

AD: Jenny, I will begin with a question you posed to Peter Weibel, Director of ZKM in Germany, just before the break of the new millennium. You asked him if Net Art is the new avant-garde. How would you answer this question today? Given the radical transformation of the social fabric (not necessarily of our own choosing, to remember Carl Marx), in what ways are we still in need of a model of action and aesthetic production such as the avant-garde?

JM: There is no question that the Internet provided ample opportunity for artists to challenge the very notion of how art is produced by building ideas and models for the distribution of information and knowledge. The Internet created a platform of networked strategies as a social interface and a new generation of artists collaborated to bring together art and Internet together. But what can art and the Internet achieve together?

I became very interested in this issue when developing my net-based project *SmellBytes* at the Banff Center in Canada. The idea was to create Chris.053—a knowbot, an intelligent agent who, driven by his insatiable olfactory desires, ‘sniffs’ out the Internet. Chris.053 is quite literally on a hunt for peoples’ smells: grabbing their images from CU See Me chat rooms and inviting visitors to the site to submit an image of themselves, he analyses their facial structures and breaks them down into bits and bytes—algorithms corresponding to smells. The website consists of an odor lab, a stinky gallery, as well as a fan club where people can participate in the analysis of their face and determination of their smell by submitting their images and sending ‘smell cards’ to friends. It was a strange coming together of body and machine, one that also deflected attention from the purely visual. Critics stressed that ‘the artist quite literally vanishes behind and from her work, while her creation, an intelligent being, takes on its own life’. (<http://smellbytes.banff.org>). Crucially, when working on *SmellBytes* I had the opportunity to meet, and discuss the ideas of, major Net artists and collectives, often identified as a ‘heroic netscape utopia’ because of their effort to redefine the Internet in terms of a radical tool for disseminating an oppositional art.

Although I see no point in being nostalgic about that period, I must say that in recent years we witness the paradox of Internet art hype being embraced by mainstream museums, art institutions and commercial galleries. This has led to a shift in the collective aesthetics and radical politics of the medium. Most cultural institutions will only support network_art_activism that deals with techno-formalism or meets the demands of software economy. Radical work that disturbs or critiques the frame of digital liberation or the essentialist belief in technology is often relegated to ‘documentation’. A good example is the FLOOD NET action against the Mexican government –a creative hack by the Digital Zapatistas, a collective known as Electronic Disobedience Theatre which has never been staged live in a museum or gallery.

For this reason I would be very careful about using the term 'avant-garde' today in describing Net Art. The inherited notion of a singular oppositional avant-garde (in a sense of solidarity or radical artistic practice) serves little purpose in the art enterprise of capitalist society today. The same as 'revolution', the term has been reduced to a marketing tool. Projects that re-route code into political content are not supported by the 'digitally correct' market. This hardly means that there are not art collectives (such as Critical Art Assemble, etoy, Knowbotic Research, EDT, Mongrel, and 'hacktivists') who challenge the status quo. Although it is important to me that the notion of Net Art and the digital domain supports a range of tactics and aesthetics the question is whether the discourse around Net Art can move beyond a concern with process and aesthetics to look for a distributed political or social critique that comes from *each project per se*.

AD: What do you think is your most successful project so far? What are your criteria for considering an art project successful? How would you describe the process of your work?

JM: I am inclined to say that I consider all my projects successful albeit for different reasons. First of all it is important to me that my projects are successful *research* projects. It is important that each project helps to fertilize and critically inform the other. I also consider them successful when they get shown at many places and the audience has been actively engaged and participated in the process and in the environment these projects inhabit. Subsequent dialogue and sometimes controversy are key aspects of a work's success in my opinion. To be successful in the art market has always been demanding and I do not think that many artists who do the kind of work I do have had financial success by selling their work.

In more general terms what I strive to achieve is a critical presentation of a range of relationships between concrete, mental, virtual and imaginary spaces and narratives which every project creates while encompassing themes of surveillance, public/private, pop culture, pleasure, subjectivity and performative agency. I consider Relational Aesthetics an emergent 'event' in my work, one that requires audience participation. It involves the displacement or replacement of forms as suggestive of our ability to invent and transform.

