling vertical and horizontal positioning. The observer can witness the extremely slow transformation of the "blank" bubble wrap into an image within 20 hours.

Several audiovisual elements parallel this process: speakers play back the original radio signal (a peculiar chirping sound that represents and transmits the SSTV image); at the same time, a video monitor displays the current SSTV image while an oscilloscope renders individual scanlines. Additionally, a miniature camera mounted on the print head observes the filling of the bubbles. Magnified, the images of this camera will be visible on a second monitor. A growing collection of VSSTV displays (1.5 by 2 meters in size) will accumulate during the exhibition. Each image is mounted between glass plates and backlit by fluorescent light.

## 6) VSSTV - Functional Diagram of the planned device

Step 1: SSTV (Slow Scan Television) signals are continuously broadcast by Ham Radio operators around the world on several short wave bands used for voice communications (e.g. 3.845 MHz, 7.171 MHz, 21.340 MHz).

✦ Step 2: An open air antenna, together with a short wave radio receiver, tunes into the SSTV band and receives the Ham Radio signals. Speakers play back the sound signals to illustrate the process.

Step 3: An SSTV scan-converter recognizes and decodes the images carried by the sound signal. A monitor displays the images while an oscilloscope renders individual scanlines, making visible the gradual flow of the image (X-resolution: amplitude, Y-resolution: time).

Step 4: The image processing PC selects a random sequence of individual pictures from the SSTV converter. A program rasterizes these images into pixels and breaks them down into their RGB components. The same PC also takes on the role of process controller in the following steps.

Step 5: The mechanics: Bubble wrap sheeting (width: 2 m, in bulk from roll) is fed between two cylinders for horizontal transport. A photo sensor, together with the PC controlling the process, manages the exact, real-time positioning of the sheeting via a feedback loop.

Step 6: The mechanics: a carriage (also controlled by the PC) vertically positions the print head.

Step 7: The print head consists of three needles fed by three tanks holding red,

green and blue ink. Controlled by the PC, these needles inject the bubbles with the exact amount of colored ink corresponding to the brightness and hue of the pixel. A miniature, closed-circuit video camera mounted on the print head captures the process and the resulting image is displayed on a video monitor.

Step 8: Pixel by pixel, line by line, the bubble wrap is colored in accordance with the underlying SSTV image. Assuming 10 seconds per pixel, this will result in a new VSSTV display every 20 hours (75 lines per image). Viewed from an appropriate distance (approx. 5 meters), the individual dots of ink resolve into distinct colors. An overall image emerges and becomes visible: Very Slow Scan Television.

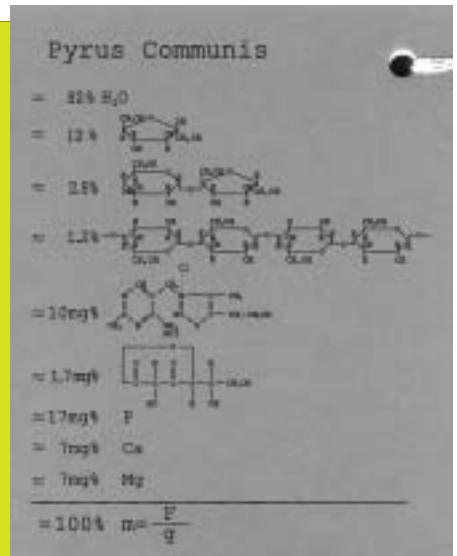
1996 APSOLUTNO 0004

# PYRUS COMMUNIS

Place: Belgrade, Yugoslavia Time: December 1996

The election fraud in the 1997 election in Serbia resulted in massive protests, during which protest marches were organised for 109 days, from December 21, 1996 till March 20, 1997. In Belgrade, around 300,000 citizens took part in the protests daily.

Association APSOLUTNO performed a street action during which the members were giving out pears to the protesters. The pears were accompanied with tags containing the following: the Latin name and chemical composition of pears, and the formula for free fall. The combination of the reference to a well-known expression in Serbian ('to fall as a pear', i.e., when it is ripe, meaning it's time for change) and the use of the scientific language points to the proven inevitability of the regime's fall. With this gesture we joined the efforts of the protesters to bring down the regime.







m e m o r y



1996 APSOLUTNO 0004

# ΑΠΟΛΥΤΗ ΝΙΚΗ

Date: January 1, 1996

Place: Athens, the four remaining buildings  
on the Acropolis

The Acropolis, one of the most significant monuments of European civilization and one of the most frequented tourist sights in the world, has often been seriously damaged throughout its history. If in the past the monument was threatened by numerous attempts to conquer Athens, today it is the harmful effects of pollution that endanger it. For example, the damage caused to the monument in the past two decades by acid rains has been greater than in the last 2500 years.

The alarming state of the monument has led to significant investments into its conservation. Teams of archeologists and conservation experts from all over the world are working on maintaining the monument in a pseudo-original condition and the buildings are

constantly covered by constructions of 'temporary architecture'. In the process, the conservation is conducted as plagiarism, since entire objects are re-made in modern and more resilient materials. As a result, the largest part of the complex is artificial. It is well known, for example, that the Caryatids on Erechtheum, the friezes on the Temple of Athena Nike, as well as most of the large stone blocks are not original. Thus protected from further damage, monuments are subject to new readings and interpretations.





At the moment when the four remaining buildings at the Acropolis remind us of the four remaining years until the end of the century and millenium, the association APSOLUTNO has chosen the Acropolis as a clear example of the process of transforming monuments of culture and spirituality into monuments of progress.

Such projects are presented to the public as technological achievements, and the artificial ambients produced in this way as historical artifacts. The desire for contact with spiritual sites of the past is thus readily met with carefully prepared mis-en-scene with a clear message: the absolute victory of capital.

1997 APSOLUTNO 0003

# LE QUATTRO STAGIONI



"Association Apsolutno's Le Quattro Stagioni project, with its immediate associations of the most delicious pizza, takes into consideration that reality is always perceived from our definitive temporal point of view; this is why the members of

Apsolutno can incorporate different historical situations. Apsolutno points in a distinctive way to the fact that we must dismiss (as an erroneous point of view, an epistemological mistake) the notion that we have a possibility to perceive reality as a totality; this error is, in fact, already included in a positive ontological presupposition of reality in itself."

*Marina Gržinić, ZERO\_ABSOLUTE\_THE REAL (text from catalogue), Gallery Marino Cettina, Umag, Croatia, 2001.*

*Le Quattro Stagioni* is a project realised during the four seasons of 1996. It consists of four parts, each of which is named after the season in which it was realised. Each part features a member of the association APSOLUTNO wearing a period costume. The site chosen for this photo-action is the memorial cemetery in Sombor dedicated to partisans who fought in the WWII. The cemetery, with its central monument bearing a pentagram, is located on the estate



belonging to the Orthodox church,  
next to a chapel built in the imitation  
of the Serbian-Moravian style.

The project was re-done in 2002 in the  
neo-Gobelin (petit point) technique.

# + AT THE RUINS OF A TRADE- MARK

Minja Smajić

For many of us that grew up in a socialist country, the term Bauhaus meant something special, and the Bauhaus group has, as a left-wing movement and a style widely accepted by the state, left many traces around us. And now some of my friends and I were on our way to the roots with invitations to the Ostranerie forum at the Bauhaus School in Dessau in our hands. Expectations were high. So I wandered around the school for five days trying to find the spirit of the Bauhaus by testing Marcel Breuer's window mechanism, sitting in his Wassily armchair in a corridor, trying out how well the knobs on the assembly hall doors fitted the concave holes in the wall or admiring the design of the tiny ceiling lamps in the assembly hall itself. Then by taking a walk around the building and back in. But all that I found were traces of a former trade-



mark. The "Bauhaus" style and school were created by a group of strong personalities. By people who had already created their own professional styles, who were already established as architects, artists or designers. They already had their own studios, staff and letterheads. To use the language of the market, they already had their own trademarks. For Walter Gropius, the main creator of the Bauhaus, trademark thinking was nothing new. Between 1908 and 1910, while he was working at Peter Behrens's architecture studio, he was already involved in a project for the German electrical combine AEG that was soon to be recognized as the first application of comprehensive design as a part of company policy. The project included publicity material,



