



Review: [untitled]

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The International "Ost-Ranenie" Festival

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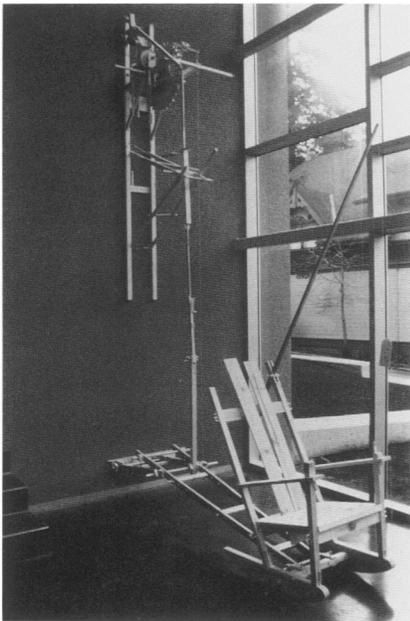
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one would dare. This invitation to participate introduced an interactive theme evident in Jim Campbell's neighboring installation.

Jim Campbell's *Shadow (for Heisenberg)* was the most sophisticated high-tech spectacle in the exhibition. Conceptually, this work illustrates Heisenberg's uncertainty principle [1], which states that nothing can be accurately measured and that the element introduced in measurement affects the measurement itself. Aesthetically, Campbell's work grapples with interactivity in a unique way.

Perhaps because Campbell's piece was included in this milieu, it donned an artistic luster that might not be evident in the context of a more high-tech arena. But here, instead of being displayed as an object, it was dropped into its own cubicle as an installation, and the lack of relationship to open space

tarnished its aesthetic potential. If situated openly in the gallery, *Shadow* might have been more successful as a self-contained sculpture.

The viewer sees a clear box in which a small Buddha resides. Campbell describes his selection as "almost a cliché, but it works in terms of the piece being about not seeing what you want to see" [2]. As the viewer approaches the work, a list screen gradually obscures it, preventing the viewer from getting a closer look. This kind of interactivity contrasts with most other interactive work, where viewer/participants can control what they wish to see.

Black-and-white images were projected onto the wall from the far end of the box. These ectoplasmic projections comprised changing, irregular forms that dwarfishly reflected the viewer's feverish attempts to look into the box. If these reflections were large enough to engulf the space and therefore emphasize the spectator's search, the total effect might have been more dynamic.

On the other hand, Louis deSoto offered a video of television static in an installation perfectly scaled to its enclosed space. He says that it is "based on a simple media phenomenon" [3]. I interpret this work as pure audiovisual abstraction. Or, taking my view a step further to enrich the experience, I could alternately view the piece conceptually as either interventions from outer space (as deSoto suggests) or an animated version of the quintessential minimalist art of stripes across a canvas. DeSoto's piece calls to mind a number of contemporary artists such as early Frank Stella, Brice Marden or Agnes Martin.

A more temporal piece, but one that contributes dramatically to the overall character of the exhibit, was John

Roloff's *Rotting Flame*. This towering construction, a treelike form of steel and real oranges, protruded horizontally from a wall. As a complement, rekindling the flamelike form of the tree, an adjacent videotape displayed images of fire through which scrolled a visual mantra of the names of physiologically active chemical compounds.

Gail Wight broadened the scientific context of the exhibit with her *Somatology Blisters* (Fig. 2), a series of eye droppers and test tubes labeled and filled with bluish liquid; the test tubes were secured on Q panels and arranged in a grid. This imaginative spreadsheet of neurotransmitters offered a simple device for stimulating our central nervous system. "Extreme nostalgia," "hysteria," "ambivalence," "conscious dream state" and "terror" were some of the conditions listed on the test tube labels. Visually eye-catching but inaccessible, the installation design made it extremely difficult for the art "pilgrim" to "mount the steps" and read the work. I was barely able to decipher the printed words half-hidden and buried upside-down in the solutions. Her natural science emulation piece, *History of Wishing*, also hard to reach, prompted two observations: (1) Is this another kind of interactivity? and (2) Why does labor-intensive graphic artwork induce tedium while arduous high-tech projects produce magical wonderment?

