

Dimitris Kozaris is an artist. He was born in Athens in 1960 and he lives between Milan and Athens. Having had an interdisciplinary training his interests range from sculpture and architecture to installation and video.

He has exhibited in many international exhibitions such as Aperto (Biennale of Venice, 1993), Dialogues de Paix (Geneva, ONU, 1995), Made in Italy (Geneva/London, 1997), The Edge of Awareness (Geneva, New York, São Paulo, New Delhi, 1998-1999).

He currently teaches at the Accademia di Belle Arti, Bergamo, and is the Coordinator of the Video Department of the Post Graduate Course in Digital Arts at the Athens School of Fine Arts.

CAMERA WORK

Today's meeting will serve as a brief presentation of the videos I have produced over the past 10 years. Let us begin then with the consideration that artistic practice is situated between two poles: *Site* and *Non Site*. *Site* is the second or third dimension — space in the absence of time — where the place is transformed into painting, sculpture, photography or installation. By *Non Site*, I mean the multimedia and audiovisual spaces of communication, where the screen contains the place rather than vice versa. To produce art is to operate between these two poles.

The common denominator between the two is the process of deconstructing the codes of the image. As a result, one thought is counterpoised against another thought, one image against another image, in a process which, historically, is known as metamorphosis.

NON SITE

The media landscape underwent a radical change during the 1980s thanks to the expansion of television. One characteristic of this phenomenon was the abbreviation of perception times, with editing playing an increasingly important role. The result of all this was extra-short commercials, music videos, and, in Italy, programs such as *Blob*. Hand in hand with this a new spatial-temporal philosophy, or *time less* to paraphrase Pistoletto, was created.

It was during this period that I started working on the "Fast Food" videos, which were brief episodes (often no longer than 20 seconds). These were edits of two or three actions that made up incredible micro-stories. The construction of these episodes were based on principles of physics such as chain reaction, force fields and synchronic phenomena. The images used were salvaged from recordings made for television, and partly constructed in the studio. The idea was that the little things in everyday life were necessary to counterbalance the "abstractions" that assail "big issues" once they are given a name (Allan Kaprow).

The *Fast Food* videos are syncopated audiovisual structures; in appearance, their construction is not dissimilar to that of silent movies where texts formed an interval between the filmed sequences in order to render dialogue and narrate. Lasting only a few seconds, the videos contain certain de-structuring characteristics such as comicality, irony, the grotesque, the surprise element, an

so on. Editing is of prime importance here as it provides a meaning not contained in the images themselves, a meaning which ultimately comes about from the relations between the images. The *Fast Food* videos were initially conceived as "bridges" between programs in the normal daily lineup of a television network. In this same spirit, René Claire in the 1920s made *Entr'Acte*, a short film to be shown between the two acts of a theater play. The film made avantgarde cinema history and can be considered as the precursor of these videos. Looking back, after many years, at these *Fast Food* videos, I think of the way art has passed from abstraction (installations in the 80s) to narration (videos in the 90s). The gradual medialization of work by artists of the 90s generation is partly due to the way in which the spread of television in the 60s and 70s indirectly educated these artists' images. One key point which distinguishes artists from the 60s and 70s (who experimented with techniques such as feedback, pixelation, demagnetization and so on) and the 80s (electronic stage sets) is television which brought with it new myths, not as a piece of technology but through its integration with cinema.

FROM ARCHITECTURE TO VIDEO

Earlier, with reference to my own work, I spoke about the crossover from architectonic-type installations to works on video, and the crossover is no coincidence. According to Walter Benjamin, architecture, like cinema, "presents material for collective, simultaneous reception." This is what René Claire meant when he said, "The art closest to cinema is architecture." As such, in normal industrial procedure, making a video or a film is like putting together a building. The architect draws up the plans which he passes on to the land surveyor. The surveyor then carries out the instructions and unless there is someone at the site who tells him to wait or orders any changes, the result is a building of no outstanding interest. I, on the other hand, work with the mentality of a carpenter. Even when I only have a vague idea of what I hope to achieve, I set about hammering and once I have reached a certain point I take a look at what I have done and say to myself: "It would be even better if we moved this wall." In an interview, George Lucas once said: "If you are a good craftsman and you know your craft and feel the structure of what you are constructing, you will end up with a beautiful, very organic building." Nowadays, the personal computer and its attendant technology, the Internet, the worldwide web and virtual reality are capable of externalizing the dreams of the individual. As such, they bring with them a new, radical potential for the democratization of the role of the artist. What I am saying is that they provide everyone not just with a means of production (in the Marxist sense) but also a means of artistic realization. Anyone who owns a computer and the relevant software can put out a book or magazine that will be indistinguishable



