ArtGenda 2000

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The topic of ArtGenda 2000, rather loosely formulated as 'young artists reflect their visions of the city, as a phenomenon, as an urban space, as an artists' playground', would satisfy both a diligent student of a design college and a thorough futurist. It allows for manipulation with utopian images of social town planning and eschatological pictures of megalopolises' decay and death.

The great Russian futurist V. V. Mayakovsky, impressed by the United States of the 1920s, once wrote the following about the plenitude of possibilities offered by a large city:

'Want to get to the sky -

Take an elevator.

Want to go under the ground -

Take a subway'.

Diligent students and graduates of Baltic states' art colleges have learned to perceive art as development of such subjects as 'loss', 'deficiency', 'death of the author', and thus a vast majority of them opted for 'a subway', that is conceptualised the city as the underground, the purgatory; they chose a horrifying image described as a 'womb' at the dawn of the industrial urbanisation, no matter which city - Paris, London or St. Petersburg - was being referred to. A considerable part of the catalogue descriptions is devoted to such integral symptoms of the city life as depressions' and psychoses as well as to their contemporary causes - an extremely unnatural life style, perverted values and twisted purposes leading to a frightening emptiness. This problem was studied by Mona Eckhoff Sormo in the 'Paradox' project. 'What is progress really, when our culture is built on this circle of inhumanity? Paradox is about the stress

syndrome of our time in the urban society, the western glory around being forever young, make success, money and at the same time be a calm, wise and harmonic person. The most important ideas in art and philosophy in historic periods have been born when people have spent most of their time simply on existing, meeting and enjoying the art of conversation. In the video work I search for the psychological aspects and experience of stress, and the fact that we are supposed to show nothing but a perfect appearance.'

The most radical interpretation of a city as an anti-utopia was suggested by the Hamburg artists. This is not at all surprising if we take into account the fact that the 20th century has suddenly ended exactly the way it began - with a war in the Balkans. The

ancient European cities that have grown out of Roman or medieval Hanseatic fortresses are about to turn into bunkers - an important architectural invention of the century that has just become the past. The submersion of fortress towers under the ground - this is the finale of contemporary urbanisation, according to the project 'Burn Cities Burn': 'We gonna show you all the beautiful things it's the year of the apocalypse electric suns and urine cocktails shine artificial days of undefined hours wait for us in the bunker. What will happen, when the last battery is gone, the watches stop and we'll forget the difference between the day and the night? How long will the mankind's memory last? People from Hamburg, Stockholm, Berlin and Helsinki build their own personal bunkers. ... While cities are burning outside, the virtual

Copenhagen, Denmark - Sofie Thorsen, Elsebeth Jorgensen, *Just like in a movie (vacant situations)* series of fictious film posters; Bio Rex Cinema, Lasipalatsi Media Center, Helsinki, 2000

glorifies the Lord', that is each breath is not only recorded but seen as a worthwhile phenomenon in and of itself.

In the project 'Sound surveillance cafe', the city noise is recorded onto an audio tape and transferred to another place; this estrangement from a specific situation turns the sound into a symbol of transient time. Thus the answer to the question posed by the Hamburg project - 'For how long does the memory of humanity last' (according to the new urban futurology we should have asked: 'What is the memory capacity?') - is as laconic and aesthetically economical as a Zen-Buddhist parable. There will be enough memory as long as there is someone catching wandering breaths and listening to noises of time. This is the role of artists and audiences who become partners in generating art as collective memory.

The project 'Analogue TV' (Tallinn) also deals with the archive of historical urban memory but only at first sight, as it leads the spectator towards more specific associations, suggesting a discussion on the standard of living, freedom of consumption, transparency of market borders, information control, desire to possess things; in other words, it brings one to the realm of organised leisure and entertainment - the very sphere where city is obviously superior to country and a capitalistic city has advan-

tages that a socialistic does not. The Personage projects 'The art of Selling and Vacant Situations. 'Just like in the movies..' also fall within this class of stories about consumption of standard images. These, however, seem to be secondary while, as far as I am concerned, the latest fashion of discussing 'positioning' is generally and always secondary to a phenomenon or an occurrence of an artwork.

A more ingenuous project 'The Motorised carpet' laying no claim to an intellectual background discovers the essential component of contemporary multimedia art: its genetic connection to the culture of amusement park shows especially popular in the middle and second half of the 19th century. An excellent historical exhibition shown at the Art Museum of Bonn in 1993 was devoted to the numerous entertainment machines displayed in the world exhibitions' pavilions. This kinship might not be acknowledged by multimedia artists themselves, who like to employ the complex contemporary philosophy of art to reinforce their stand; however, the authors of the motorised carpet, just like Candide, disclose the genealogy of what the curators of the 'Alien Intelligence' exhibition at the Kiasma museum attempted to pass off to the audience as sophisticated art this season. The grandmother of the carpet or the Kiasma's talking he-

Gothenburg, Sweden - Jesper Norda (composer), *Dividing screen (coffee box)*, sound installation, Cafe Ekberg, Helsinki, 2000; (in the picture: Trevor Davies Secretary General of ArtGenda network)

ad was 'The Mareorama' which allowed the idlers of the 1860's to experience the unforgettable sensation of the rocking sea[5].