logos, company buildings and product design. He learned how important it was to use company thinking to make the Bauhaus idea work. Gathering around one idea is never a risk-free business. But it is often the only way to create a good basis for big business. Today we are used to seeing the Bauhaus movement as left-wing oriented (what was not left when fascists were on the right?), but its members were completely conscious of the market situation and the need for money and technologies that could make their ideas come to life. Spreading the spirit of the "Bauhaus" philosophy required a certain momentum, and the only way to create this was to integrate their own trademarks into one that had the potential to become stronger than the sum of

its parts. Such a trademark could give them a better position in their attempt to get German industrialists to take them more seriously and develop the technologies that would meet their needs. Today we would call it a merger. Each merger situation is different, but they all have one thing in common: you give something to get something more back. So you create a substance as a sum of intentions, organization, ideas, individual skills and future potentials. The idea of the Bauhaus

proved to be strong enough to keep many skilled artists and craftsmen in work for shorter or longer periods of time under the Bauhaus hat. It was they who created the substance behind the Bauhaus trademark. By doing so, they added value to both the "Bauhaus" trademark and their own, and ensured the future of the Bauhaus ideas through the talents of Herbert Bayer, Marianne Brandt, Marcel Breuer, Gunta Stölzl and many others. The old masters created new ones. And the Bauhaus trademark became more and more valuable. The power of intentions with which the trademark of Bauhaus was loaded was very unusual for that time. The Bauhaus School was thought as the Mercedes of arts and design schools and their products as a milestone of human achieve-



† ment: artefacts the like of which had never been seen. They also understood that just creating a trademark was not enough. It was necessary to make it known to as many people as possible. So there were postcards, posters, products with the Bauhaus logotype on them, buildings as a part of the statement, exhibitions, theatre plays, etc.. The momentum was there and every single artefact was loaded with a message that had a certain power of the new. Everything, even down to the level of a simple snapshot of the school teachers, had become a part of the Bauhaus myth. But when one actor on the market makes big steps forward, the competition sees him as a threat and starts using all possible methods and means to fight back. No wonder that the school was brutally closed down by the fascists, who by then were acting on the same market: the idea market. The ideas of the Bauhaus just did not fit the fascist ideas and were a serious threat to their own trademark - the swastika. I remember that the picture shown here of Wassily and Nina Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Georg Muche and Walter Gropius standing in a corridor of the Bauhaus School in Dessau had a very strong effect on me the first time I saw it. There was a certain power in their body languages. They were obviously very proud of their own creation. It seemed to me like a picture taken on the top of Mount Everest, with their facial expressions

that say "We made it and we are bigger than that." To me and my friends on the spot in Dessau, this was in a way a unique opportunity to reach the top and pin our own flag there. But the only way to get close to the spirit of the Bauhaus was to stick to the myth. To take up the same poses in the same location and take a similar snapshot. The place where we were does not feel like Mount Everest anymore. It is more like Delphi after the Christian destruction, like Pompei or Machu Pichu. The monument is there but the energy and people that created it are gone forever. The trademarks that they had invested in their common vision were too strong to be replaceable. And after that, we went straight to one of the few still living forms of the Bauhaus trademark at "Kebab am Bauhaus" on Walter Gropius Allee, where we could have a meal and watch the school building slowly disappear in the dusk.

#### Sources

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Magdalena Droste, *Bauhaus*, Benedikt Taschen Verlag, 1991.

Jeannine Fiedler and Peter Feierabend, *Baubaus*, Könemann, 1999.

# END OF THE MESSAGE - TOTAL ARCHIVES

project by Darko Fritz. 1995 > 2000

'End of the Message' will start in 1995 and it will be realized in seven phases over a period of five years. For this project I will deploy different technologies of vision, communication and archivizing. The images you are about to see come from my total archive.

[ phase 1 ]

## End of the Message

*site-specific installation*

The entire installation space is enveloped in a convex mirror mounted on the ceiling. Within this setting I engage the communication media of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In juxtaposition to electronic media there is a selection of paintings, sculptures and drawings from the Rijksmuseum Twenthe collection, which mark the end of the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>h</sup>, 18<sup>h</sup> and 19<sup>h</sup> centuries. My choice of art works is prede-

termined by the system of values established throughout art history. There are two parameters: that the artifacts are produced in the last decade of each respective century and that they deal with the most typical motifs of the end of each century.

By means of communication media I try to renegotiate value programming. There are fax-machines which print-out computer graphics three meters long. These typographic images are recordings of a pre-programmed fax-modem transmission which reads: 'NO VALUE', 'VALUE ON' and 'END OF THE MESSAGE'. The thermal fax-paper and thus the image is affected by the quantity of light and the gallery temperature. The messages fade during the exhibition.

The first two elements of the installation are contained in a third element - a close-circuit video-link which means that the gallery is under constant surveillance. The recorded events are displayed simultaneously on the monitor. This set up is used for a period of one month which is the duration of the exhibition. During this time the surveillance system will act as an archive.

'Obsessions: From Wunderkammer to Cyberspace' exhibition, Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede, Netherlands, 1995

+ [ phase 2 ]

### End of the Message - Security Camera

*video - TV programme*

These are the same images but this time they don't depict live action. Recorded events create electronic paths which in turn create a memory of the installation. The installation has thus become an archive which can also be used for anthropometric research. I have in fact used sevenhundredandtwenty hours of surveillance to make a one hour art video. In keeping with conventional video surveillance devices, I use a single camera angle, time-code display and various time compression methods.

Beta SP, 60 min. / PARK 4DTV, Netherlands, 1996  
PARK 4DTV, New York, 2000

[ phase 3 ]

### End of the Message (archives)

*series of photographs- video-stills*

This series of photographs reveal a new level of the surveillance process. They enable us to see that which escapes our perception due to the persistence of vision. This new archive of selected portraits is based on thirty minutes of the surveillance video, compressed into one minute. Each one of the visitors can be traced through his or her time-code of the recording.

'Radical Images' exhibition, Neue Galerie, Austria, 1996

'Radical Images' exhibition, Szombathelyi museum, Hungary, 1996

'Europe > Humanisme' exhibition, Sélestat, France, 1997

'Electronic Landscape', Drewen, Germany, 1997

[ phase 4 ]

### End of the Message - sigurnosna kamera snima! (Security Camera is Recording Now!)

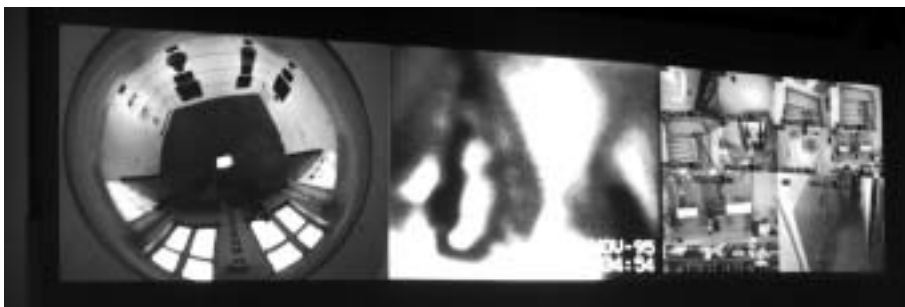
*video installation in public space*

Vesta, the Roman goddess of the hearth, or Vestalinka as she was named by her sculptor Ivan Meštrović in 1917, is guarding my video monitor as well as the bank in Zagreb, Croatia.

The art video which emerged from the staging of the surveillance process in the Rijksmuseum Twenthe is now put on display for the actual surveillance system of the bank.

The title of the installation 'End of the Message - Sigurnosna kamera snima! (Security Camera Is Recording Now!) is not displayed as the title of the site. Instead, I have designed a warning sign to inform the bank clients that they are under video surveillance.

The bank surveillance video is not exhibited at the installation site. Nevertheless, the zone of the visible is defined by the surveillance system. Unlike the museum visitors who could



phase 6, End of the Message (archives - live!)  
 installation view at the BALTIC Centre for  
 Contemporary Art, Gateshead, 2005  
 photo: Sarah Cook

take part in the act of surveillance the  
 bank clients are denied this possibility.

Bank office Oktagon - Privredna banka, 'T.EST'  
 exhibition, Zagreb, Croatia, 1996

[ phase 5 ]

### End of the Message [Bank's Security Camera]

*video - TV programme*

The video editing, which restores continuity to the multimonitored and hence, fragmented space of the bank is performed by the security officers as part of their daily routine.