In this exhibition, fantasy, playfulness, humor, scale, variety, color, language and psychology were used to manipulate the technological and scientific information toward an aesthetic validity.

References

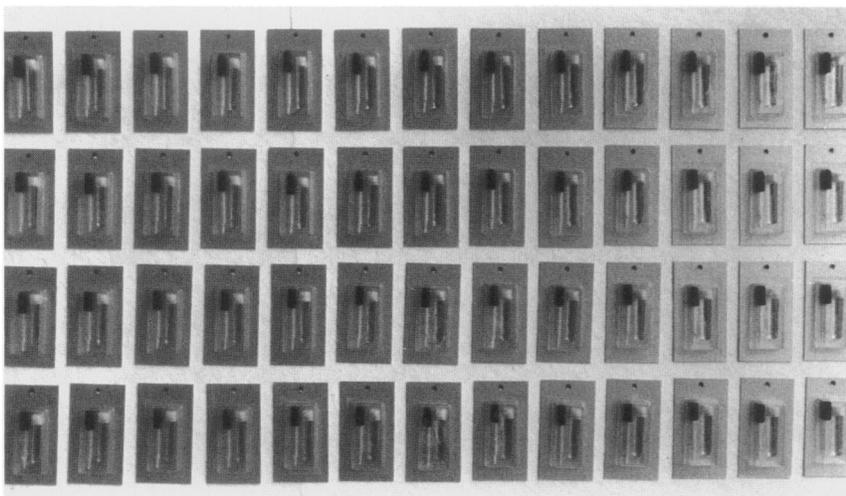
1. Artist's discussion with Steven Jenkins, *Artweek* (17 February 1994).
2. Jenkins [1].
3. Artist's exhibition statement.

FESTIVAL

THE INTERNATIONAL "OST-RANENIE" FESTIVAL

Reviewed by Bulat M. Galejev, "Prometei," Kazan State Technical University—Academy of Sciences of Tatarstan, K. Marks Str., 10, Kazan 420111, Russia.

The first international video festival to be held in a territory of the former Ger-



man Democratic Republic, took place in November 1993 in the city of Dessau. The festival was produced under the aegis of—and, in fact, in the building of—the Bauhaus (the art school founded by Gropius, now under restoration). The festival's initiators and organizers were Stephen Kovats and Inke Arns. The name "Ost-ranenie" is derived from the Russian word "ostraneniye", which means "to make strange."

I have participated in many international video festivals, and was truly astonished at how politicized this particular festival's program was. There were many interesting video installations, experimental videos and films analyzed through video documentaries, as well as a light-musical production (which I presented). Given this variety, it was surprising that all seemed to express the social and political cataclysms experienced by Eastern countries and Russia during the past few years. To speak more precisely, this festival was a video-requiem for communism and for the Soviet Union as a great empire.

Some films reminded me of "dances on the tombs," but, as a whole, the parade of visual documents seemed fixed on presenting an image of a communist monster with an inherently evil, deadening process. Though it was difficult for me, as a representative of Russia, to witness our former Soviet bloc neighbors exulting about their liberation from Moscow's rule, I should acknowledge that the works exhibiting the most talent were indeed presented by our neighbors: Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and Poland, most notably.

Russian films from Moscow and St. Petersburg seemed to feature Russia's masochistic character (though this is really only my personal opinion). These films were amusing, for the most part, transfixing the audience with fantastic stories about the total and consuming passion of Russians with various unorthodox diversions. I am happy to say that these depictions of Russian life struck me as entirely fictitious, though indeed our lives as a whole are not very joyful now, to say the least.

