

Telecommunication-Performance "MEDIA GAMES" in the Kunsthaus Zürich

In July 1982 The German video-artist Bernd Kracke, Fellow at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge/USA has realized in the Kunsthaus Zurich a telecommunication-performance with the title "MEDIA GAMES" . His assistant was Hanspeter Ammann, video-artist in Zurich. The performance combined in a collage 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 preproduced 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 sounds 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 to combine two different pictures into one, to enlarge certain areas of images 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 Kunsthhaus 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, whereas 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.

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