Here, I provide the possibility of presenting these monitored images to an audience. This electronic archive draws upon a found, ready made system of domination imposed through vision.

Beta SP, 60 min., Art Film

[ phase 6 ]

### End of the Message [archives - live!]

*video and sound installation*

This triple video-projection includes both the museum and the bank surveillance videos. In addition, a still video is introduced in this phase. Time delay caused by the absence of motion, is complemented by projections of images on a large screen. The twelve by three meter screen cannot be taken in from a single focal point.

The last intervention is the process of the sound being doubly displaced from the image: in the first instance it is simultaneously broadcast via the radio, and secondly there is an audio CD.

'Drive-in' Planet Art, Hengelo / radio,  
 Netherlands, 1996

Kapelica gallery, Ljubljana / radio Študent,  
 Slovenia, 1996

'Who by Fire', Institut of Contemporary Art,  
 Dunajvaros, Hungary, 1997

Berlage Institute Amsterdam gallery / 20 hours  
 broadcast by Radio Patapoe, Netherlands, 1999

'Images' - 'Argos' project. Vevey, Swiss, 2000

Miroslav Kraljevi Gallery / radio Student [10  
 hours ambient remix by Wave FM] / Gjuró 2 club

⊕ [drum'n'bass remix by DJ Markan], Zagreb, Croatia, 2000

Audio CD 'End of the Message (archives - live!)'  
60 min. / .rm at the internet

[ phase 7 ]

## End of the Message (Edit Value)

*installation*

This installation consists of the three newly designed fax works which quote the messages from the first phase of the project: NO VALUE, VALUE ON, END OF THE MESSAGE. In the first phase I question the programmed value of the cultural institutions by staging a value programming system. In the last phase, this programming system is decontextualized from its previous site. It folds onto itself infinitely.

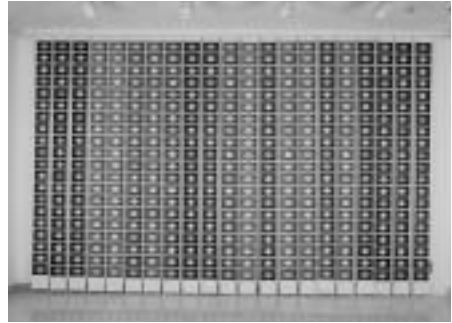
Nova Gallery, Zagreb, Croatia, 1997  
Interstanding 4, Tallin, Estonia, 2001

[ total ]

## End of the Message - total archives

*presentation project*

You have just seen the seven phases of the 'End of the Message' project collected in my total archive. The total archive is a project consisting of a touring exhibition, a printed catalogue, an internet document, a thirteen minute video and finally the text you are reading now.



End of the Message (Edit Value)  
installation with 21 fax prints  
Installation view at Nova Gallery, Zagreb, 1997  
photo: Ozren Drobnjak

The time of the archive, of its filtered production, reception and recollection is now. As I have demonstrated, these sources for preprogramming and reprogramming the archive are open. I have no recollection of this not being the end of the message?

exhibition:  
Brotfabrik Galerie, Berlin, Germany, 1996  
Berlage Institute Amsterdam Gallery, Netherlands, 1999

publication 'Darko Fritz: End of the Message':  
32 pages, texts by Darko Fritz, Leonida Kovač and Inka Schube, 1996

internet document (from 1996):  
<http://members.ams.chello.nl/fritzd/projects/enden-dopen>

The internet document is constantly upgraded and now including audio and video as well. By the way, the subject of an archives was probably the most unpopular subject among net.art community at the time being.

video 'End of the Message - Total Archives':  
Beta SP, 13 min. / .rm at the internet

# SYNDICATE ALBUM SAMPLES FROM THE PHOTO COLLECTION

Andreas Broeckmann

On the following pages I want to present some photographs from the incomplete album of the Syndicate network. The Syndicate was a network of people working in the arts that was created in 1996 to facilitate communication and cooperation between East and West Europe. From the beginning, it was clear that this initiative would be successful when it had made itself obsolete. In this sense, the demise of the Syndicate in 2001 was a timely event, marking the end of the post-Cold War period. Most importantly, the Syndicate organised meetings and stayed in touch through a mailing list on the Internet. (The archive of the list remains online at [www.v2.nl/syndicate](http://www.v2.nl/syndicate) and offers a detailed chronology of the now defunct network.) Since then, the Syndicate list has been replaced by a mailing list called 'Spectre', which continues to operate as an information and communication channel for art and digital culture in Europe.

This photo selection comes from a very limited stock of images. Some Syndicate-related events remained undocumented, while there are probably many photographs in private collections like mine, which would make a proper family album only when taken as a whole. At some point, a historian is going to have a hell of a job trying to construct this album, which - in addition to the events mentioned here - will have to include the meetings in Rotterdam, Liverpool, Stockholm and Venice, the Net.Shops in Linz and Karlsruhe and the Balkania workshop in Helsinki, not to mention Syndicate-related events like Beauty and the East, Virtual Revolutions, Polar Circuit, WRO, VideoMedeja, and many others.

The story of the Syndicate from 1996 to 2001 forms part of the backdrop and cultural context of the work of the association Apsolutno during these years, and the work of aA no doubt contributed to the temporary cultural formation that the Syndicate was.

1. This is in Budapest in a park close to the Art Academy, where Metaforum 3 was organised in October 1996. From left to right you see Vuk Ćosić, Luka Frelj, my back, Igor Marković, Pit Schultz, Benjamin Perasović, Geert Lovink, Tom Bass and Marjan Kokot. Metaforum was much more a Nettime-related event than a Syndicate event [[www.nettime.org](http://www.nettime.org)]. After the founding

1999 APSOLUTNO 0001

# INTERMEZZO

## THE DIARY OF A TOWN

Intermezzo is a collection of sounds recorded on various locations in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, at regular intervals between May 1998 and April 1999. The aim of the project was to capture an authentic yet invisible reality of the life in Novi Sad during one year and to create a specific sound map of the town. In this project, association APSOLUTNO collaborated with Radio 021 (Novi Sad), which broadcast one sound record-

ing each week, followed by information about the time and place of the recording.

The locations selected for this audio documentary represent various aspects of the public space of the town, from more traditional social sites (the town beach, open-air market), to communication hubs (a corner of two streets, a bus stop), social events (the New Year's Eve, a wedding) or events that association APSOLUTNO accidentally witnessed (a car accident, a conversation in a store).

The project was interrupted by the beginning of the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia in March



of the Syndicate in Rotterdam in January 1996 at the end of the Next 5 Minutes Tactical Media conference, Inke Arns and I had organised the first big Syndicate meeting, again in Rotterdam, in the context of the DEAF 96 festival. Forty people came from all over Europe for presentations of media art from Eastern Europe and for a discussion about archives for media art. In Rotterdam, Vuk, Alexej Shulgin and

I also had the idea for the 'Refresh' net-art performance, which we then coordinated for the online event on 6 October. A week later, Vuk brought floppy disks with the first Refresh loop to Budapest. For some metaphysical reason, Kathy Rae Huffman is in none of these photographs, although she was seminal, together with Geert, in creating many of the first nodes in the network that the Syndicate would become.

2. In the summer of 1997 we had an opportunity to organise a workshop at the Hybrid WorkSpace of the documenta X in Kassel. Under the title 'Deep Europe' we discussed, for 10 days, the geography and topology of identities in Europe and how artists deal with them. Most memorable was the Deep Europe Visa Department perform-



1999, two months before its planned completion. Thus, truly important moments in the life of the town were recorded in this Diary.



ance, in which we turned the work-space into a fictional consulate where people could apply for a futile visa by following a long, incomprehensible and irrational bureaucratic process - the queue was long and the whole thing a big success. In the photo you see me with the 'Apsardze' (Albanian for 'guard') badge and the 'd/e' (Deep Europe) logo that Kit Blake designed; Luchezar Boyadjiev and Iliyana Nedko-

va (Illie had organised another big Syndicate meeting in Liverpool in April that year); and I think, in the background, there is Thorsten Schilling with the glasses, and Lisa Haskell.

