

THE OUTSIDER IN AND OUT OF CONTEXT

APPEARANCE AND PRESENCE IN ACTUAL  
AND VIRTUAL SPACES

ANNA TSOULOUFI-LAGIOU MASTER'S THESIS

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MASTER'S THESIS

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## Introduction

The theoretical position of this thesis considers mainly my interest in the results of short periods of residence in foreign countries and cultures. Questioning artistic identity, I will focus on some characteristics which influence some artistic prototypes, and hence of the contemporary art-making. I want to emphasize on the contradictions of different experiences, which influence the life of the contemporary artist/researcher/traveler, created through such circumstances. Therefore, I will indicate a way of how an "outsider" tries to create common ground, or, interact with public space, which becomes his environment. I will give further references to the contemporary language of image representation, which creates a universal, nomadic code of understanding. I will juxtapose and compare the virtual space and the physical place, threading them together, within the context of contemporary, spatial, and international politics.

I will present here my topic taking the position of a specific kind of *outsider* within a social structure and community. I will approach the topic from this point of view, as experienced also through personal anxieties, both existential and materialistic. Being on the move since some years, changing environments constantly, I want to present some thoughts I developed throughout this time. I also see this as a sequel to my previous thesis, "The transformation of the artistic identity in its environmental diversities", a critical reflection on Miwon Kwon's "One Place after Another, Site-Specific Art and locational identity". In this critical position I presented the "RADAR Project-Connecting Europe" as a paradigm.<sup>1</sup>

I will point out some of the areas of interest for my exploration: 1. The passage to post-modernity, 2. Individuality, and subjectivity, 3. Language, image, code and symbolism, as expressed in advertising, 4. Networking, and communication, 5. Art and politics.

In my opinion, not only these topics are directly connected to each another, but also they blend and mingle together. I will focus and give references to specific points representing the subjects of employment, travelling, and education.

I set myself in a place in which all of these things are happening. Positioning myself on a district, I understand I am becoming a member of a global city (Athens, Chicago, Berlin, Venice, Weimar). How is this global city represented and to whom? According to Saskia Sassen "*The global city is a border zone where old spatialities and temporalities of the national and the new ones of the global digital age get engaged*".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For analytical information about the "RADAR Project-Connecting Europe" go to: [www.radarlab.net](http://www.radarlab.net)

<sup>2</sup> *The Global City: The De-nationalizing of Time and Space*, p. 27, Saskia Sassen, *Internationalism and Other, Modernist Myths*, Thesis, Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, (2000) Heft 4/5.

Which roles do institutions, academies, businesses & corporations, and finally, networks & communication systems play in it? To whom, does this *global city* belong? What is the emotional contact created between members of international cultures?

Second, I question what is tourism but an industry for creating cultural economic capital? Does tourism stand as a cultural value? Is tourism an educational practice? What is the role of the international artist in connection to all of these points? Most importantly, how does visual representation function as artistic means of communication and interaction in public space? Is it all influenced by the new global economy, or, does it all happen for the sake of humanity? Where does the notion of democracy stand in between all these factors? Though I am not able to answer to these questions representing universal problems, I will at least try to present some of their important aspects.

Seeing the theme from all of these various perspectives, my first aim was to approach the specifics of a local, social and cultural structure, broadening my artistic point of view. I started on thinking about the multiplicity of my subject. I wondered how I should point out some of the perplexities of human behavior, focusing on the exception of a person who functions as a catalyst within a social structure, and finally pointing on the idea of how to formulate public space. The issue is of how I connect art with politics & space? How should I plan a good strategy to realize this action?

I built up a strategy of complexes for a micro-macro perspective, to grasp the totality of my surrounding. Practically I reduced this strategy to a tactic of practice in everyday life, within the form of an art project.



*"It is a vindication of the proto-anarchist Fourier's idea that pleasure and learning come from what he termed the "Butterfly" -the human desire to access as many active processes and learning resources as possible, or to put it negatively, an aversion to boredom caused by redundant specialized activity."*

*From the introduction of the book Digital Resistance, Exploration in Tactical media, Critical Art Ensemble, p. 6.*



## Description of the project

Living in Weimar, a place with a highly performed interactivity between local and "moving" populations (tourists, foreign students, Asylum-seekers, and more), is quite an interesting experience. I decided to make an inquiry, positioning myself in this surrounding as an artist, not only aesthetically but also politically, in combination with my inquiry for definitions of artistic identity and how it is expressed nowadays (Globalization<sup>3</sup>, European Community, Postmodernity, etc.).<sup>i</sup>



One of the basic problems I question in this project is how to apply abstract ideas within the context of a physical space, and which is the best way of creating public space. Rosalyn Deutsche's theoretical framework in her essay: *The Question of "Public Space"* concludes to its redefinition in terms of its concept, form, and idea.

*"Some people, myself included, found a valuable resource in the concept of "the public sphere," a historical category first analyzed by Juergen Habermas as a set of institutions in which private citizens gather to formulate public opinion that may be critical of the state. A public, then, differs from an audience. It is formed when citizens engage in political discussion. ... But without going into this debate, we can note that the category of the public sphere was useful to art discourse because it replaced the idea of public space as that which lies outside, and must be protected from politics with the idea of public space as the realm of politics. Introducing the concept into art criticism, people redefined public art as art that enters or helps create such political space. This redefinition shatters mainstream categorization of public art for, within its terms, public art is no longer conceived as work that occupies or designs physical spaces and addresses preexisting audiences; public art is an instrument that constitutes a public by engaging people in political discussion or by entering a political struggle. Any site has the potential to be transformed into a public space. And with the introduction of the concept of the public sphere, the admonition to make public art became a demand for art's politicization."*<sup>4</sup>

Emphasizing the contradictions of different experiences created during the life of a temporary dweller (artist/researcher/traveler), and focusing on the conditions of art making in contemporary societies under the circumstances of globalization, I started to realize of a project taking different positions of employees, and becoming a *chameleon citizen*.<sup>ii</sup> Placing myself in this way, I exchanged the positions of the

<sup>3</sup> "Four positions on our topic seem logically available. The first also affirms the opinion that there is no such thing as globalization (there are still the nation-states and the national situations, nothing is new under the sun). The second affirms also that globalization is nothing new, there has been globalization and it suffices to leaf through the history books to see that as far as the Neolithic trade routes have been global in their scopes, with Polynesian artifacts deposited in Africa, and Asian potsherds as far afield as the New World." (*Globalization and Architecture*, p. 17-18. Dr. Fredric R. Jameson, *Internationalism and Other, Modernist Myths*, Thesis, Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Bauhaus-Universitaet Weimar, (2000) Heft 4/5.)

<sup>4</sup> *The Question of Public Space*, Rosalyn Deutsche, *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*.

performative action of the artist, with that of a common behavior of an actual citizen, intervening in the city's everyday life. On the other hand, I interacted with working-groups, the visitors and clients of each working center.

Practically, I applied for employment to several businesses, for two full time working days. I "jumped", temporarily, into various personae of common people/employees. I used the appropriate, job-specific outfit; it was provided to me from the agencies' authorities in each place of action. Where it was not provided from the authorities, I improvised. I had an assistant for documenting the process. During the actions, I carried equipment myself, to document the project. Specifically, I did training as, 1. A social worker in the Asylum-Seeker- Wohnheim, 2. An employee in the tourist information center of Weimar, 3. An employee in the train station, 4. An employee in the post office, 5. A cook and server at the student's restaurant, 6. A seller in the market, 7. An assistant in the "Network against the Extreme Right".