UN MOMENTO
DELLA CONFERENZA
DI HAIM STEINBACH / A
MOMENT DURING HAIM
STEINBACH'S LECTURE,
COMO, EX CHIESA DI /
FORMER CHURCH OF
SAN FRANCESCO

ble from one produced by a publishing house. The expansion of the Internet is an extraordinary, entirely new phenomenon.

It was William Gibson who said, "What we are experiencing might, in terms of its cultural importance, be comparable to the founding of the first cities."

THEME-BASED VIDEOS

As well as the Internet and the Worldwide Web, another feature of the new mediascape has been the introduction of digital or theme-based television channels. Here, the spectator finds the screen transformed into a library of films which he can choose to view when he wants, rather than the usual linear set of programs, in other words programs which are developed in time. Some years ago, I came up with *Star Tricks*, my first theme-based video, the theme being science fiction, a genre that appeals to old and young alike.

The video begins with the words, "Where no man has gone before ..." from the celebrated television series *Star Trek*, as a lead-in to the world of sci-fi and fantasy films. It is a universe populated with quack scientists, hi-tech gadgetry that never works, journeys into the impossible, monsters of every description for all seasons, and an endless procession of Martians and UFOs. "Where no man has gone before ... but film has ..." *Star Tricks* is made up of cuts from some 60 films of the genre.

The selection consisted mainly of movies that were particularly spectacular (for their action and special effects), as well as comedies (parody, early TV), cartoons and children's films, television commercials inspired by the genre, and documentaries. The aim was to invent new relations between these units of film which, once assembled, would result in an amazing film.

The work drew heavily on the specifically 60s vision of the future. Even the clips that did not belong directly to the same era were affected by this spirit. The common denominator of the clips was the typically gleeful, ingenuous, infantile vision of the future.

METHODOLOGY

With the "Fast Food" videos, the process started with a sequence-stimulus and concluded with a con/sequence. The title of each clip was based on the action being depicted.

In *Star Tricks*, meanwhile, I was following rules: from movie thrillers (compression of the story), music videos (choreographic editing and the documentary-style narration which, as intervals between the various episodes, serve as an introduction to each act. The result, for me, was a new, experimental method.

EAST/ETHICS

Body & Soul was a video edit for the exhibition *The Edge of Awareness* (to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the World Health Organization). The video is made up of excerpts from over fifty films from western cinema and explores social contradictions linked to the theme of health. The video was made in Milan between November '97 and March '98 at the Via Farini Cultural Association by a workshop of 30 young artists whom I coordinated under the banner of Collective Editors.

As you have seen, the video tackles the theme of health within audiovisual creativity, the human body as a primary value (handicaps, situations of war, the problem of nutrition in impoverished communities, epidemics and so on) in the relation between society (cohabitation, family, the relation with the other etc.) and nature (the ecological crisis, environmental resources, geopolitics, ethnic minorities, and so on).

Using a method that probes between the systemics of the audiovisual image (fiction and documentary) and its syntagmatic implications, the workshop is a collective approach in which the participants choose, analyze and compose cuts from various films.

The aim is to create short and very short episodes based on key- words to invest the themes I mentioned earlier (handicap, war, the environmental crisis and so on), thus providing the video with an infra-narrative structure, a screenplay.

Each film comes with notes in which we single out the narrative areas chosen for the final edit. The objective was to select units of film which, once they were put together, would make up synthetic and essential narrative units.

This whole operation does not claim to be exhaustive as regards the analytical variations on the theme, though it does pave the way for experimentation and an east/ethic reflection not only on the tools of the artistic trade but on the world around us generally.

EPILOGUE

I would like to conclude this meeting by calling to mind the final interview granted by Akira Kurosawa before his death.

To the question: "At your age, what pushes you to continue?"

His reply was: "The day when I have learned to make a film, when I know everything from top to bottom, only then will I stop."