3. This is outside the National Gallery in Tirana/Albania during the 'Piramedia' trip undertaken by a group of Syndicalists in April 1998 - among them Stephen Kovats, Melentie Pandilovski,





✦ Eric Kluitenberg, Yukiko Shikata, Adele Eisenstein, Diana McCarty, and again Geert, Igor and I. Most of us had first met Edi Muka - the guy in the light blue shirt standing in the middle - at the Syndicate meeting in Rotterdam in September 96, and since then we had been toying with the idea of going to Tirana, one of the few capital cities none of us had ever visited. 1997 was a bad year in Tirana, but things calmed down and we spent a wonderful week with Edi and his friends and students, the group that will probably never be called the VHS - Video Heroi Shkipitari. - In the summer of 2001, Edi curated an exhibition of contemporary Albanian art in Berlin which opened on the night the Syndicate list 'went down'. Edi said he would not have gotten there if it hadn't been for the Syndicate, but maybe the fact that he did get there proved the point of the initiative's obsolescence in its old form.



picture). It is not easy to believe that this photo was taken in the middle of the war - but it does show that even under such difficult external circumstances it was possible to maintain friendships and keep the lines open.

4. In the spring of 1999, NATO bombed Serbia and Kosovo in order to drive Yugoslav forces out of Kosovo. We had been making plans for a Syndicate meeting in Belgrade since the previous autumn, and CyberRex had actually applied for the travel funding from APEXchanges. This meeting was, under the circumstances, organised instead at C3 in Budapest in April and brought together all these people for a long weekend of discussion (only Melentie, who had to leave early, is missing in the



5. Half a year later, we met at the Ostranenie 'finissage' in Dessau/Germany for the presentation of the book 'MediaRevolution', which summarised and documented the whole Ostranenie process. In 1993, 1995 and 1997, Stephen Kovats and his team had organised the media forums that, for many, were a first-time opportunity to encounter media art from different East European countries. The Syndicate meeting at Ostranenie 3 was not very

memorable, just like the one we held at Next 5 Minutes 3 in Amsterdam in February 99, probably because there were many non-Syndicate-members present who felt alienated by the in-crowd of people belonging to the network; the mix between internal discussion and external information just wasn't right. The meetings always worked best in small groups of people who knew one another and each other's work. Good presentations and performances could arise from that, like in Kassel or the 'Partnership for Culture (trademark)', with which we irritated a Stockholm conference on cultural cooperation in the Baltic region early in 1998. - The Ostranenie 'finissage' ended with a big breakfast during which Stephen must have made hundreds of pancakes. At this breakfast table, Bojana Petric and Zoran Pantelic are talking to Wolf Kahlen, and to the left you see Inke Arns (still smoking at that time) and Sandra Kuttner.

6. This is in a bar in Novi Sad where Lisa Haskell (left) and I went with Larisa Blazic, Branka Milicic and - I think he is called Vlad (right) - during a stay in February 2000. You can see us drinking some dangerous local liquor. I flew from Berlin to Budapest and then took the train to Novi Sad where I met up with Lisa, who had been doing a workshop with people in Novi Sad. Because bridges over the Danube had been destroyed, we had to take the bus



to continue our journey to Belgrade - for me the fulfillment of the old promise which had been prevented by the bombings of the previous year.



7. In my story of the Syndicate, this table in the courtyard of the Mexican House in Plovdiv/Bulgaria is the last real-life location. There had been some discussions on the list about the quality and style of discourse; many felt that it was deteriorating. This was a discussion that we had had before - there was always some notorious lurker who would demand that the list should be more like a discussion forum -, but the founders and the administrators had never been as critical about the state of

+ the list as they were now. During the Communication Front workshop in June 2001, we took the opportunity given by the presence of some Syndicalists to discuss the future of the list. At the table, there were only one or two people who had ever been at another Syndicate meeting before; the others were more or less active members of the list. Maybe it was the final de-masking of a myth that we had maintained in self-defence: the Syndicate had stopped being a definable network of people and had become a mailing list, so that it was no longer guided by the rules of empathy and mutual interest, but by the strange communication laws of the Internjet [sic]. No final decision was taken at the time, but only a few weeks later the list blew up in a flame war and remains online in a form that is only a shadow of what it used to be. Anyway, here we have Alexander Gubas (sitting, left), Dimos Dimitriou (sitting, right) and Igor Stepančić (standing, right) on the scene.



8. The picture show ends with this idyllic shot of two sleeping beauties (Stephen Kovats and Geert Lovink) and my wife Sandra armed with her video camera in a park on the outskirts of Tirana where, in April 1998, we were all lost in time and space.

# BLINDFOLD CHESS AND THE WAR IN SERBIA

Ken Goldberg

I first came into contact with Absolutno in January 1999. I was teaching a graduate seminar at the San Francisco Art Institute entitled: "Is Net Art a Legitimate Art Form?" Dragan Miletic signed up for the class. We analyzed a number of key works from that period, in particular work from Olia Lialina and Jodi, who visited from Barcelona during the semester.

The invasion of Kosovo occurred early in the semester, followed by the NATO bombing of Serbia. We talked at length about it in class. Dragan was in regular contact with his colleagues at Absolutno and B92. When Milošević shut down the radio station, we discussed the idea that the Internet link was still active and that xs4all was broadcasting B92's radio feed from Holland: Milošević could not shut down the Internet. But the following week Milošević shut down all Internet servers at B92, at the time the only independent IP in Serbia.



Post-office servers and EUnet continued working during the war, so Dragan was able to upload Absolutno's web site piece by piece over a phone connection and to establish a mirror site in Vienna under Public Netbase ([www.t0.or.at](http://www.t0.or.at)).



The situation for Dragan, no admirer of Milosovic but increasingly agog at US rhetoric, was complex. For the class, it put everything else into context. It was during this period that Dragan presented the Absolutno net work, C-h-e-s-s.net.

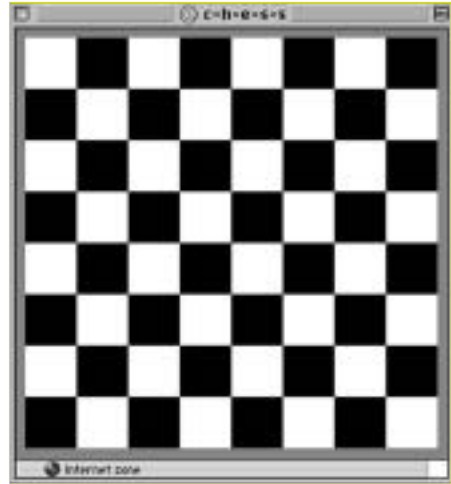
✦ On the screen, a viewer is presented with an empty chessboard. The familiar game pieces can be located and identified only by clicking on the empty squares to reveal hidden hyperlinks. Thus the structure of the game must be built up from memory.

This project is rich in associations. I have always been fascinated by the image of the blindfolded chess master, George Koltanowski, playing 56 simultaneous games by calling out moves to his invisible opponents (he won 50 of the games).

Of course Absolutno is well aware of recent developments in computers and networks. In May 1997, IBM's network of computers called Deep Blue defeated Gary Kasparov with a dramatic victory in Game 6. What is at stake when a computer beats the best human in the game that symbolizes intelligence and strategy?

Any juxtaposition of art and chess brings to mind Marcel Duchamp, who said that "while not all artists are chess players, all chess players are artists." In 1967, Duchamp took the American chess genius Bobby Fischer to a major tournament in Monte Carlo.

Chess has a rich history in Eastern Orthodox countries and in Yugoslavia in particular. In 1992, Fischer came out of his 20-year retirement to play a



rematch with Boris Spassky. The U.S. Treasury Department warned him that he would be violating U.N. sanctions if he played chess in Yugoslavia. Fischer



played anyway. He beat Spassky but now faces 10 years in prison if he returns to the U.S..

Absolutno weaves such associations brilliantly to warn of abstraction and its dangers.

2000 APSOLUTNO 0000

# WE MUST ACCEPT THE UNACCEPTABLE

installation

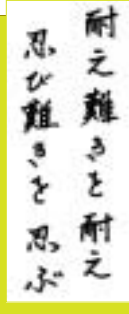
Date: 6 August 2000

Place: Hiroshima, three military warehouses  
that survived the atom bomb explosion in  
1945

Apsolutno marked the buildings as museum  
objects by installing brass plaques with the  
following text:

“We must accept the unacceptable”  
Absolutely real facts; series 0000.