The outcome of my inquiry is formed into a cultural/political message in using the media form of posters/advertisements. The posters are designed to present instants of the projects' process, and they are images having my person as the main protagonist figure in each place of interaction, depicted in combination with

relevance to the topic text-graphics. This *art product* will be put in the open space, and, hopefully, will function as a stimulation, to create a dialogue between the citizen/spectators, within the broader public of the city.



Finally, I want to justify that I perceive the places I chose to work either as *Ports of Entry* for the city of Weimar, or, as places where an intense interaction between the local society and the *foreign* takes place.

Posters, is the final form of the project. Mapping is my system of working. Employment is my specific subject. Being there, *working*, is my action.

## The Outsider, the Alien

The outsider is taking a certain position: he is the viewer, the not-part-taker.

Outsider: 1. A person or thing not within an enclosure, boundary, etc., 2. A person not belonging to a particular group, set, party etc.: society often regards the artist as an outsider, 3. A person who is not native to, or known to a community, 4.



A person unconnected or unacquainted with the matter in question: not being a parent, I was regarded as an outsider, 4. A race horse, sports team etc., not classified among the best or among those expected to win.<sup>5</sup>

Alien: 1. Being, related to, or characteristic of a country other than one's own < the new immigrants with customs alien to the community where they have settled, 2. Not being a vital part of or belonging to something > it's completely alien to her nature to wish evil of anyone. <sup>6</sup>

The purpose behind my wish to present an outsider, an alien, is partly because I want to reveal an unexpected, irrational, aspect of life. This aspect is secretly or mysteriously revealed to each one of us, through actual situations or circumstances during our everyday life, but not confessed and transformed to something else, but it may be part of an artistic behavior. A person with such behavior can be the catalyst for moving constant standards from their given position in a society. This is the way I identify the artist's position, as he exists and functions in the contemporary social system. Through postmodernity, artists become a type of vagabond, or tourists-in-temporary-residencies, who find their self more and more in a transitional space, trying to catch up with the speed of things happening around them, and in that, artists are always aliens. There are certain things that apply to this kind of alienation except nationality, and these are certain cultural elements of a system, such as language and codes, local habits, but also human emotional bonds.



On the other hand, from the political aspect, I am thinking of the alien, as the immigrant, or very generally speaking, certain populations of immigrants, who

<sup>5</sup> Source: [www.webster.com](http://www.webster.com), online dictionary.

<sup>6</sup> Source: [www.webster.com](http://www.webster.com), online dictionary.

*discovered* and inhabited (not always with the best results for the native inhabitants as known) new lands like America, and Australia.

### **-The Tourist Trainee**

First of all I have to declare in which way I use the term *tourist*, or maybe *rambler*: to define someone who cannot identify as a member of a local society, and he is constantly moving around. He is defined also from what he can grasp and feel from the actual of a place. He has always an odd aura that surrounds him, that makes the rest of the community be aware of his *otherness*.

Talking about site-specificity and community-specific art projects, for instance the "RADAR Project -Connecting Europe", in which I took part, or even international exchange programs/workshops organized from universities, which have similar orientation, I use the term "tourist-intellectual" to define the certain category of participants to these projects. How do these global "tourist-intellectuals" reflect their experience, for the progression of their civilization? Is it an educational and cultural process?

Dean MacCannel makes an overview of such movements throughout history, and ends up with the following idea of what exactly is the experience of the *tourist*:

*"Self-discovery through a complex and sometimes arduous search for an Absolute Order is a basic theme of our civilization, a theme supporting an enormous literature: Odysseus, Aeneas, the Diaspora, Chaucer, Christopher Columbus, Pilgrim's Progress, Gulliver, Jules Verne, Western Ethnography, Mao's Long March. This theme does not just thread its way through our literature and our history. It grows and develops, arriving at a kind of final flowering of modernity. What begins as the proper activity of a hero (Alexander the Great) develops into a goal of a socially organized group (the crusaders), into the mark of status of an entire social class (the Grand Tour of the British "gentleman"), eventually becoming universal experience (the tourist)."*<sup>7</sup>

### **-The Personal Perspective**

According to Vilem Flusser's definition of western mentality, as one based on a combination of ancient Greek tradition of philosophical ideas and democracy, and of Judeo- Christianity,<sup>8</sup> I believe I have to "accomplish a mission", to contribute with my knowledge, into the *vision* of a common universal network, or, community, that will work in the future and for the future, in order to render global society. On the other hand, I also believe that this does not, necessarily, consists of a concrete mission to be accomplished, but instead I am in a situation in which I have the

<sup>7</sup> Dean MacCannel *The tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*. From the Catalogue of the exhibition: Universal Experience, Art, Life, and the tourist eye, MCA Chicago-USA, p.13.

<sup>8</sup> Vilém Flusser, *Writings*, from the chapter *Celebrating*, pages 165-171. This whole chapter deals with this idea.

freedom of choice to create values, ideas, through my art discipline. I know there are more people like me. We are becoming nomads of a specific kind, a group of people not fully aware of their own situation, which are scattered around the globe. Miwon Kwon, in the introduction of her book "One Place after Another, Site-Specificity and locational Identity" describes the confusion happening through the postmodern era, giving references to attempts done by artists and theorists to reinvent through their work the relations of *subject* and *space*:

*"... the accelerated speed, access, and exchange of information, images, commodities, and even bodies is celebrated in one circle, the concomitant breakdown of traditional temporal-spatial experiences and the accompanying homogenization of places and erasure of cultural differences is being decried in another. The intensifying conditions of spatial indifferenciation and departiculization - that is the increasing conditions of locational unspecificity- are seen to exacerbate the sense of alienation and fragmentation in contemporary life. Consequently, the nature of the tie between subject/object and location, as well as the interplay between place and space, has received much critical attention in the past two decades' theorization of oppositional cultural practice. Fredrick Jameson' s cognitive mapping, Lucy Lippard' s "Lure of the Local", Kenneth Frampton' s "Critical Regionalism", Michel de Certeau' s "Walking in the City", Henri Levebvre' s "Production of Space", attempts to theorize the transforming nexus between the subject/object and location."*<sup>9</sup>

Where are the borders of a place then and how do we define them? In which side of the border do we place ourselves during the in between processes of this exchange?

### - The Global City



*"The centrality of place in a context of global processes engenders a transnational economic and political opening in the formation of new claims and hence in the constitution of entitlements, notably rights to place, and, at the limit, in the constitution of 'citizenship' (Copjec and Sorkin 1999; Social Justice 1993).*

*The denationalizing of urban space and the formation of new claims centered in transnational actors and involving contestation, raise the question: Whose city is it?*

*Global capital and the immigrant workforces are two major instances of transnationalized categories that have unifying properties internally and find themselves in contestation with each other in global cities."*<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *One Place after Another, Site-Specificity and Locational Identity*, by Miwon Kwon, in the Introduction, p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> *The Global City: The De-Nationalizing of Time and Space* in p. 28. Saskia Sassen, from the Thesis Internationalism and Other, Modernist Myths Thesis, Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, (2000) Heft 4/5.

Saskia Sassen, here, defines the *global city* within the notion of capital cities. Weimar in no way could be compared to London, or New York. But yet, in a minor level *global city* can be every place where big international institutions exist, such as Universities and Tourism.



## The Process of the Project

My intention is to adjust myself in a social system with the identity of an artist, rather than with the notion of what reflects on my national identity. I first have to observe this social system I live in, and then I inform myself on historical and philosophical facts. I also have to inform myself in terms of site-specific political and social issues. Here, in Weimar, I can distinguish two main categories of interest. This city is a place very much burdened, in terms of both political and of cultural history. To create minor histories, or change the history of a place, the interesting part is not the history of the place itself, but how the people live with in it. One has to act on a site and at the same time theorize and conceptualize his action. Personally speaking, as an outsider, I have to accept this position courageously, because I am in a transitional space.