A good example of my art process is my 2003-4 work *Flying Spy Potatoes: Acting on the City*. This was a public art project articulated through public intervention, wireless video recordings, singing performances and an installation. The urban space of New York City played a vital role. I spent considerable time during 2003 intervening and recording through the vertical vision of the bird's eye view of a wireless cam mounted and hidden in an oversize silver helium balloon which I was holding at the end of a 30 foot tether while walking through

portals and platforms in New York City. The latter (for example, railway stations) have been under strict security and surveillance control as Hard Targets for terrorism.

To realise this work I had to design a wireless interface. The visual data almost organically captured from the wireless camera/balloon was processed and transmitted live through a wireless radio receiver/transmitter and finally recorded on a battery-operated cam recorder. The interface generated a new aesthetic dimension of the database and the visualization of the everyday density of urban environments of transition into continuously emergent electromagnetic effects, painterly abstractions, unpredictable repetitions, non-linear representations, sounds and improvisations, views and human motion patterns seen from above. The performative aspect of the intervention, resting on the use of a complex technology interface, was conceived as a tool for a self-organizing form of human agency and control of the city. Ultimately it challenges the representational conventions of uncanny surveillance imagery while the loss of artist/director behind the camera's eye brings into question the subjective nature of the medium of video as a document of reality and gives rise to emergent narrative forms. But equally important for the successful realisation of this work were the diverse sources I drew on. The balloon/cam recalls the reconnaissance technologies and tactics of 18th and 19th century military strategies. The performative urban interventions draw on Guy Debord's theory of the Derive and other Situationist writings on the city. The exploratory art practice in the film and video works of Steina and Woody Valsuka, Nam June Paik and the films of Charlie Chaplin provided inspirational visual references.

AD: In an interview with curator Katerina Gregos you mentioned that you are interested also in the 'sexual and interpersonal dynamics of surveillance aesthetics'. Could you comment on this further?

JM: Wireless technologies create an odd combination of distance and intimacy which seems to be immensely seductive to use as a tool in my work. Today we witness the rise of the live image and communication distributed over a many-to-many broadcasting system. This greatly challenges the supposed 'realism' of photography and video. The aesthetic impact of live and processed images, and how it can be deconstructed and used to create new narrative forms, are very prominent issues which I always aim to address with my projects.

A key issue is how such technologies define subjectivity under their targeted vision when sexuality is a fundamental part of subjectivity. Under the ritual of control such technologies proclaim security for all while they infuse public space with voyeuristic and sado-masochistic desires and pleasures. Obviously we have to rethink of the erotic very broadly, in terms of the sensual qualities of a redefined voyeuristic experience. What happens when a young woman, Jenny Cam, has a web cam permanently switched on in her bedroom? The pleasure principle of the voyeur to see everything and the pleasure principle

of the exhibitionist to show everything have been boosted by technologies that invite us to *enjoy* surveillance from every possible angle. Examples of this genre of sexual and interpersonal surveillance originate in the media and reality shows but also in art, if we think of Andy Warhol's *Outer and Inner Space* (1965), *Screen Test* (1965) and *A Novel* (1968), which exploit the lives of the members of his factory community, and Nam June Paik's *Good Morning, Mr. Orwell* (1984), a live satellite program to appear on public television.

AD. Despite the fact that you are based in New York, you have on several occasions been invited to represent Greece in international exhibition contexts, most recently in ARCO 2004 in Madrid –which this year highlighted Greek art. My question is two-fold. First, did you show work that you or the curators perceived as representing something specific about Greece? If not, to what extent do you think art shows based on national subjects are still relevant? Secondly, does this mean that you are perceived as a Greek artist of the 'diaspora' and what does the term mean to you?

JM: Defining my 'Greekness' as an artist is an unavoidable dilemma, which I carry with me in New York City and the many other cities I have worked in the last ten years. Whether I consider myself a Greek artist, or a Greek-American artist, or most recently a Balkan artist, or where do I feel I belong, are questions posed in most discussion around the exhibitions I participate. Posed by curators and critics alike, such questions reflect the requirement of a culture: to belong or not. Yet I still have no idea where I belong! At the same time I am not stepping away from the literacies that come to me by birth and education as this would amount to a betrayal of my cultural memory. To give one example, it is the memory of the public space in Athens as one where citizens negotiated their relationship with fear (despite or because of the memory of the 1968-1974 dictatorship) that I often contrast with the reality of the gated gardens of New York, where people need to have the key to get close to nature. If anything, I see my un-homeness or in-betweenness as a privilege which informs my interest in invention and intervention, and which goes beyond the stereotype and norms of what kind of art I should be making as a Greek born female subject. Generally I retain the personal but eschew the anecdotal and folklore by placing my discourse on a hopefully universal intellectual context.