The sentence is taken from Emperor Hirohito’s  
address to the nation upon Japan’s surrender.

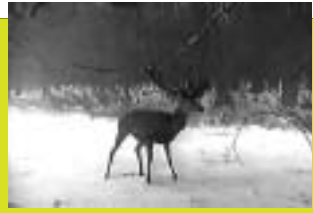


1999 APSOLUTNO 2002

# A.TROPHY

The idea for this piece originated during the 78 days of the NATO operation "Allied Forces" in Yugoslavia in 1999. It features a sequence from Petar Lalovic's documentary "The Last Oasis"<sup>1</sup>, which was shot in the early 80s, in the Baranya County of the former Yugoslavia, now the Republic of Croatia.

<sup>1</sup> Produced by Dunav Film Beograd in 1984.



The film reveals the beauty and diversity in one of the largest wildlife refuges on the Balkan Peninsula, which is endangered by industrial and agricultural development, as well as human disrespect for nature in general. Situated between the rivers Danube and Drava, the Oasis' marshes attract a variety of species, some extinct in the rest of the European Continent. The area, known as *Kopacki rit*, covering 17,770 hectares, was declared a Nature Park in 1967, with an area of 6,234 hectares declared a Special Zoological Reserve in 1969. With great admiration for this small but vibrant ecosystem, director Petar Lalovic explores the Oasis and reminds us of the times when wildlife was thriving in a much larger area of this part of Europe.

Let us consider the events in the Last Oasis when the film was made and the more recent developments. The early 1980s in the Yugoslav political arena were very dynamic and occasionally very eruptive. In May 1980 Marshal Tito died. From today's perspective his death can be seen as a turning point: after years of a relatively comfortable socialist era, Tito's death accelerated the separation of the six Yugoslav republics into five new states. Many see Marshal Tito as the single authority figure that kept post WWII Yugoslavia together. Coincidentally, Tito was an avid hunter who enjoyed this activity in the region where "The Last Oasis" was filmed.

Positioned in the middle of the Balkan Peninsula, on the outskirts of the Iron Curtain, between the communist East



and the capitalist West, Tito's Yugoslavia had a unique position in the global community, a virtual Oasis with its own guiding principle of self-management. Yugoslavia was part neither of the Warsaw Pact nor of NATO. Instead, together with India and Egypt, Yugoslavia initiated the Non Aligned Movement, at a summit in Belgrade, September 1-6, 1961. Thirty-one years later, at the meeting of Ministers of Non-Aligned Countries held in New York on 30 September 1992, it was decided that Yugoslavia cannot participate in the activities of the Movement any longer. Yugoslavia, one of the initiators of the Non Aligned Movement, ended up expelled from the organisation it had founded. In a radical political shift, a socio-political trophy turned into atrophy.

The film-sequence chosen for this piece shows a scene with deer shedding its antlers. This process occurs when the animal is aged and represents a turning point in the animal's life. The animal's pride and symbol of power is about to vanish. At the same time, the animal's life becomes much safer. This event also redefines the value of the antlers. After they are shed, neither hunters nor collectors value them as highly as when taken with the animal's skull. Only a killed animal is potentially a trophy.

A deer hunt may last for days, and we can imagine the hunter's frustration at the sight of deer shedding its antlers. But for the camera and the director, this moment is a real trophy, since it captures an event extremely rarely seen in nature, a moment when everything turns into its opposite.





Obviously, the event itself carries antipodal meanings and the interpretation depends on one's point of view and the given context. In this sense, the title of the installation, a-trophy, suggests certain readings of the image by emphasizing the binary nature of the event beheld in the image (a trophy vs. atrophy). In a specific political and military context, such as the one we started working in on this project,

certain questions arise: what is a trophy and what is atrophy in a wider socio-political sense? The variety of possible interpretations of the image are paralleled by a variety of possible answers to these questions. It is certain, however, that the author of "The Last Oasis" could not predict that this sequence would gain such a rich metaphorical significance and become a trophy of an atrophy.

*ApSolutno fuit hic*





✦ **Andreas Broeckmann** / Berlin

Studied art history, sociology and media studies and worked as a project manager at V2\_Organisation Rotterdam, Institute for the Unstable Media, from 1995-2000. Since the autumn of 2000 he has been the Artistic Director of transmediale - International media art festival Berlin. He is a member of the Berlin-based media association mikro, and of the European Cultural Backbone, a network of media centres. In texts and lectures he deals with post-medial practices and the possibilities for a 'machinic' aesthetics of media art.

**C5** / San Francisco

An ensemble of artists and academics personified in a corporate identity-body enabling valued signification of experimental research and development endeavors. C5 is a Limited Liability Company as artwork. C5 devises theoretical models, analysis and tactical implementations of Theory as Product. Experiments, analysis models, prototypes and simulations serve to define C5 theory as an information commodity. C5 projects have been presented at Siggraph, the Technology Museum of Innovation in San Jose, the San Jose Museum of Art, The Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, New Langton Arts in San Francisco, Transmediale in Berlin, The Ars Electronica Festival in Linz, Austria, etc.

**Inke Arns** / Berlin

Independent media art curator. Since October 2000 she is a lecturer at the Institute of Slavic Literatures and Cultures at the Humboldt University, Berlin, Germany. Her curatorial work includes exhibitions, festivals and conferences on international media art and culture, like OSTranenie 93 at the Bauhaus Dessau; Minima Media: Medienbiennale Leipzig 1994, Leipzig; discord. sabotage of realities, Hamburg 1996/97; body of the message, Berlin 1998; and update 2.0, ZKM Karlsruhe for the Goethe-Institute, 2000. She is a founding member of

the translocal Syndicate network (\*1996) <<http://www.v2.nl/syndicate>> and of the Berlin-based „mikro“ association for the advancement of media cultures (\*1998) <<http://www.mikro.org>>. She has published widely on issues of media culture and art in international magazines and books. Her book "Net Cultures" (Rotbuch Verlag) was published in spring 2001.

Her PhD dissertation, titled "Objects in the Mirror may be Closer Than They Appear: The Avant-garde in the Rear View Mirror", researches a paradigmatic shift in the way artists reflect the historical avant-garde in visual and media art projects of the 1980s and 1990s in (ex-)Yugoslavia and Russia. Currently she is the art director of Hartware, Dortmund.

**jodi** / Barcelona

Pioneers of net.art

**Ken Goldberg** / San Francisco

Artist, Associate Professor of Engineering, and founder of the Art, Technology, and Culture Colloquium at UC Berkeley. He is editor of The Robot in the Garden: Telerobotics and Telepresence in the Age of the Internet (MIT Press, 2000).

**Konrad Becker** / Vienna

Hypermedia researcher/developer, interdisciplinary event and content designer. He was chairman of the Institute for New Culture Technologies, Director of Public Netbase/ t0, a Culture and Youth oriented Center for New Communication Technologies and founder of World-Information.Org, a cultural intelligence provider. Konrad Becker has been active in electronic media as artist, curator, organiser and producer. Numerous intermedia productions, exhibitions, and eventdesigns for international festivals and institutions, TV-stations, museums and galleries since 1979. Publication of mediaworks, electronic audiovisual products and theoretical

texts. He is member of various boards and committees on Information- and Communication Technologies and culture.

#### R. LeE Montgomery / Oakland

Received a filmmaking degree from Bard College in 1991.

Since then he has occupied himself as a commercial video editor, effects supervisor, game designer, web designer, 3D sound designer for a location based digital entertainment platform, artist and teacher. In 1999 Lee received an MFA degree from the San Francisco Art Institute where he began work on the web site [www.norwoodfunk.com](http://www.norwoodfunk.com). R. Lee Montgomery continues his involvement with the [www.norwoodfunk.com](http://www.norwoodfunk.com) web site, and also contributes to the sites [www.conceptualart.org](http://www.conceptualart.org) and [www.lee-web.net](http://www.lee-web.net). Most recently, R. Lee Montgomery has lectured in the art department at UC Santa Cruz, and currently serves as the lead multimedia instructor at Diablo Valley College in Northern California. Currently he is working on a project NPR- Neighborhood Public Radio is an independent, artist-run radio project committed to providing an alternative media platform for artists, activists, musicians, and community members.