### -From the Virtual to the Actual

It may sound absurd, but the inspiration for the form of the project comes from a virtual representation.

As a kid I was a TV junkie. I think I belong to a generation whose mentality was literally fed TV with a spoon. One of my heroes was Claudius Caesar. There was a British TV-series shown on the Greek TV called *I, Claudius*.<sup>11</sup> He was depicted as an outsider. He was ugly, crippled and the *fool* of the palace. But the TV-watcher could see from his thoughts that he had a strategy behind all that. In fact, someone could see he was the cleverest, and he used his disadvantages to get away from the mean conspiracies of the corrupted people of the palace. In a way his was acting undercover.



The film *The Man Who Fell To Earth*,<sup>12</sup> by Nicolas Roeg with protagonist David Bowie, depicts also a similar case, an Alien who brings advanced technology to our planet, *wearing the human appearance*. Only that this Alien-outsider didn't manage to escape the meanness of the mankind, and at the same time he got stuck to the *other*, he got stuck into his *human suit* and behavior. Though "he brought the future to earth", a theme depicted in the movie with his excellent technological inventions, he never managed to return back to his planet. Woody Allen, being an American-Jew, ironically sets up in his film *Zelig*,<sup>13</sup> a chameleon figure. A human being that has the ability to "change" his personality according to the people with

<sup>11</sup> *I, Claudius*, directed by Herbert Wise, 1976 UK. British History-Drama TV-Series.

<sup>12</sup> *The Man who Fell to Earth*, directed by Nicolas Roeg, 1976 UK. British Sci-fi Drama.

<sup>13</sup> *Zelig*, by Woody Allen, 1982 USA. American comedy film.



whom he interacts, a disease that results in a literal transformation into every person who would meet with him. What happens, in general, is that he becomes a polymorphic creature, a multi-personality/no-own character persona. As a freak, he is confronted variously with his surrounding, always as an object of exploitation for the sake of each idea, coming from diverse social groups, and perceptions (labor unions, scientists, politicians, mass media, people commodity industry members, etc.). One way or another, in reality he is a creature without personal choice,



without personal belief and expression, he is the *Human-Chameleon*. In other words, all the various forms of the American outsider reflected on one 'surface'. The director sets him up in this position to reflect the negative aspects of the common, oppressed by the system -an american citizen in exclusion. The citizen of this homogenous society that on

one hand absorbs differences and on the other has too many inner contradictions of socio-political categories. Only our society has the tendency to make a show out of everything, and simultaneously make a hero, idolizing, and celebrating the uncanny. *Zelig* is celebrated in a society of the mass.

A similar to this situation is given by Kafka, who presents the unpersonalized, prey-citizen of the western, bureaucratic monster-state, Josef K..<sup>14</sup> His protagonist obviously has no identity. This citizen is in search of a definition of a personal identity, and a way out of unidentified guilt. He is trying to get out of the grey-costume pattern of indifferantiation. The same taste we get from the film of Terry Gilliam, *Brasil*,<sup>15</sup> but with much more references to the futurist idea of the technologically developed monster-state.

### -The Tactic of Appearance and Presence

Inspired by these fictitious hero cases, but mostly from the comic-tragic figure of Zelig, of a staged/directed personality and the allegory of social *chameleonism*, I wanted to put myself in a similar set up, to direct (play-act) myself in actions, but with a different to the film maker's expectations. The setup should be in reality, using tactics of the enemy (the absorbing capitalist system), being at the same time undercover and revealing my real identity, acting like an art-spy and a real employee, the way I wanted to present it. I did temporary, mini-practices in chosen jobs. I



<sup>14</sup> Roger Behrens questioning subjectivity makes a juxtaposition of both cases, *Zelig* and *Josef K.*, Kafka's figure in his book *Der Prozeß (The Trial)*.

<sup>15</sup> "Die Ungleichzeitigkeit des realen Humanismus, Konsequenzen, Experimente und Montagen in kritischer Theorie", in the chapter "Strategien des Mißlingens" Franz Kafka-Woody Allen (Traude Junghans Verlag – Cuxhaven-Dartford)

<sup>15</sup> *Brasil*, directed by Terry Gilliam, 1985, UK. British comedy, Sci-fi, fantasy film.

reversed the role of the individual without personal choice, with the freedom that is given to me by my standing position.

Using this scheme, this "mechanization" for practically, transforming my job-character, my "appearance" according to the pattern of each working environment, as a purpose I basically had to:



- Enter the local community and gain the trust of the people.
- Exercise against the alienation of the artist from the real world.
- Act against the alienation of the public from the artist.
- Have an immediate, authentic experience of how each specific functional part of this city works.
- Work on how the public perceives the artist's work beyond the protected and institutionalized space of the Museum and the Gallery.
- Creating my own route in the city as a cultural tactical resistance.

*"The place of a tactic belongs to the other. A tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over entirely, without being able to keep it at a distance. It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure independence with respect to circumstances. The "proper" is a victory of space over time - it is always on the watch of opportunities that must be seized "on the wing". Whatever it wins it does not keep. It must constantly manipulate events in order to turn them into "opportunities". The weak must continually turn to their own ends forces alien to them. And so are, more generally, many "ways of operating": victories of the "weak" over the "strong" (whether the strength be that of powerful people or the violence of things or of an imposed order, etc.), clever tricks, knowing how to get away of things, "hunter's cunning", maneuvers, polymorphic simulations, joyful discoveries, poetic as well as warlike. The Greeks called these "ways of operating" Métis."* <sup>16</sup>



Indeed, going along with Michel De Certeau's theory on tactics of the weak, the idea of "Repetitively changing occupation" stems from a desire to carry out the image of a polymorphic being, whose talent is the successful achievement of self-piloting in adverse and unfavorable circumstances. I name this polymorphic being, because it has a specific ability of self-piloting, borrowing from technical terminologies from other

<sup>16</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of everyday life*, in the General Introduction, chapter: The consumer production, Trajectories, tactics, and rhetorics, p. 19.

disciplines such as theater, film, chemistry, mythology, etc.: a “joint-er”, a catalyst, the “equal replica of the protagonist”, or the “protagonist idea”, which brings the “Trickster” (of the West-Indian mythology), or, Hermes of the Greek mythology,



and such figures, to mind. The talent of this figure -who in this case is that of the artist expressed as a living replica of his artwork in performative act, together with the pre-mentioned mechanization of art-function- is that he can bring into communication different parts of a whole that are otherwise scattered. This figure represents the “other”, the “outsider”. In reality, it is a figure that can not be totally socialized. Yet this figure, when mythified, represents totalities and

abstract social personae. I define the adverse circumstances mentioned above as the difficulties that the individual confronts in the era of late-stage capitalism during globalization. These difficulties are of personality and character surviving in a new order of things era, or more preferably, difficulties of creating a qualitative, personally chosen life-style. Concerning the way of how the individual progresses in a social sector: it can be defined by the freedom that the person has, to choose his profession, according to its qualities and the actual talent to a categorized, or, a specific implementation in the functional social system. On the other hand, how is this functional social system is going to maintain progress, since unemployment, or precarious employment, the “One-Euro Job” policy of the government, and in general, flexible employment in international corporations, becomes the main occupation for more and more people on the globe?