As I am writing this I am invited to participate in the group show 'Any Place Any' opening on May 22, 2004 at The Macedonian Museum of Contemporary Art in Thessaloniki as part of the Cultural Olympics. I am showing 'Translocal/Camp in my Tent', a series of public interventions which started in 1996 and continued till 2001. I pitched my tent in cities (ranging from Mexico City to Ramallah and Rotterdam) where public place engages cultural memory in contrast to cities where public space is structured and conditioned by the flows of tourisms. Each intervention resulted in a lot of agitation and was mediated through a series of

linguistic confrontations, exchanges of hospitality, controversies between myself and the locals -and sometimes the police. It is the issues raised by a project like this that make it relevant to the Greek context at present.

Overall I think that art exhibitions with 'ethnic' themes, or orchestrated around national subjects, are tricky as representations of the local and require rigorous re-conceptualisation. I'm interested in the ways that institutions--and curators--can and should lend themselves to being rebellious in their choices but doing this requires an extraordinarily delicate balance, which may be gotten 'wrong' as often as it is pulled off. 'Diaspora' is a very hyped term and one associated with the notion of the 'nomad'. Yet the kind of art production that requires the artist to move from place to place to produce her work can be associated with site specificity and the geography where the work materialises rather than the nationality of the artist. And these are the conditions under which I perceive myself as an artist of the 'diaspora'.

AD: Do you think that current globalization processes justify the continuous use of terms such as 'diaspora' or are we in need of revising such identity terms? What is potentially worrying is that there is developing a two-tier international culture: part of it (immigrant workers, refugees and generally less privileged social subjects often without access to technology) will carry on falling under the category of the 'diaspora' whereas rising cultural elites, working simultaneously across different countries and continents, are already on another plane where new terms apply. Do you think this is the case? And if so, can art, especially new, radical hi-tech art, achieve an intervention, given that 'international' artists are often part of the new cultural elites in the making?

JM: I think artists have always been under the category of 'diaspora' whereas rising cultural elites, as you say, have the privilege of working simultaneously in many places without feeling they are crossing borders. The global capital of the art system has supported this by creating a continuous flow of cultural tourisms worldwide (through Biennials, art fairs, etc). More often than not the usual suspects of the cultural elites colonise such spaces.

In my opinion neither the traditional art system nor high tech art will be able to counter such developments. What I suggest is the practicing of a utopian urbanism which reconstitutes social and local relationships and exchanges between communities and artists. If the reaction to globalisation is a reconfigured identity-quest then the need for identity should be politically reinterpreted as a constructive energy fostering the growth of a 'place consciousness', as put by Becatinni. This consciousness must be based on the acceptance of specific socio cultural attributes of each group and involve sectors of the economy that

develop through the network of diverse groups to disrupt the exploitation mechanisms of national and international capitalism.

AD: In the early 1980s, just as you were moving to New York, Donna Haraway's Cyborg Manifesto claimed a particular link between women and technology. Over twenty years on, how would you describe women's relationship to technology? Has the Cyborg been a dangerous myth in that it proposes an unrealisable meltdown of conventional feminine identities? Third World women's relationship to technology is necessarily different to that of First World women, and even within the First World it is women who are often under the line of poverty.

JM: Based on my observations and experiences as a female artist and art faculty member at Cooper Union in New York, there is a lot more work to be done to change the structures of hierarchy defining the electronic world. Most faculty members at new technology departments, as well as in other departments, are male and also fewer female artists seem to be interested in technology. On top of that women's equal access to computer literacy, equipment and other expensive technological apparatus has not been achieved. The euphoric promises about new technologies are promoted by the market and global capital. As a result the gap between first and third worlds with regard access to technology and polarization of resources is still a sad reality.

I have been fascinated by computer games and the intricate ways the Internet challenges traditional gender identities but computers cannot represent human subjectivity and the flesh body of what it feels to be human, and to carry the burden of female cultural history, and to respond to the physical environment of other gendered human beings. However there is much about cyberfeminism (of which many versions currently exist) which I have learned through FACES, the Old Boys network and the all-woman collective Gender Changers whose work with underprivileged women I deeply admire.