On the whole, the project descriptions betray low concentration of urbanism in the minds of the artists: despite all the dramatic collisions the city is most often presented as a space for tourism (isn't the free trade of images also a sort of tourism - through personae and identifications). This intermediate state of the projects -between raw and boiled, warm and hot - becomes especially evident if one is to compare these fruits of European cultural-tourist thought with some Asian artworks, for instance with the new Hong Kong films, wherein the city is really shown as the environment of intensive division and multiplication of new synthetic beings.[6]

1] City Angel. "My mother was hospitalised and placed in the corridor behind a folding screen for 5 days. When she wanted a cup of coffee and somebody to talk to, nobody had the time. Putting her in the corridor, which is a public space, already broke the limit of privacy, and the care from another person was not there when she needed it. I transfer this story into a wider aspect of urban living to raise the question of our priorities of care." Bjorg Toranger, Bergen.
2) Perhaps this Hamburg project indirectly reflects the experience of installing a Jewish genocide memorial designed by Jochen Gerz. 'On the walls of this memorial people could write their thoughts and reflections on the subject of war, thus generating collective memory. Major part of the inscriptions turned out to be aggressive and anti-Semitic while the memorial, according to the Gerz's idea, was slowly sinking under the
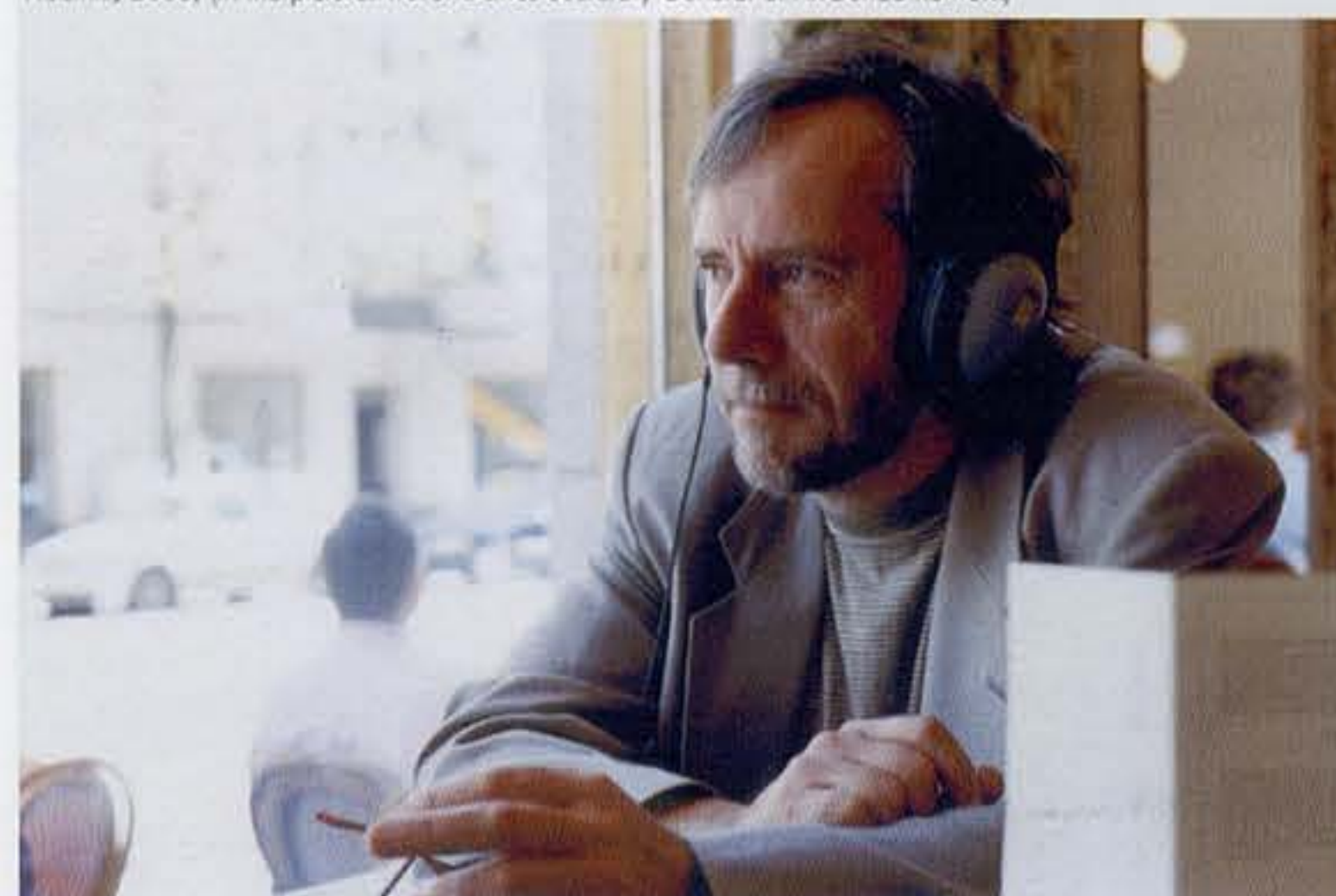
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