Richard Sennett indicates definitions of the terms *job* and *career*, as they are connected nowadays to the idea of what *flexible capitalism* means, according to their original meanings:

*“The word “job” in English of the fourteenth century meant a lump or piece of something that could be carted around. Flexibility today brings back this arcane sense of the job, as people do lumps of labor, pieces of work, over the course of a lifetime.”*<sup>17</sup>



*“Career”, for instance, in its English origins meant a road for carriages, and as eventually applied to labour meant a lifelong channel for one’s economic pursuits. Flexible capitalism*

<sup>17</sup> Richard Sennett, *The corrosion of the character*, The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism, 1998.

*has blocked the straight roadway of career, diverting employees suddenly from one kind of work into another.*<sup>18</sup>

Wondering to what extent one can criticize this social system, offering as propositions the following: coming from the position of the artist in training, being a part of a rising social system, fed with it and progressed in it, being a privileged westerner, and finally living on a continent "admired" worldwide for its civilization and history, a continent rich in heritage and culture, it is like hitting your own face. Belonging to this in transit generation, that has the opportunity to study, and make a free choice of trade, in contradiction to older generations, who had to follow the flow of immigration, in and out of their own country, to man factories and working sites of the up-growing urban areas, plying trades that more or less were imposed on them, one feels privileged.

Could this criticism, produced from the reflections on this system, also become part of the institutionalized system? Miwon Kwon says:

*"...the commodification of the artist is not completely accurate, because is not the figure of the artist per se as a personality or a celebrity, that is produced/consumed in an exchange with the institution. ...the very nature of the commodity as a cipher of production and labor relations is no longer bound to the realm of manufacturing (of things) but defined in relation to the service and management industries. The artist as an overspecialized aesthetic object maker has been anachronistic for a long time already. What they provide now, rather than produce, are aesthetic, often "critical-artistic" services."*<sup>19</sup>

We are now on the threshold of a unified Europe. This same society perceived as an abstract idea has a new face. The exchange of populations and immigration has a new face as well. Belonging to the generation of the artists who are called to contribute with their work and presence in the construction of the new European model:

*"At documenta X last summer, several media and art practitioners met in a project titled Hybrid Workspace, and later called Deep Europe. Echoing the words of the Bulgarian artist Luchezar Boyadjev, "Europe is at its deepest where there are a lot of overlapping identities", the German critical writer Inke Arns characterizes the notion of Deep Europe as follows: "With the notion of Deep Europe we refer to a new understanding of Europe, which leads away from the horizontal measurement of the size of a territory (thus including East/West etc.), towards something that could be called a vertical mapping, or a vertical measuring of the different cultural layers and identities in Europe."*<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Richard Sennett, *The corrosion of the character, The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*, 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another, Site-Specificity and Locational Identity*, in the chapter *Unhinging of Site Specificity, Itinerant artists*, p.50.

<sup>20</sup> From the online article *Statement for the final discussion about exclusion and inclusion in the art world*, by Edit Andras, Euroland-Money Nations, [www.republicart.org](http://www.republicart.org)

## The Contemporary Artist's Identity

### -The International Artistic Identity

Questioning my own identity for myself, I realized that actually I am dealing with the definition of the identity of myself as an artist. Looking at it from a specific point of view, the roles I take, as an outsider in the globalized world, in the consumer society, and to reference to other professionals.

The shift throughout the history, of aesthetics and art, from the art-cultural as transcendental and metaphoric, to that of social, the political, and the behavioristic becomes crucial, when we deal with changes that happen passing through postmodernity. Some definitions about postmodernity from Fredric Jameson:

*"...globalization is an intrinsic feature and which we now largely tend, whether we like it or not, to associate with that thing called postmodernity."*

*"...one can deplore globalization or celebrate it, just as one welcomes the new freedoms of the postmodern era and the postmodern outlook, and in particular the new technological revolutions..."<sup>28</sup>*

In reference and responding to the idea of postmodernity in connection to identity politics, some new artistic strategies have been created.

*"Through their new strategies artists are aiming for an identity in transition, for an open, manifold identity. 'Being oneself' makes little sense to them - a continual 'becoming oneself' would indeed be more interesting. But this too they understand in a way that agrees with neither the old idea of a pre-existing Self nor the modern one of a self which is to*

*be produced. In the long term they don't want to be or become comprehensible. They want to remain in transition. Fernando Pessoa - with his motto "Be plural like the universe!"<sup>(55)</sup> or with his maxim "I am the living stage on which different actors performing different pieces make their entry"<sup>(56)</sup> - could have been this type of artist's prophet. Or was it rather Foucault, who wagered "that man would be erased, like a face drawn in sand at the edge of the sea"<sup>(57)</sup>"<sup>21</sup>*



<sup>21</sup> Wolfgang Welsch Home Page, *Becoming Oneself*, From: Subject - Author - Experience: The Subject in the Expanse of Art, Bratislava: Soros Center for Contemporary Arts, 1999, 11-33. <http://www2.uni-jena.de/welsch/>

In general, the position of the artist doesn't change in form, in connection to the old idea of his position as a *medium* (for example between the holy and the human). Metaphorically, the position of the artist nowadays is on the spots that connect the routes of a spread out net that expands mainly in width. His position is the key position in a code of communication using it as a "weapon" with technological means.



On the other side, and examining the profession of the artist is that it has become another *job*, another *employment*: The international identity of the artist, in combination with his *exported* identity as a product, becomes a commodity that carries the mark of the place of production. The more we live in a so called: *postmodern, globalized, historic-politic-social space*, the more we are marked with a relevant to our heritage stamp. Even if according to traditional democracy, we are not commodities, or products, we, involuntarily, become traders of our own historical, political, and social tradition, presenting ourselves according to this exact identity as part of our work. The universal art market is interested more and more for similar kinds of art production, with the purpose of unification, bridging between countries, traditions, and historical moments. Is it for the sake of humanity, or for the sake of the global economic prosperity? Saskia Sassen seems to point out the main idea which stands in between both:

*"...the logic of the capital market - profitability at all costs - against that of the human rights regime. But it does represent a space where other actors can gain visibility as individuals and as collective actors, and come out of the invisibility of aggregate membership in a nation-state exclusively represented by the sovereign."<sup>22</sup>*

The multi-identificative (through education-institutionalized financing most of the times) presence of the artist, or artist groups in a certain place, entails a relevant perception from the surrounding itself - is a combination made from people and spaces/places - which the artist enters and within which he moves. His *presence*, performed this way, carries together and sweeps, mental spaces and perceptions. As soon as, there is raised a point (by the artist) of personal and practical redefinition of this surrounding space, in which the "immigrant artist" moves and functions, then these spaces gain a different meaning. In the postmodern world of art, instead of the term site-specific artwork, arbitrarily I insert the term identity-specific artistic tactics.

<sup>22</sup> *The Global City: The De-Nationalizing of Time and Space*, p. 29. Saskia Sassen, *Internationalism and Other, Modernist Myths.*)

I name various artist figures, in theorized categories according to a specific belief, practice, or character I am able to distinguish by now:

The artist as a tourist trainee... a rambler theater-man... a performative introducer... a institutional employee... a curator... a space maker... the obsolete, out-dated outsider... a cultural cannibal... a catalyst... a social worker... a creator of lingual and cultural codes, the intellectual, the technocrat... a scientist of his times... the avant-guardist, a political activist ... an anti-artist. As an example for some of my definitions I borrow from Linda Weintraub her reference to the following artist:

*“Daniel Joseph Martinez objects to being identified as an artist. This is because many people assume that artists only create and market decorative objects, and that success for artists is measured according to these criteria. In order to demonstrate that he does not confront to this art convention, Martinez has invented his own job title. He prefers top be known as a Tactical Media Strategist. The “tactics” and the “strategies” he employs fall into two categories: Martinez defies rules, and he disrupts conventions. These methods are designed to expose insidious concentrations of social, political, and economic power. Open discussion is a prerequisite for social change. Martinez succeeds when his methods stimulate dialogue among those who are in control and those who are controlled”<sup>23</sup>*

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Joseph Martinez is an example of what I call here as the *anti-artist*. This quote is from Linda Weintraub, from her book: *In the Making*, in the chapter: *Measuring Success, Political Issues- Diffusing Concentrations of Power*, about the artist Daniel Joseph Martinez, p. 374.