#### Marina Gržinić Mauhler / Ljubljana

is doctor of philosophy and works as researcher at the Institute of Philosophy at the ZRC SAZU (Scientific and Research Center of the Slovenian Academy of Science and Art) in Ljubljana. She also works as a freelance media theorist, art critic and curator. Marina Grzinic has been involved with video art since 1982. In collaboration with Aina Šmid she has produced more than 30 video art projects, a short film, numerous video and media installations, Internet websites and an interactive CD-ROM (ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany). Marina Grzinic has published hundreds of articles and essays and 7



books. Her last book is FICTION RECONSTRUCTED EASTERN EUROPE, POST-SOCIALISM and THE RETRO-AVANT-GARDE (Vienna: Edition SELENE in collaboration with Springerin, Vienna, 2000; [www.amazon.de](http://www.amazon.de)). Currently she teaches at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna.

✦ **Nina Czegledy** / Toronto / Budapest

An independent media artist, curator and writer, Nina Czegledy divides her time between Canada and Europe. Digitized Bodies, Virtual Spectacles is the most recent collaborative project conceptualized and developed by Czegledy, presents a series of on-line and on-site events. The Aurora Universalis collaboration with Stephen Kovats initiated in 1997, is in progress. The Crossing Over Workshop/Media Residency project co-curated with Iliyana Nedkova has been realized in Sofia (Bulgaria96 and 97), Novi Sad (Yugoslavia98), Ljubljana (Slovenia99), Columbus, Ohio (2000) and Liverpool, UK (2001).

Interactive digital works: Aurora, Aurora CD ROM (Virtual Revolutions project),the Digitized Bodies CD ROM (in collaboration with C3 and Ars Wonderland Studio, Budapest), Triptych (in progress) and theY2KMonsters interactive installation.

Czegledy has published both internationally and in her native Hungary.

Most recent publications in: Reframing Consciousness ed. R. Ascott (1999 and 2000), Mediated Bodies with Andre P.Czegledy In: The body caught in the computer intestines and beyond. Ed.Marina Grzinic and Adele Eisenstein (2000), Digitized Bodies Virtual Spectacles with Andre P.Czegledy (2000, Futures, UK). Transcribing the Body, with Andre P. Czegledy (Anomalies, in press), Media Revolution ed. Stephen Kovats (1999)

**PLATFORM** / London

Since 1984 PLATFORM has established itself as one of Europe's leading exponents of social practice art, combining the talents of artists, scientists, activists and ecologists to work across disciplines on issues of social and environmental justice. PLATFORM works in and about London and the tidal Thames Valley, but its methodologies and strategies travel far beyond Britain's capital.

In 1992 PLATFORM won the Time Out Award for 'Still Waters' which proposed as common sense the recovery of the buried rivers of London. Growing out of the success of 'Still Waters' the 'Delta' project, involved sculpture, music, performance and the installation of a micro-hydro turbine in London's river Wandle, and has in turn led to the creation of the largest community renewable energy scheme in an urban context in the UK - RENU. Another strand of PLATFORM's work began in 1993 with 'Homeland', a commission from London International Festival of Theatre, which investigated Londoners' links to producers through international trade systems. Since 1996 it has been working on its most ambitious, multi-faceted project to date - '90% CRUDE' - a ten-year process focussing on the culture and impact of Transnational Corporations and specifically their dependency on oil, with particular reference to London and Londoners. PLATFORM are: Dan Gretton (writer, activist), James Marriott (sculptor, naturalist) and Jane Trowell (art teacher, musician).

**RTMark** / United States / Paris

Began as a funding system for the creative subversion of corporate culture. Its core is a Web-based database of aesthetic and social interventions in public spaces. These projects are displayed at <http://rtmark.com/funds.html> in hopes of soliciting funding that will allow or reward their accomplishment.

RTMark uses corporate public relations techniques to publicize its successful projects to millions of people. RTMark-sponsored projects containing alternative and blacklisted content regularly receive widespread media coverage and attention in numerous mainstream newspapers and magazines, and on mainstream television and radio stations, both in the United States and abroad. A constantly updated archive is located at <http://rtmark.com/allpress.html>.

The core aim of RTMark is to call attention to the iniquity of the legal rights that corporations have arrogated over the years in the United States and (now increasingly) around the world. RTMark's charter is to popularize these problems and their innumerable ramifications, and, especially, to focus anti-corporate sentiment and activism. We do this both directly—by discussing the issues—and indirectly—by embodying corporate behavior in many of its manifestations. For the most part, we do this because it is effective—corporations use the publicity techniques that they do because they work—but at the same time, we hope to draw attention to the way corporations act within our society... and outside it.

#### Stephen Kovats / Rotterdam

Canadian architect, lived and worked primarily in Dessau, and Berlin, Germany from October 3, 1990, the day of German unification, until Y2K. There he established the Studio Electronic Media Interpretation at the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation, where he initiated and ran numerous international projects in the fields of architecture and electronic media arts including the OSTRANENIE Electronic Media Arts Forum, and the ARCHITONOMY architectural media seminars. He recently produced the publication MEDIA · REVOLUTION and the CD ROM ostranenie 93 95 97, which examine the role played by electronic media art and culture upon the societal transformation process in Central and Eastern Europe. Currently Kovats is international programs developer at V2\_Institute for the Unstable Media in Rotterdam.

#### Vuk Ćosić / Ljubljana

Retired net.artist and ascii artist. Born in Belgrade, Yugoslavia. Currently lives in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Best known as internet art pioneer and author of numerous net.art projects. Lecturer, writer and curator, exhibited, published and curated inter-



nationally. Co founder of Nettime, Syndicate, 7-11 and Ljubljana Digital Media Lab. Most notable venues include: Venice Bienale, Walker Center, Minneapolis; Postmasters, NYC; Kunsthalle, Vienna; Stedelijk, Amsterdam; LAMoCA, LA; ICA, London; ZKM, Karlsruhe; Beaubourg, Paris;

#### Geert Lovink / Amsterdam

Media theorist, net critic and activist. Studied political science at the University of Amsterdam. Member of Adilkno, the Foundation for the Advancement of Illegal Knowledge, a free association of media-related intellectuals established in 1983 (Agentur Bilwet auf Deutsch). Most of the texts of Adilkno in Dutch, German and English can be found at



† <http://thing.desk.nl/bilwet>. He was the co-organizer of conferences such as Wetware (1991), Next Five Minutes 1-3 (93-96-99) <http://www.n5m.org>, Metaforum 1-3 (Budapest 94-96) <http://www.mrf.hu>, Ars Electronica (Linz, 1996/98) <http://www.aec.at> and Interface 3 (Hamburg 95). In 1995, together with Pit Schultz, he founded the international 'nettime' circle <http://www.net-time.org> which is both a mailinglist (in English, Dutch, French, Spanish/Portuguese, Romanian and Chinese), a series of meetings and publications such as zkp 1-4, 'Netzkritik' (ID-Archiv, 1997, in German) and 'Readme!' (Autonomie, 1998). A recent conference he organized was Tulipomania Dotcom conference, which took place in Amsterdam, June 2000, focussing on a critique of the New Economy [www.balie.nl/tulipomania](http://www.balie.nl/tulipomania). In early 2001 he co-founded [www.fibreulture.org](http://www.fibreulture.org), a forum for Australian Internet research and culture which has its first publication out, launched at the first fibreulture meeting in Melbourne (December 2001).

#### Lev Manovich / San Diego

an artist, a theorist and a critic of new media. He is the author of *The Language of New Media* (The MIT Press, 2000), *Tekstura: Russian Essays on Visual Culture* (Chicago University Press, 1993) as well as over fifty articles which have been translated into many languages and published in 20 countries. Manovich was born in Moscow, where he studied fine arts, architecture and computer science. He moved to New York in 1981, receiving an M.A. in Cognitive Science (NYU, 1988) and a Ph.D. in Visual and Cultural Studies from University of Rochester [1993]. His Ph.D. dissertation *The Engineering of Vision from Constructivism to Computers* traces the origins of computer media, relating it to the avant-garde of the 1920s.

Manovich has been working with computer media as an artist, computer animator, design-

er, and programmer since since 1984. His art projects include little movies, the first digital film project designed for the Web (1994-) and Freud-Lissitzky Navigator (1999-), a conceptual software for navigating twentieth century history.

He has been teaching digital art and theory of new media since 1992 at a number of Universities in the U.S. and Europe. Currently he teaches at the Visual Arts Department, University of California, San Diego.