AD: Tell us about your recent project entitled 'Hackers: The Art of Abstraction'. What has your involvement with hacktivism offered you as a contemporary gendered subject? Also where do the majority of women hacktivists come from –geographically?

JM: The term 'hacktivism' describes the combining of traditional methods of political protest with the technological knowledge of computer hacking. Hacktivism also has a broader meaning, one drawing on an important legacy of conceptual artists who have always been interested in the politics of distribution and display as well as creativity. *Hackers: The Art of Abstraction* was organized in collaboration with Berta Sichel, curator of Film and Video Department at Reina Sofia in Madrid. The connection between 'hackers' and 'artists' was

inspired by McKenzie Wark's 'Hackers Manifesto', where he argues that 'all intellectual creators are 'hackers''. We screened videos and films, made by filmmakers, grass root groups, hacktivists, artists, collectives and journalists, some of which were never seen before. There was a parallel series of discussions, presentations and performances. The aim was to create a platform, instead of showing my own work, and offer the public a very substantial overview of the subject of hacktivism through the fictional/documentary narrative of film and video and through a variety of voices and works not directly connected with computers.

The idea for the project began to take shape two years ago when I attended the H2K2 hacking conference in New York City at H2K2. I watched films made by activists and hackers that uncovered some realities of the hacker culture, which contradicted how the Hollywood movie industry and the authorities almost always portrays hackers – as terrorists (especially post-9/11). For me it was vital to use the popular language of cinema to bring into the public arena the complex social and political issues surrounding hacking, information and security. I did extensive research on the subject of 'hacktivism' and art during my residency at the Media Centre of Art and Design (MECAD) in Barcelona in 2001. My involvement with 'hacktivists' gave me an ideological positioning and empowered me to work against the masculinist digital domain as a platform where resistance could be articulated in and through art.

But in general hacking is associated with computer skills and virtuosity in ways that reflect an all male cyber-culture, an underground society that often has the misogynistic stink of a high school boys locker room. British sociologist and author of *Hackers: Crime in the Digital Sublime* Paul Taylor also argues in his book that it has been very difficult to find women hackers. That has been my experience too. The ones we know of seem to be the exception to the rule. I am thinking of Carmin Karasic (her real name). Or Blueberry and a woman who goes by the name Natasha Grigori (both of whom are involved with anti-child pornography campaigns). Rena Tangens and Cornelia Sollfrank are both from Germany. Sollfrank's topic has been art and hacking and in her video *Notes from the Electronic Underground* talks with Clara G. Sopht, the reflective and unpredictable hacker at the Berlin Convention 1999.

AD: With very few exceptions, Greek women artists are largely 'invisible' outside Greece, even in oppositional discourses such as western feminism. Why do you think this is the case?

JM: This is a very tricky question because I do not live in Greece and have never been part of the feminist discourse in Greece. I would speculate that the reason for this invisibility is due to the fact that the feminist discourse of the past three decades has not been addressed

in Greece *consciously* and through co-ordinated effort -neither by artists and curators nor by art historians. To be honest you are the first Greek art historian I know who has any idea about, and showed interest in, Greek women's art, and especially new media, from this perspective. The problem is that Greek women artists have worked in isolation. Very few of them, and only very recently, have been able to show their work outside Greece.

AD: Would you ever return to work in Greece?

JM: Greece is a country with many ideas but it seems that only one can be realized at a time. The memory of Greek antiquity has been a euphoric reference in the country's cultural endeavours. A member of the EU for over twenty years, Greece can no longer be perceived as a homogeneous culture since it receives a great number of immigrants from Albania and Eastern Europe, the Philippines and the Arab countries. Greek people, who have traditionally seen themselves as very hospitable, have had to confront the racism in them and this was the social reality of the 1990s. In the last two years, and in the wake of the Olympics, Greece has supposedly experienced a flourishing economic prosperity that has allowed for a series of cultural events including international exhibitions. Yet this cultural hype operates on a very superficial level and there seems to be no support from museums, galleries, the Ministry of Culture for an extension and opening of the debates in the years to come. Meeting Greek artists and curators has been a rewarding experience but it is frustrating to witness the absence of engaged discourse -especially with regard to new media. I have come to realise that although I travel to Greece often in the course of the year I always come back to New York City.

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