## Not models but possibilities

### -The supremacy of the advertisement-icons in the postmodern.

*“...the following constitutive features of the postmodern: a new depthlessness, which finds its prolongation both in contemporary “theory” and in a whole new culture of the image or the simulacrum; a consequent weakening of historicity, both in our relationship to public History and in the new forms of our private temporality, whose “schizophrenic” structure (following Lacan) will determine new types of syntax or syntagmatic relationships in the more temporal “arts;”<sup>24</sup>*

We are all involved as individuals in a world that is overwhelmed with images, depicting fetishes of material conformity. This simulation tends to become a composition of substitutes to those images used in earlier times for the worshiping of the 'holy', the religious icons. We live in a fictitious reality, of the overuse of aesthetic forms, attained from corporate capitalism in postmodernity. The fact that this function diverts the everyday man to a consumer is already a known thing, as well as that this function also reinforces individual careers in a society of the mass.



By using the creative imagination of the artist-intellectual, that has been transformed into an advertisement campaign of the artist who has been also diverted into an employee in the service industry- corporate capitalism puts up a fragmented, a priori spectacular advertisement in the public realm. The capitalist system converses the need of people for life maintenance, the need for emotion/creation, and the need for personal and individual expression to

its fetish. This service has as a goal to turn into a magic world of suspension ideal models of human life. The image/icon of the advertisement becomes a filter to deface reality, providing the everyman prototypes to be imitated.

The function of this *prefabricated* reality deprives one from being self-creative, and also designates a *prefabricated* life style, made by connoisseurs of commercial aesthetics.

Does this fetish making, also create a false conversion of the individual critical ability, putting people in “social –preference” camps? Even if we assume that people are totally aware of this situation, how many of us will sacrifice the conformity of a life-

<sup>24</sup> *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Dr. Fredric R. Jameson, Duke UP, 1991 chapter 1-part VI, from an electronic version: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR/JAMESON/jameson.html>.



style, and go away from the prefixed schemes provided by corporate capitalism, to practice a disciplined, personally configured qualitative life?

Although my assumptions seem to be already played out, in terms of definition of the capitalist totalizing dynamics of social function, I want to emphasize on the transitional present situation of politics, the passing from modernity to postmodernity. We, the postmodern-era generation, are called to criticize and reverse the rules of this function, to bring them onto the surface of reality, present them into the open, and admit that we should create new conceptions ourselves.

### **-Issues of aesthetics & politics - Out of the spirit of a given place.**

The capitalist model binds directly with the American consumer culture. The new advertisement messaging is directly connected to the new model of the successful



individual, processed by the corporate capitalism. According to Tomas Frank this successful prototype, seemingly, depicts a model of a person who has disrupted the old myths and the models of imitation, heroes of the beat generation and the rock 'n' roll mythology. The new consumer figure is called to replace corporate America energetically in its everyday life,

to become *heroic* through its personal choice of consuming-practice, within the context of the counter-culture. This consuming practice of the *heroic* consists of an absurd scheme, since it happens within the a priori set up level of consumerism that has already reconfigured *heroism* into a product for consumption:

*“Capitalism is changing obviously and drastically.”*

*“Consumerism is not longer about “conformity” but about “difference.” Advertising teaches us not in ways of puritanical self-denial (a bizarre notion on the face of it), but in orgiastic, never-ending self-fulfillment. It counsels not rigid adherence to the tastes of the herd but vigilant and constantly updated individualism. We consume not to fit in but to prove, on the surface at least, that we are rock ‘n’ roll rebels, each one of us as rule-breaking and hierarchy-defying as our heroes of the 60s, who now pitch cars, shoes and beer. This imperative of endless difference is today the genius at the heart of American capitalism, an eternal fleeing from “sameness” that satiates our thirst for the New, with such achievements*

*of civilization as the infinite brands of identical cola, the myriad colors, and irrepressible variety of the cigarette rack at 7-Eleven.*<sup>ii</sup>

*An existential rebellion has become a more or less official style of Information Age capitalism, so has the countercultural notion of a static, repressive Establishment grown hopelessly obsolete. However the basic impulses of the counterculture idea may have disturbed a nation lost in the cold war darkness, they are today the fundamental agreement with the basic tenets of Information Age business theory. So close they are, in fact, that has become difficult to understand the countercultural idea as anything more than the self-justifying ideology of the new bourgeoisie that has proven itself ever so much better skilled than its slow-moving, security-minded forebears at adapting to the accelerated, always-changing consumerism of today. The anointed cultural opponents of capitalism are now capitalism's ideologies.”<sup>25</sup>*

Tomas Frank focuses on the American reality, and talks about consumerism and individuality in relation to the corporate capitalism. The scheme 'capitalism of the corporate America' does not differ in form from of the one that is established also in the rest of the western world, whose strategy is the widening of the global market. As Fredric Jameson also indicates:

*“Yet this is the point at which I must remind the reader of the obvious; namely, that this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and super-structural expression of a Store new-wave American military and economic domination throughout the world;...”what has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally...”<sup>26</sup>*



Advertising has always been the non-personalized face of this totalitarian system. The issue lies in matters of different quality levels. Though what Tom Frank concludes about consumerism, difference and counterculture does not directly apply to my assumptions for my project, I will borrow his notions about advertising to distinguish some of my own ideas about it.

I use the aesthetics of advertisement borrowing examples from commercial magazines for employment opportunities: Karriere-Führer, Management, Business-Spotlight, Karriere. All these magazines use a specific style of announcing the new prototype image of the successful employee, and they propose new ideas for the new global

<sup>25</sup> *Why Johnny cannot dissent*, by Tomas Frank, from the book *Cultural Resistance Reader* by Stephen Duncombe, from the chapter *Commodities, Co-Optation, and Cultural Jamming*, p. 319.

<sup>26</sup> *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Dr.Fredric R. Jameson, Duke UP, 1991 chapter 1-part VI, from an electronic version: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~DRBR/JAMESON/jameson.html>.



economy. What I try to accomplish, further on, is a depiction of the non-differentiation as it happened through my personal work-practice-changing project, where I virtually placed myself in the positions of the everyman. With the ad-posters I depict my self in action within environments in which I am vanishing, although borrowing forms with which the models of success are depicted in the advertisements of these magazines. The main point of interest is the diversion of the product presentation for creating identification of the spectator with the product, and

as Tomas Frank points out also, the tempting area of the advertisement creates an enclosure where the 'spectator' should be identified with the product-character. It becomes doubtful, whether this character could be the symbol of the freed man or an artificial social stereotype.

## In a way of an epilogue

I am in the middle of a cyclone of transitions with an indeterminable center, but instead many small ones... following almost unwillingly the new model of cultural nomadism. Through a retrogressive movement of this back and forth, I create a visual filter, which gives me the ability to distinguish differences in between schemes and matters. Every point of interaction becomes a communication center for the everyday person. Every point of interaction becomes a communication center for the mere individuals in the everyday activities of living in the human microcosm.