#### Minja Smajić / Stockholm

Art Director. Studied economy, graphic design and visual communication. His field is branding and corporate identity. He is running Jobbajobba design agency and teaches at Berhgs School of Communication in Stockholm. His work can be seen at [www.jobbajobba.com](http://www.jobbajobba.com)

#### Darko Fritz / Amsterdam / Zagreb

Media artist, curator and graphic designer. Studied architecture and art media. He works with reproductive media and technology in artistic and cultural contexts. He has been working with video since 1988 (as tv virus). First computer-generated environment in 1988. Digital photography since 1990. First attempt to webcast 1994. Founding member of (all) artist groups cathedral (1988), the imitation of life studio (1987 - 1990), young Croatian electronic films (1991) and the future state of Balkania (1998). Involved in syndicate network. He curated exhibitions 'Culture of graphic design in the Netherlands' (1999), 'I am still alive' (Internet art and computer art from the sixties, 2000), club.nl (art and art networks from the Netherlands, 2000) and 'lights from Zagreb' (interactive light installations, 2001).

#### Gebhard Sengmüller / Vienna

Artist who is working with electronic media, video, computer. He is a founding member of

media artgroup Pyramedia from Vienna, member of hilus intermediale projektforschung and inventor of Vinylvideo.

**Dejan Sretenović** / Belgrade

Art theoretician and chief curator of the Museum of Contemporary Arts in Belgrade, associate of the School of History and Theory of Arts of the Centre of Contemporary Arts in Belgrade and editor-in-chief of the Virco library. Curated a number of exhibitions in Yugoslavia. Published 'Art in Yugoslavia 1992 – 1995'.

**Aleksandar Bošković** / Belgrade

has degrees from the university of Belgrade and Tulane university. ph.d. in social anthropology (university of st. andrews, st. andrews, scotland, uk, 1997). ph.d. thesis topic: "constructing gender in contemporary anthropology". He taught at the universities of st andrews (scotland), belgrade (yugoslavia), ljubljana (slovenia) and brasilia (brazil), before embarking for the university of the witwatersrand in johannesburg (south africa), where he is currently a visiting research fellow. being a multiple personality (gemini), aleksandar is also a visiting professor in the post-graduate (ma) program in anthropology at the faculty for social sciences (fdv), university of ljubljana, slovenia. his most recent book project is a collection of the cae texts (digitalni partizani), published in belgrade in early october 2000. other book projects in work include a textbook on the anthropology of religion, a book on cyber theory (co-edited, with Igor Marković), writings on blade runner and an edited volume about paul virilio.

**Florian Schneider** / Munich

Writer, filmmaker and net activist. He concentrates on how new communication and migration regimes are being attacked and undermined by critics of borders and networks.

Schneider is one of the initiators of the No One is Illegal campaign and one of the founders of the noborder network and the Europe-wide internet platform, D-A-S-H. In 2001 he designed and directed the make world festival in Munich, and organised metabolics, a series of lectures on net art and net culture. He has also worked on several documentaries for the German-French television station, Arte, including What's to be done? which looks at contemporary activism. He also writes for major German newspapers, magazines, journals and handbooks.

Currently teaches theory at the art academy in Trondheim.

**Rossitza Daskalova** / 1967 - 2003

Bulgarian and Canadian art historian, journalist and writer. Born in Sofia in 1967, died in Montreal in 2003. Was an art and film critic in Montreal since 1990. She contributed to journals such as Parachute, C-Magazine, ETC Montréal, Vie des arts, Espace and E-Magazine of the International Center for Contemporary Arts(CAC). For three years she produced a TV program "Window on Bulgaria" for the CJNT-TV, Montreal multilingual tv station.

# + ASSOCIATION APSOLUTNO

The association APSOLUTNO was founded in 1993 in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, as a collective of four members (Zoran Pantelić, Dragan Rakić, Bojana Petrić and Dragan Miletić (from 1995 till 2001)). The works of the association are signed APSOLUTNO, without any reference to personal names.

The production of APSOLUTNO started in the field of fine arts. Gradually, it has developed to include cultural, social and political aspects. Today APSOLUTNO is a conceptual collective, dealing with interdisciplinary research into reality and media pluralism. In the last few years, APSOLUTNO focuses on re-conceptualising its earlier works in new contexts and in different media.

<http://www.apsolutno.org>  
apsolutno@apsolutno.org

## Zoran Pantelić

Artist, producer, and media activist. He holds BA and MA degrees from the Academy of Fine Arts Novi Sad as well as a certificate from the School of Media Education 2001, Ljubljana, Slovenia.

In 2000 he founded kuda.org – new media center, in Novi Sad, which is the first of its kind in Serbia and Montenegro <[www.kuda.org](http://www.kuda.org)>. He curated (2001) the new media section of Belgrade October Exhibition, and co-curated New Media Festival in Belgrade. In 2003 he co-produced the World-Information.Org exhibition [www.world-information.org](http://www.world-information.org), an international project by Public Netbase, Vienna, in Novi Sad and Belgrade. In 2004 he organized Trans European Picnic in Novi Sad, [www.transeuropicnic.org](http://www.transeuropicnic.org), which was co-produced with V2 Institute from Rotterdam. Since



2005 he is teaching Media communication at the Academy of Fine Arts in Novi Sad.

## Dragan Rakić

Artist and art educator. Studied at the School for painting and icon conservation in Belgrade and at the Academy of Fine Arts in Novi Sad, where he now teaches. Solo exhibitions of installations and paintings. Consultant for computer graphic design.

## Bojana Petrić

Researcher and educator in the field of linguistics. She earned her Ph.D. degree in applied linguistics from ELTE University in Budapest. She is a contributing editor of "Misao", an educational journal in Novi Sad. In 2005 she edited a special issue titled "History teaching in transition". She publishes on issues such as writer identity, interdisciplinarity, and citation practices in writing. She has taught in educational programmes in Russia, Turkey, Hungary and Serbia. Currently she is writing a book about educational reform.

## Dragan Miletić

Artist. Studied at the Academy of Fine Arts in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia. Dragan was a member of the art association Apsolutno between 1995 – 2000. From 1998 he lives in San Francisco, California. Dragan works as a Web Coordinator at the San Francisco Art Institute, where he received his MFA in 2000. He now works as a member of the artistic collective Bull.Miletic.

## PRESENTATIONS / EXHIBITIONS / LECTURES (SELECTION):

1996

**Belgrade**, Cinema Rex, production B92, Yu  
**Novi Sad**, Yugoslavia, "Zlatno oko" Gallery  
**Belgrade**, SKC, production SKC Novi Sad  
**Schratzenberg**, Austria, Art Symposium  
**Mostar**, BH, 4.LUR, production Fund for an  
Open Society

