

TELECOMMUNICATION-PERFORMANCE "MEDIA GAMES" IN THE KUNSTHAUS ZURICH

In July 1982 The German video-artist Bernd Kracke, Fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge/USA has realized in the Kunsthaus Zürich a telecommunication-performance with the title "MEDIA GAMES". His assistant was Hanspeter Ammann, video-artist in Zurich. The performance combined in a college live action, closed-circuit-video, preproduced video-material and live image-processing via telecommunication. The live action in Zurich was recorded simultaneously with a video-camera and was mixed with pre-produced video-images on the video-projection screen.

During the performance the artist established a live telecommunication link with the MIT at Cambridge, USA, to increase the dimensions of his performance electronically. The Slow-Scanning, chosen on this occasion, is normally used for industrial, economical and military purposes. The advantage of the system is that it is very cheap. Because it is possible to translate images into sequences of sounds (digitalisation) which are transmitted over a standard telephone line.

Artists today are interested in using these technical innovations as tools for their artistic experiments and expressions. During the telecommunication-performance in the Kunsthaus an image was taken by a video-camera and then frozen as a still-frame which was translated into sound and transmitted over a telephone line to Lee Silverman of the MIT at Cambridge and to Brian Raila at Somerville. The resolution of the transmitted images depends on the transmission time: low resolution graphic image can be transmitted in 8 seconds, the transmission of higher resolution images in black and white requires up to 60 seconds. In the case of our performance we transmitted images every 45 seconds. Each grey level corresponds to a certain sound. (In the video-tape of our performance you can hear the transmission sounds). Certain interruptions in the transmission result from the noise in the telephone line.

The partners in Cambridge and Somerville received the signals through their telephone which was connected to a slow-scan transceiver. This transceiver transformed the audio signals back into a video image which was then displayed on a monitor. The scanning time again was 45 seconds per image, and the picture was a freeze frame. In the case of "Media Games" the received images at MIT were restaured in the computer which enabled the artist to transform the pictures with computer graphic programs. For instance it was possible combine two different pictures into one, to enlarge certain areas of image or to add type to the pictures and retransmit them to Zurich. The communication process enabled the partners in Zurich, Cambridge and Somerville to develop some kind of question and answer situation. For example we transmitted from Zurich the picture of the world football championship just running in the Swiss Television, and we received back the answer of a big, single football! The transformed images were received and mixed in Zurich with the other video sources and the video-projection. The performance in the Kunsthaus was an example for the use of technical innovations which are originally designed for different purposes, as means for artistic expressions and experiments.

The physical stage presence of the performer was transcended into the immaterial reality of the electronic media through the integral use of transmission tools. The transition of the live performance via closed circuit-images to prerecorded video-material happened in front of the audience in Zurich, where as the telecommunication link demonstrated the possibilities of influencing events at different places separated by time and space. Our imagination is challenged by new dimensions of communication and perception.

We remember the famous word of the "Global village" by Marshall McLuhan.

Ursula Perucchi
30.7.1984

MULTI-CHANNEL IDENTITY

What is more difficult than to talk about changes in times of change - and is not the epistemology of our century permeated by concepts of change. The surrealists were among the first to show that our knowledge of the world is just a drop of grease floating on a boiling subconscious. We cling to our conceptions, which are not more than a freeze frame of the infinite tape that is stopped every now and then to throw out images of continuity. As a matter of fact, we are afraid of changes which we anxiously avoid. Even the most experimental artists and the most caustic critiques are hardly ever destructive enough. Not to look out for signposts of endurance and recognition in a universe of infernal parasitism. So big is the fear that we rather take for granted the assumption that the media transfer information like an armoured car-carries banknotes, without doing damage to the sign value. But as silently as the value of the banknotes changes even in the best-guarded safe information changes. Passions turn into misunderstanding on their satellite-transmitted odyssey. TV-stations are defended against unauthorized intruders like banks, which keep the images of the thieves; hundreds of engineers are busy eliminating any possible distortion.

Frankly, we would not need a video-vanguard, were we capable to do away with all these secret services of distrust, were we capable to watch a TV-program the way we watch experimental videos. Who keeps us from switching between French, Italian, Swiss and German channels, to program our own exploration of the electronic image? Why don't we break out into laughter, watching the nightly newsshow? This is not a question of technology, it is not a question of different standards, say, between Secam and Pal. It might be a question of buttons available to be pushed. But these standards have its source in the restriction imposed upon our imagination, which limits our perception to national boundaries, to traditional semiotic strongholds. We would well be able to expose ourselves to all the different informations as we confront ourselves to multi-channel installation. It is not a question of technological capabilities, whether or not and which kind of innovations are carried through, but of priorities determined by an imminent inhibition of imagery within the media itself.

We are not educated or trained to believe our eyes. We believe, what we read and follow the track of the TV-programs, the narration of the script, the teletype lines of the newscast. We are forced to believe that we know what we see, and that we do not see, what we do not know. We prefer to see pictures, before we get to the images: recognition ranges before exploration. Even before we fall victim to, let us say, an internationalized data system that places each and every one of us under control, we already are intimidated by the inhibition of imagery: we are intimidated by our fear to lose ourselves, and this fear is the very first step of depersonalization.