*"...Each individual is referred to himself. And each of us knows that ourself does not amount to much. This breaking up of the grand narratives (discussed below, sections 9 and 10) leads to what some authors analyze in terms of the dissolution of the social bond and the disintegration of social aggregates into a mass of individual atoms thrown into the absurdity of Brownian motion. Nothing of the kind is happening: this point of view, it seems to me, is haunted by the paradisiacal representation of a lost 'organic' society. A self does not amount to much, but no*

*self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations that is now more complex and mobile than ever before. Young and old, man or woman, rich or poor, a person is always located at "nodal" points of specific communication circuits, however tiny these may be. Or better: one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us, is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position him at the post of sender, addressee, or referent."*<sup>27</sup>

My project applied as a net to many different aspects of the same totality, which is called *The Global City*. Something that I try to embrace, theoretically, is a more general view of what it means to be part of an increasing global society. I have a feeling that we are part of a plan. I am sure that people had the same feeling since the beginning of time. The point is of who is the designer of this plan, and for what reason. In older times it was religion, belief, together with the state power, together with ideologies, and now I am assuming, that it is probably the global, state-market together with technology.



<sup>27</sup> *The Postmodern Condition*, Jean-François Lyotard, p. 15.

*“The disappearance of history as the fundamental element in which human being exists, and not least, the end of an essentially modernist field of political struggle in which the great ideologies still had the force and the authority of the great religions of the earlier times.”*<sup>28</sup>

Going back to the starting point of the art project in question in this essay, I would say, that my act was a miniature of what I, or what many of us, ‘the we’ are doing, being called to embody this developing society. The things I discovered during my mini practices cannot be widely presented in this essay, but they are exposed within the documentation of this *living*.



The professions, I practiced, were simply various aspects of an ordinary life. Being in the privileged position of the artist-researcher, all the activities were driven out of their routine. The result was the creation of private minor histories. As a consequent to that, I think that art can not be crystalized as such. From the moment on that the one who theorizes coexists within the context of the rest of the society, and lives together with the common man, he finds out that whenever the *human-behavior* element comes as an imponderable factor, things get out of control. From the emotional aspect of assuming my *mini-practices* I realized that people are the same in every place. On the other hand, a person extracted from his heritage forgets the habits that structure this heritage. This person adopts the habits of the society he finally lives in. During the attempt of *transporting* a culture, or cultural elements to another cultural environment, authenticity is condemned to fail. Foreign cultures cannot be really lived; when exported, or imported cannot be really understood. What I mean with here has to do with cultural fragments. As long as we try to unify the globe in cultural terms, and via political debate, trying to establish new international human conditions for living and communicating, we will always find ourselves in between those fragments of habits, codes, and finally human relationships.

This seems to become true, through the broadening of the net of the new global capitalist market. I would like to compare this market to the ancient Greek "Agora". "Agora" originally used to be a space the creation of oneself according to his intellectuality, and not only for the market of trades. And this of course was supposed to be the fundament for the creation of democracy. I wonder if in our times it is the space where the money economy mingles with the creation of the self as a product, within "capitalist democracy"... It seems that the new free public

<sup>28</sup> *Globalization and Architecture*, p.18. Dr. Fredric R. Jameson, *Internationalism and Other, Modernist Myths*, Thesis, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Bauhaus-Universitaet Weimar*, (2000) Heft 4/5.

space for individual expression is developing in cyberspace, with the help of the Web. Still, communication systems and control is the new products of consumption that promises speedy, functional, virtual communal systems. Blog and dialogue through wires, the new technology of optical lines, that promises faster and cheaper connections, and so on. New technologies make the so-called Flexible Capitalism possible, but at the same time create a space for free expression. The civilian is now tempted to produce his own models of representation. I will juxtapose two aspects on the same theme, the one of the intellectual Vilém Flusser, who had a vision for a *dematerialized* future referring to a certain kind of *sublimity*, and the other coming from Fredric Jameson, a more down to earth point of view:

*“Practically all the models now at our disposal are space models. They are either linear (such as sentences, or equations, or curves); or they are on a plane (such as maps, or sketches, or two-dimensional statistics); or they are three-dimensional (such as atomic models, prototypes of machines, or models of architecture). ...most available models can show time only indirectly. Only models of the type “space-time continua” can now satisfy us. ...using space-time media. Films, videotapes, and so forth are such media. They allow the elaboration of models better suited for phenomenological vision. And they allow the storage of larger amount of information than do traditional media, because they have one more dimension. Such media therefore contribute to the superation of both the “objectivity crisis” and the “information inflation crisis”. If they were used for the elaboration of models in this sense, our vision of the world would probably change in a way that we cannot begin imagine.”<sup>29</sup>*

*“What happens is that technology, and what the computer people call information begins to slip insensibly in the direction of advertisements and publicity, of postmodern marketing, and finally of the export of TV programs rather than the return of startling reports from remote places. But this is to say that the surface concept, the communicational one, has suddenly acquired a whole structural dimension: the communicational signifier has been endowed with a more properly cultural signified or signification. Now the positing of an enlargement of communicational nets has secretly been transformed into a kind of message about a new world culture.*

*But the slippage can also take another direction: the economic. Thus, in our attempt to think this new, still purely communicational concept, we begin to fill the empty signifier in with visions of financing transfers and investments all over the world, and the new networks begin to swell with the commerce of some new and allegedly more flexible capitalism (I have to confess that I have always found this a ludicrous expression). And we also remember that computers and their programs and the like are themselves among the most hotly exchanged forms of good among the nations today.”<sup>30</sup>*

<sup>29</sup> Vilém Flusser, *On the crisis of our models*, *Writings*, p. 78.

<sup>30</sup> Globalization and Architecture, p. 19. Dr. Fredric R. Jameson, *Internationalism and Other Modernist Myths*. Thesis, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Bauhaus-Universitaet Weimar*, (2000) Heft 4/5.

It is a fact that our era's target is the dematerialization of processes. In the same way, the traveler, both the actual and the virtual, redefines his ambience.

The general human ability of reconfiguring a self in a place, according to time limits, experiential knowledge of the place and bodily & mental distance from the other is directly connected to this distance, which contains a perception built through immediate experience <sup>31</sup> and creative reflection. <sup>iii</sup>

The other place is the place left behind and probably the place that I aim to reach back. But in the end when someone resides in more than one place, the other place loses its solid ground. The other place becomes a net of routes going back and forth, long stays in transitional spaces (airports, bus and train stations).

The movement of the people tends to be more and more nomadic. The nomadic movement of artists takes the form of a Temporary Campus moving through



global cities. Artists become cosmopolites while collaborating with institutions. Indisputably, the tension is a mere opening of the global market. This is the reason why all this *moving about* is happening. Finally, in the globalized economy, and more specifically, on *our* side of the ocean, in the effort for the unification of the European Community, one can distinguish

that the artwork as an outcome is betrayed from this prototype. The artwork becomes an object of exploitation in the hands of organized institutions, because it is firstly promoted for economic reasons and not for its aesthetic and cultural value, while the artist is promoted and financed more or less as another *employee* of big institutions. We are all hunting for opportunities. And mostly, temporariness means no ground under one's feet; he is always on the flow.

<sup>31</sup> Robert D. Mack, *The Appeal to Immediate Experience, Philosophic Method in Bradley, Whitehead and Dewey*, Conclusion, p. 70.

## A fictitious Interview

Writing this essay, I tried to theorize the process of my art project at the same time to describe what happened in it. I felt I wasn't fluent enough to do it in the theoretical part. To succeed with that, I made up this interview, putting myself in the position of my imaginary other. This process became essential for revealing details about the project. I also use this form as another tactical gesture for presenting the work.

