READING THE CITY

Project for the Ogaki Biennale (feb.-march 2004)

Origins

This project is beein studied and prospected since more than 2 years.
In the beginning Eric Maillet, artist and art professor in France, was grant holder for a 6 monthes residence in Villa Kujoyama in Kyoto, Japan. He works mostly with new media and was very interrested in the japanese situation. He discovered the prototypes of the future cellurar phones with videos capabilities and started to think about a possible artistic and experimental use of them.
Then he encountered Hiroshi Yoshioka, philosopher and professor at the Institute for Advanced Media Arts and Sciences (Iamas) in Ogaki, Japan. They both discussed about possibles collaborations based on a mix of art, theory, experimentation about social situations and new medias, and pedagogy.
Then, back in France, Jean-Claude Ruggirello, artist and art professor, proposed to Eric Maillet a pedagogical collaboration in Ecole Superieure des Beaux-Arts de Marseille (EsbaM), in the south of France. Since this time they develop together pedagogical experiences about the use of new media, and Jean-Claude Ruggirello naturally joined the project.

Éric Maillet, artist and art professor, did several stays in Japan after Villa Kujoyama ; recently, he did a public work during the football world cup inYokohama, a talk at Eva-Gifu seminar and a personnal show and screeening at Videoart Center in Tokyo. He has many links with different people in Japan. He makes videos, interactive installations, sound works. He exhibits in France and in foreign countries as well.

Hiroshi Yoshioka is a philosopher from the university, who decided to think about new technologies and their consequences in arts and society. He is now department director in Iamas, and also publisher of the Diatext art magazine, director of the Kyoto Biennale, he publishes and makes conferences in Japan and in foreign countries as well.

Jean-Claude Ruggirello is artist and art professor. He makes videos, video installations and sculptures. He exhibits in France and in foreign countries as well (Germany, Switzerland, USA...).

The project, at the present time is thinked and conducted by E. Maillet and J.C. Ruggirello in France, and H. Yoshioka in Japan.
Because it is a project based on the participation of different people, and because, too, it has a pedagogical dimension, we invited some french and japanese young artists and art students to collaborate. A professionnal programmer, Thierry Pierre, has also been invited to develop and manage the technical part.

Thierry Pierre is a famous programmer and engineer, and an ex-hacker. He created Seduwa, en enterprise specialized in the real-time image processing and analyzing.

The theme

"Reading the structure of a city": about the idea of the urban structure, we can use the semiologic approach as Roland Barthes delimited it from his famous book "Mythologies". Every element can be significant of a referent which is bigger and includes it ; you just have to make a lecture of it and organize its meaning.

30 years later, the architect, urbanist et theorician Rem Koolhas propose a definition of the city that we consider particularly appropriated to Marseille or Ogaki as well. The city is not a chaos, it is simply an entropy of signs ; let's know how to recognize them, read them and organize them, so that we could make sense.
According to these theories, we created the field and defined of our project.

The project

"Reading the city" is about making a specific work in Japan, based on both visual and audio analysis of the city, using a new consumers technology with very strong development in Japan : the video mobile phone. It integrates a video camera and a microphone and allows the video-mail, that is to say the transmission of video and sound to an equivalent appliance or to a server, by way of the cellular network.

A first version of ReadingTheCity has benn realized during the first Kyoto Biennale, october 2003 (refer to the archives on this website).

It is a teamwork.
This second version for the Ogaki Biennale includes 2 students from EsbaM and several young artists and students from Iamas. E. Maillet defined the

basis concept ; Thierry Pierre creates and manages the system ; J.C. Ruggirello, H. Yoshioka and E. Maillet coordonate the project.

The work language is English, nevertheless there will be an edition (printed or electronic form) in French, Japanese and English.

The french group stays 12 days in Japan. The first days are for preparation of the project, the workshop itself will last 5 days, and then the last days will be for promotion of the project and meeting people.

The invited participants are be dispatched in several small teams (with mixed nationalities), each team will be equipped with one of these mobile phones (kindly provided by NTT DoCoMo, sponsor of the project).
They work as a regular mobile phones, but are equipped with a lens and a microphone, and a wide color screen. It is possible to shoot motion pictures and record sound, and then send it to the same kind of mobile phone or on a server.

The teams walk along in Ogaki city and live react, by sending sequences, to different questions (kind of enigmatic statements), received regulary by SMS and related to the lecture of the city. All the teams receive the same question at the same time. There is one new question about every 4 hours, night and day, during one week ; nevertheless the coordonators can send more questions if necessity.

Each team thinks about and answers the questions in its own way and according to its localisation in town, which is freely decided and never fixed.
They can shoot what they want and then upload the sequence to the server where they will be automatically assembled chronologically.
This work is not exactly a "cadavre exquis" (i.e. the surrealistic process)

while each team may, with the use of the phone and at any time, watch at the whole video on the server or communicate with the other teams or the coordinators; hence they can control (or decide not to control) how their sequence will be integrated into the final cut.

J.C. Ruggirello, H. Yoshioka et E. Maillet are in permanent touch with the teams and can interact, guide, help, or provoke some situations.

Spectators can live watch the project while it is realized, on the spot or on the internet.

So, in a way, "Reading the city" can be considered as a video for which the time of the making is the same than the time of the watching.

This project queries the city in all its aspects : visual, social, historical, fictionnal, poetical or political.

Behind this query there is a reappropriation of the consumers new tech in a different way than the official-commercial one : to the ubiquity we prefer the relation to a very space ; to the immediacy we prefer the conscience of the time ; to the futility of the gizmo, we prefer a tool to create relations between people.

Partners and sponsors :

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