I appreciated the films by M. Grzinic (of Slovenia), R. Robakowsky and G. Krolikevich (of Poland). Rather than using highly technical shifts in their work, these filmmakers employed elementary techniques (shooting at slow speed, incorporating still photographs, and so on). However, each technique helped to emphasize very precise thoughts. I was impressed especially by

one of Krolikevich's films, *The Scythians*. Its opening sequence is assembled from old Soviet newsreel scenes—tractors moving across a field, tanks on the Red Square, "Katyusha" multi-rail rocket launchers sparking, and a rocket's grand salute blazing across the Moscow sky. In the second part of the film, tanks and tractors move forwards and backwards, and fiery missiles return back into the muzzles of cannons. In the last scene of the film, a fireworks salute sparkling in the sky unfolds slowly until it is drawn into the earth, and the audience faces a dark screen. Russia is kaput! This is a very sad picture.

Russia is very much alive, in reality. The fact that this film (and this review) was conceived and written in one of the distant Russian cities is certainly proof. The organizers of "Ost-ranenie" promised to make this an annual festival. I hope that Russia will be presented more broadly and more fairly in future events. We have many "strange" and interesting artists in Russia.

SEMINAR

THE MODERN TECHNOLOGY OF COMMUNICATION (THE HUMANITARIAN ASPECTS OF TELECOMMUNICATION)

Reviewed by Bulat M. Galejev, "Prometei," Kazan State Technical University—Academy of Sciences of Tatarstan, K. Marks Str, 10, Kazan 420111, Russia.

A seminar entitled "The Modern Technology of Communication (The Humanitarian Aspects of Telecommunication)" was held at the Central Cinema House in Moscow, 17–19 March 1994. The meeting was organized by the New Screen Technologies Association of the Russian Filmmakers' Union. The following topics were discussed at the meeting:

- Modern telecommunications: telephone networks, video computer terminals, cable and interactive television (what more? what next?)
- Modern telecommunications as a "Gordian knot" of human culture and technology
- The globalization of telecommunications: from communism to communalism?
- The communicative phenomena of the "global village" and "metaprehistoric culture": new values and codes, goals and motiva-

tions, ideologies and lifestyles

- The creative essence of telecommunicative products
- The social and cultural markets of communication: the first steps toward actuality
- The first teleconferences held in foreign countries to discuss issues surrounding modern art, information exchanges through electronic mail communication and other perspectives on communication.

A forum entitled "Searching for a Third Reality" was held at the seminar on the last day. This was a presentation of various creative groups engaged in the development of new technologies in art and art education. The groups involved included the Great Association of St. Petersburg; the groups "Pilot," "Big Stroll" and "TV-Gallery" from Moscow; the Art Laboratory for New Media, the Laboratory for Art-Psychotherapy and the Termen Center of the Moscow Conservatory, all from Moscow; and "Prometei," from Kazan. The works created by these groups were demonstrated in the exhibition, to which Muscovites were invited. The exhibition provoked great interest among members of the audience.

This forum completed a discussion of similar events held last year at the Graphikon Festival (St. Petersburg, September 1993) and the Anigraph Festival (Moscow, May 1993). It also set forth plans for the new Anigraph 1994 Festival, as well as a computer forum to be organized by the Great Association of St. Petersburg.

The meeting revealed a powerful rise of interest in new technologies in Russia over the last 3 years. Dozens of new groups have appeared, mainly consisting of creative teams of young people engaged in computer and video art. Many exhibitions and festivals have been held during this period, and regular TV programming on this theme, now in its second year, has been produced by a Russian channel. Participants in the meeting decided to entrust the coordination and connection with other countries to the newly created Screen Arts Association. The concept of the necessity of a common publication in Russian devoted to new technologies was also expressed. I informed the gathering of the forthcoming special issue of *Leonardo* on "Art and Technology in the Former Soviet Union" (Volume 27, No. 5) and proposed a broadening of attempts to publish such collaborative international editions.