*A. L-T.: Anna Lagiou-Tsouloufi (the other).*

*I. S.: Imaginary self (the artist).*

*Anna Lagiou-Tsouloufi: At first let me summarize your topic. You chose to realize this specific project "The outsider in and out of context" dealing with the status of employment, here in Weimar. Can you give me an outline to understand the idea behind the project?*

*Imaginary Self:* At first, the issue to be pointed out within the context of my project is not only about the problem of employment, but a specific scheme of social, and cultural issues, and within it the development of new artistic strategies, as a means of expression and criticism. The points that bring together this scheme are: a) employment, in other words money to live and move around, b) education, in other words progress, c) travelling and tourism, meaning the experiential process of knowledge, d) technology, the means to progression, and e) globalization and the Global Market politics, the machine above, the governmental engine; and finally, the last but not least, the time of a human life, that runs through all those.

*A. L-T.: Would you like to tell us, in which way you decided to work through all these issues?*

*I. S.:* Dealing with this scheme, it was difficult to focus on one theme. I got into the point where I had to focus on a specific topic that would help me to get into an action that would confront ideas in a practical manner. Another basic idea behind the project was to also reverse the idealized model of production of a spectacle into a real act. So I 'performed' employees, or workers, in various professions for two or three days. You know, I disguised as citizen, but at the same time I really worked. All the acts I performed were various aspects of an ordinary, everyday life, and there are as many as the members of a society put together in one mass. These activities, of a single person's routine, became for me an exceptional experience. The key word of this art process is *intellectual alertness*. Once a person is in such a mental state recognizes the world in a different way. Being in this position only



for a short time, having in mind that I wouldn't have more than this one chance to enter this *experiential opportunity*, I tried to collect as many impressions I could. I faced other's people work as a space of observation for an art research.

*A. L-T.: Why did you decide to use the idea of the Chameleon Citizen?*

*I. S.:* I think it is a very good strategy to enter into a society, in a "gentle" manner; in this way I became indistinguishable for "attacks" (this means automatically, protection of any kind of assault by being in a new environment). I assimilated myself according to the preconditions of this place. On the other hand, I managed to insert myself into places that are "closed", or to express it better, "obviously hidden" to others, even native inhabitants of the city. Alternative tourism also comes to mind. What I want to say is that I use this form of disguise as a tactic to become part of the place's pattern. That doesn't mean I am fooling anyone, and I am completely aware of not fooling myself. The appearance is a very important issue for how people behave. For instance, while wearing a service uniform in a train station you have to be useful to people, otherwise they are going to get mad with you! It happened to me a couple of times.

*A. L-T.: Who is the character you wanted to create?*

*I. S.:* The character I wanted to create... I deal with the case of a person, who is actually living in a cultural and social environment, and at the same time has to theorize about the processes of his living within the identity of the artist. How this identity is shaped is the main question. After all, I end up with the conclusion that the artist's identity is the new global, international identity. Putting myself in this position, and playing with language, I made up the terms: *Tourist in education, a Tourist Trainee, or a tourist in parallel cultural realities... A transporter of artistic foible...* I experiment with ideas taken from the abstract, but practiced in actual reality. In the end I think I just wanted to create a character that would collect various experiences. You see there is a blending, a diffusion within the work's planning, between the identity of a tourist, of an artist-researcher, an employee, and a worker, a scheme I try to draw and point out here.

*A. L-T.: How have you been treated by the other employees, your co-workers? How did they perceive your project? Were they friendly? Did they ask you why you were doing that? What were their reactions?*

*I. S.:* I am not quite sure whether they all knew exactly what I was doing. You see, I could understand two thirds of what they would say and my German is not

so good. But for one thing, I learned German! As a "Praktikantin", that means a person in training, I was welcomed to take part in their activities, and assist them. In order to show me around, they had to perform their occupation for me in a way. In most of the cases, they treated me as a guest more than as a co-worker. In the train station for instance, I had one of the best experiences. I even helped the person in charge of the railway control do his work! I was happy to see they would also change their routine a bit because of my presence there; they were also very respectful, they took my identity into consideration, giving me credit for being incomprehensible, beyond their understanding in a way. It is a fact that from the minute I shared their working space and jumped into their costume, I became part of their species. I shared their labor and their anxieties while working. So in a way I shared their life. But I am sad that the thing I cannot share with them was a long term, common life.

*A. L-T.: What did you really do, during work? What was actually your attitude there?*

*I. S.:* In fact I used the space for working... I mean as an employee in training, but as an artist as well. I observed the movement and the people, what they said and what they did. I was making photos and I was also recording sounds. I have many hours of sound from my everyday in each place. I was trying to capture as much as I could... But I realized that the truth is that reality cannot be grasped. Even if someone records everything, he doesn't manage to grasp reality. It just happens... In the end you realize that the art object then becomes a shadow of what happened. It is already a memory. Hence, the presentation, together with the conceptual idea becomes the art-object.

*A. L-T.: Tell me about professions you have chosen... Why did you choose these specific places?*

*I. S.:* I must say I mostly chose places where native people work. I wanted to compete with this idea of being an active citizen in Germany, to emulate the workers of this society I live in. The people who work there must have an effective performance. I like the idea that they are, with their presence, the go-betweens in a system of authorities and citizens who constitute a society. I was welcomed to participate in their activities being in the privileged position of a legitimate European citizen, protected by an institution, the university. Everybody knows the Bauhaus here. And that was also very helpful in getting access some of the places, like the student restaurant for instance. I wonder how many people outside know exactly how life really is behind the stand, the bar, and in general the uniform of

the servers in our society? ... One of the reasons why I chose to collaborate with the specific places was also because of their title. These places are Ports of Entry, where mainly the exchange of the city with the foreign starts to take place (post office, train station, Asylum-seekers house, etc.). Actually, I made a combination of professions and places. In those places, I thought I could interact, be in contact with a specific public, through my actual, physical presence. In this case I would say that I did have an audience, or spectators. This is one of the main reasons why I chose these locations where I would work. The location of the happenings was an important issue for me. I chose these places mainly for the reason that a certain public had access to the place and I had access to the public's space. I chose places that were part of the public realm, or in other words, places where I could interact with a public. I would like to call it having an audience, or spectators, but on the other hand I hate this definition. I have a preoccupation of not willing to abuse the meaning of the words. And actually these spectators were by no means invited to any happening, or any action, in purpose.

*A. L-T.: Which people did you meet in all of these places?*

*I. S.:* Let me make a sum in my head... In the Asylum-seekers house the 'public' of course is Asylum-seekers from all over the world, and other immigrants, in the Studentenmensa students and the staff of the University... in the Tourist Information center I introduced tourists and foreigners to the local environment. Post office: except the post office employees, random people and citizens we would meet on the street, and people who would have to receive their post in hand. On the market: random people, market sellers, and people with a specific taste for Mediterranean specialties... and more.

*A. L-T.: As you said, you didn't invite spectators to any happening, how do you explain, or, justify this intention and why do you call it an art project? Where is the art then?*

*I. S.:* The machination, the plan...the strategy behind the project is the big art in the project! I reached the conclusion that in a way the whole project is a reversed performative action, a denial to the spectacular, its echo to be understood or felt from the audience, whatever this is and will be, every time the project is presented, even later in time. I perceive my project as a process in time and not as a finished act. On the other hand, it developed in such a way, that it became an act for a specific audience. Some people who know me, and who witnessed some of the actions, had a very puzzled and surprised reaction. And I really like it this way better, than to invite people for another spectacle. They could go to the cinema,

or to another organized performance. That doesn't mean mine wasn't organized, but it could not become part of any institutionalized spectacle because it was an everyday-living-in-action performance. Of course, then comes the Poster, which is up around in the city. That is of course spectacular, and it sabotages, intentionally, the project itself.