**Belgrade**, Yugoslavia, OFF BITEF, Belgrade  
International Teatre Festival

**Budapest**, Hungary, C3, Center for Culture and  
Communication

**Belgrade**, Yugoslavia, Cinema Rex, production  
B92

1997

**Belgrade**, Yu, Centre for Contemporary  
Art-Bgd, Anual Exhibition,

**Belgrade**, Yugoslavia, 44th Festival of short and  
documentary film

**Gent**, Belgium, Experimental Intermedia

**Dortmund**, Germany, MeX, Kunstlerhaus

**Sarajevo**, Bosnia-Herzegovina, 5.LUR, produc-  
tion Fund for an Open Society

**Schratzenberg**, Austria, Art Symposium,  
Flaschenpost

**Dortmund**, Germany, DASA, Short Cuts: Links  
to the Body

**Somerset**, UK, Nettlecombe Studios, Shave  
Farm '97

**Kwangju**, South Korea, '97 Kwangju Biennale

**Graz**, Austria, Steirischen Herbst '97, Neue  
Galerie Graz: 2000 minus 3, ArtSpace plus  
Interface

**Cape Town**, South Africa, Michaelis Art Galery

**Belgrade**, Cinema Rex, 21. oktobar, The  
Absolute Sale, presentation and talk, Yu

**Sombor**, Yu, Gallery "Laza Kostić" Culture  
Centre, 25. oktobar

**Ljubljana**, Slovenia, S.O.U., Gallery Kapelica

**Dessau**, Germany, Bauhaus, The International  
Electronic Media Forum OSTranenie 97



1998

**Belgrade**, Yugoslavia, Galerija kulturnog centra  
Beograda

**Budapest**, Hungary, Film Center "Balazs Bela  
Studio"- Cinema Toldi

**Graz**, Austria, "Flaschenpost", Forum Stadtpark

**Sofia**, Bulgaria, Presentation and talk, Gallery of  
Foreign Arts

- Varna**, Bulgaria, Presentation of selected projects, TED Gallery  
**Seattle**, USA, "Independent Exposure", Seattle Independent Film & Video Consortium  
**Plovdiv**, Bulgaria, VodeoArt, 11-17 May  
**Schrattenberg**, Austria, Intermedia Symposium, "2000"  
**London**, England, UK, Backspace  
**Liverpool - Manchester**, UK, ISEA98, Revolution98  
**Berlin**, Germany, Galeria i.f.a., "Focus Belgrad"  
**London**, UK, Pandaemonium Festival, London's Festival of the Moving Image, 16 -23 Oct.  
**Novi Sad**, Yugoslavia, VideoMedeja Summit, video festival  
**Pula**, Croatia, INK Theater, Presentation of selected projects (slides and video)  
**St. Petersburg**, Russia, "Balkan answer", The festival of video art from former Yu
- 1999
- Berlin**, Germany, "Transmediale 99", international media festival  
**Belgrade**, Yugoslavia, TGH, CD Rom project presentation, Cinema Rex, B92  
**Paris**, France, VIA #5, Art Festival  
**Barcelona**, Spain, MECAD, 2nd International Show of Art in CD-ROM  
**Budapest**, Hungary, Cinema Toldi, ex-YU video  
**Wroclaw**, Poland, WRO99 - Media Art Biennale, Presentation,  
**Graz**, Austria, Raum fur Kunst, "Stop the War"  
**Paris**, France, "Off Tracks International Meetings"(Berlin-Paris) Video festival  
**Berlin**, Germany, Shift Gallery – "shift-tage"  
**Graz**, Austria, Forum Stadtpark – exhibition/ symposium "Stirring, streaming, dreaming"  
**Vienna**, Austria, Basis Wien  
**Vienna**, Austria, Stop the Violence, Akademie der bildenden Kunste / MAK, Austria  
**Munich**, MEDIENFORUM, Literaturhaus, Salvatorplatz 1, Germany
- Belgrade**, Reality Check, CCA Belgrade & Free B92  
**San Francisco**, New Langton Arts, CA, USA  
**Berlin**, Germany, VEAG Medien Facade, Video installation  
**Sofia**, Bulgaria, Video Festival „Videoarcheology“  
**Helsinki**, Finland, Kiasma Museum, presentation and talk  
**Dessau**, Germany, Bauhaus Dessau, „Apsolutno - Interventions In The Urban Space“  
**Dessau**, Germany, Bauhaus Dessau, „The Semiotics of Confusion“  
**Berlin**, Germany, Mikro.lounge #19, WMF Club  
**Rotterdam**, Netherlands, WHIPPET - Deunde Fudation  
**Maastricht**, Netherlands, Jan van Eyck Academie - "en/passant 99" programme  
**Vienna**, Austria, "Aspect - Positions" Palais Liechtenstein,  
**Belgrade**, Yugoslavia, Center for Contemporary Arts - Belgrade, Video Art in Serbia
- 2000
- Belgrade**, Yugoslavia, "Insomnia" Gallery SULUJ, Center for Contemporary Arts  
**Berlin**, Germany, "Transmediale 2000", international media festival  
**Belgrade**, Yugoslavia, 47th Festival of short and documentary film, Serbeiko, video  
**Enschede**, The Netherlands, Dutch Art Institute  
**Oberhausen**, Germany, 46. International Short Film Festival  
**Amsterdam**, The Netherlands, Montevideo - Nederlands Instituut voor Mediakunst, Media Art in Serbia  
**London**, UK, The Lux Gallery, "Tech\_nicks" [POST\_WAR\_POST\_CARDS] yugoslav new media  
**Ljubljana**, Slovenia, Skuc Gallery, "MSE - Project" [ Meaddle-South-East Project, Rotor-Graz]

**Hiroshima**, Japan, Creative Union Hiroshima,  
 “Hiroshima Art Document 2000”  
**San Francisco**, CA, USA, New Fangle 2000,  
 Herbst International Exhibition Hall  
**Belgrade**, Yugoslavia, School for theory and  
 history of art, CCAB  
**Warsaw**, Poland, Zacheta Gallery, “Inside/Out-  
 side”  
**Basel**, Switzerland, VIPER - International  
 Festival for Film Video and New Media  
**Vienna**, Austria, Technical Museum,  
 “Dialogführung”, World-Information.Org,  
 Public Netbase  
**Tirana**, Albania, Piramyde and ICC, In/Out

## 2001

**Munich**, Germany, ‘inSITEout’ lothringer 13/  
 halle Gallery,  
**Pluschow / Rostock**, Germany, ‘Willing  
 Refugees’ Schloss Pluschow / Kunsthalle  
 Rostock  
**Umag**, Croatia, ‘Zero\_Absolute\_The Real’,  
 Gallery Marino Cettina, Curated by Marina  
 Gržinić  
**Roma**, Italy, Tribu’ dell’arte, Galleria Comunale  
 d’Arte Moderna e Contemporanea di Roma  
**Belgrade**, Yugoslavia, BELEF, DYSFUNCTIONAL  
 PLACES / DISPLACED FUNCTIONALITIES  
**Barcelona**, Spain, Macba, Museum of Contem-  
 porary Art of Barcelona  
**Graz**, Forum Stadtpark Gallery, Steirische  
 herbst: The Real, the desperate, the absolute  
**Vienna**, Austria, TELE[VISIONS], Kunsthalle  
 Wien, October 2001 - January 2002  
**Munich**, Germany, Make-World Festival,  
 Muffat Halle  
**Skopje**, Macedonia, UNDERSTANDING THE  
 BALKANS, Center for Contemporary Art

## 2002

**Herceg Novi**, Montenegro, Salon 2002  
**Torino**, Italia, BigTorino 2002, Biennale  
**Frankfurt**, Germany, Manifesta 4,  
**Zagreb**, Croatia, Urbani Festival, BLOK  
**Chicago**, IL, US, LIPA - Links For International  
 Promotion of the Arts  
**Montreal**, Quebec, Canada, Champ Libre -  
 Cite des Ondes  
**Novi Sad**, Serbia, MSLU, ‘Centralnoevropski  
 aspekti vojvodjanskih avangardi 1920-2000’  
**Belgrade**, Serbia, ‘Absolute Report’, Museum  
 of Contemporary Art, Belgrade  
**Nizhniy Novgorod**, Russia, PolyScreen, Media-  
 ArtLab-Moskva, CCA Nizhniy Novgorod

## 2003

**Skopje**, Macedonia, Center for Contemporary  
 Art  
**Novi Sad / Beograd**, Serbia, Word-Inforna-  
 tion.Org, Public Netbase t0  
**Vienna**, Austria, Attack! Art and War in the  
 Media Age, Kunsthalle Wien

## 2004

**Novi Sad**, Serbia, Zlatno Oko Gallery  
**Belgrade**, Belgrade, Academy of Fine Arts  
**Vienna**, Austria, Secession, Belgrade Art Inc./  
 kuda.org  
**New York**, US, Artist Space

## 2005

**Amsterdam**, Netherlands, “Radio Days”,  
 Gallery De Appel  
**Dortmund**, Germany, Phoenix Halle Dortmund  
**Beograd**, Serbia, Muzej savremene umetnosti  
 Beograd

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The Absolute Report



A springerin book

Edited by association Apsolutno

Proofreading:  
Tim Jones

Design and Cover:  
Irena Woelle

Photos:  
Apsolutno archive and authors archive

Print:  
Stane Peklaj, Ljubljana, SI

ISBN 3-86588-288-9

Published by

Revolver

Archiv für aktuelle Kunst  
Fahrgasse 23

D - 60311 Frankfurt am Main  
Germany

Tel.: +49 (0)69 44 63 62

Fax: +49 (0)69 94 41 24 51

[www.revolver-books.de](http://www.revolver-books.de)

We gratefully acknowledge the financial support of KulturKontakt Wien and the help of Annemarie Türk

Printed in the EU

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