*A. L-T.: It seems you follow a sequence of denials of your own acts.*

*I. S.:* Yes but on the other hand, this has to do only with the things I say, because then you see I did all of these actions. While doing the practical part, I enjoyed and suffered from disbelief, at the same time, learning so many things from the people I worked with, things and information that I will probably never use in my future life. I felt like a tourist. And who said that it is a bad position, if it is possible for a tourist to really be somewhere... Only that from a certain point on I realized that my reality became an illustration, and this is what I am trying to criticize here among other things. I put myself in the position of the privileged traveler, but at the same time to the position of the guest worker in Germany of the '50s-'60s, trying to create a bridge between generations. In terms of my artistic language, I would say I am creating an ephemeral monument for my ancestors, repeating a ritual; like for instance the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, by making an abstract form, and taking their position, all at once. This is an exaggeration, but if I had more time I would try more professions.

*A. L-T.: So, in the end you wanted to make a paradigm out of your self through this allegorical self, being a chameleon-citizen as you call it, pretending that you are employed, and at the same time exploring a place through working? What is your connection with social studies?*

*I. S.:* ...I want to live like common people... (singing) You know these are lyrics from a song of a pop British band, The Pulp.<sup>32</sup> The story of the song goes like this: She, a rich Greek student of arts in London meets this guy, and wants to experience the life of the common people, probably, to get inspiration for her art work. So the song goes on exposing this idea of a foreigner who wants to taste real life, and common routine, to see it from another point of view. The thing is that everyday anxiety can not become art... at least I am trying to find a way to transfer it into art. The songs talks about that... I can play it for you if you want it's great! Now getting very personal... I come from a working class family, and I have experienced this life during my past, before I entered the art world. I know many people with the same experience, and there is always a doubt in our heads about the value of art. Recently, after some struggle, I find myself in this privileged position of being sponsored to study my profession. I had to find a way to close this circle of the

<sup>32</sup> "Common People" Single, "Daytime" CD single (CD1), Label: Island, released in 1995, from the British Pop Music Group: *The Pulp*, UK.

past and get to the point where I accept the value of the artist's job in society. It is a good lesson for me and for others to understand this position. In my other environment, the one of the working class, they still believe that the artist is an outsider, an idler, a loungeur, and not someone whose work is needed in society's development. Of course this has changed a lot in recent years, as more people got to study art, and became part of the production chain all over the western world. ...Back to your question... Since I am not a sociologist, not an art theoretician but an artist, I had to focus on aesthetics. I am not sure how many people have solved the mystery of what the content of the term aesthetics is. My targets in this project are multiple. I want to talk about the change of social systems; but still, to focus on the micro-level of this city I inhabit, Weimar. Within this life-level I can really touch and have immediate experience of the local intrigues. This is the main reason why I did these mini-practices. I didn't want to speculate and approach from a distance. When members of the communist party wanted to approach people and persuade them to join the party, they would do it via working in a factory. For example, since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when sociologists and journalists wanted to make an inquiry to see the real state of the working class from close, they enforced it through actual research. For instance British journalist James Greenwood who published "A Night at the Workhouse", in 1866, the first recorded study of its kind.<sup>33</sup> ...And many more, Charles Booth in Britain, Minna Wettstein-Adelt and Paul Goehre in Germany... All of them tried to make their inquiry empirical. I was reading about that in *The Cabinet*, the art Magazine, and mainly the article was about a book. The article had the title 'Poor Like me'. It was about a social activist and a well-known author, Barbara Ehrenreich, coming from the US. One day she grabbed a bag with some clothes and started working in the service industry, living out of this income, as a waitress and so on, and during her free time she wrote about her experience. The book is called: *Nickel and Dimed: Or (not) getting by in America*. My way of approach is a bit similar to that but has a different interest. You see, I also did not want to approach people for some statistics, or for doing a survey. This is too scientific for me and it would create a distance. Then I could as well observe the world from my studio. But I also tried not to forget that this is an experimental project with many layers, as well. I indeed interviewed some of the people I worked with, during work. Although I had prepared a basic questionnaire, in the end, I realized that I would spontaneously question the people in a more personal way, like someone does ordinarily, when he meets someone new within his environment. Then I realized that ordinary questions would consist of, in fact, the questionnaire for the project. And again, I could not be out of the position of the observer. The time limitation of the project timetable would restrict my occupation in each place to two, or three days. Here comes my actual reality, that this is an art project, which is another strict framework.

<sup>33</sup> Source: *The Cabinet*, A Quarterly Magazine of Art & Culture, issued in the USA. From the article: *Poor Like Me, The persistence of class ventriloquism*, by Eric Schocket. Issue 11 Summer 2003

A. L-T.: Here we come back to talking about reality. Are you dealing with reflections?

I. S.: Yes, I always do, although, as I mentioned already probably, the real chameleon, the animal, does not reflect its environment, but instead it vanishes in it. It becomes a part of its phenomenological pattern. But here I would like to make a statement:

Trotsky said: Art is not a mirror to reflect reality, but a hammer with which to shape it. ...It seems that we the new messengers of contemporary art use this same hammer to smash the exact mirror that all the representations of the existing world have shaped. And you know in how many small pieces a mirror gets when broken... This act goes along with postmodernity and fragmentation. There exists a norm for how things should be shaped. I am trying to go against this norm. Metaphorically thinking, I believe that my system of functioning follows the sea-behavior system. I come from a country where the sea makes half of the land... The sea seems like a chaotic thing, and yet it has some rules of behavior.

A. L-T.: So, as far as I understand by now, one of your main issues is also the aesthetics of representation in the contemporary world-culture. What do you want to draw out of it with this criticism, in the end?

I. S.: I feel constantly like a moving actor. And the matter of *theatricality* is extensionally explored by many groups in the recent history of arts, like for instance by the *International Situationist*, and by artists, like *Cristian Philipp Müller*...at least of what I can think right now. I have to mention something from *Guy Debord's The Society of the spectacle*. He says that the spectacle is by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any projected review or correction. It is the opposite of dialogue. Whenever representation takes on an independent existence, the spectacle reestablishes its rules.<sup>34</sup>

There is a certain kind of theatricality provided by the Mass Media, manipulating the distribution of information and knowledge...from ads to political debates. Again one of my points... I designed the posters as a gesture of subversion to this aspect... I know I can reach only few people with this gesture, but maybe it is enough.

A. L-T.: Talking of outsiders and their point of view. What about group working in the art field?

I. S.: There are two fields of action; the one has to do with logic and the other involves feelings. The one puts you at a distance, and the other in the world... It always has to do with collective consciousness. It is this in and out that combines an understanding of the world.

<sup>34</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, caption from the chapter: *Ideology in Material Form* (1986, Athens, Free Press (Eleutherios Typos), for the Greek language)

I met some students when I was in Chicago for my studies. They were trying to create their own "scene", you know something like a small "theater", something that happens in small independent and daring groups wanting to make exceptional art, and become the Avant-Guard, which is not bad at all... But on the other hand I see traps: when some people create their own environment and have no idea what goes on beyond that, and maybe I am exaggerating now, but this is then a kind of paradise, something I experienced during my studies in Greece as well. This space is a shelter but also a trap at the same time... When you are inside it, you feel so comfortable in there, but out of it you feel like a monster. Think of all the Avant-Guard movements... It is something like a ghetto... but we probably all want to be in it, at least for some time...

*A. L-T.: Do you suffer from disbelief of the power of a group creating something together, or rather, do you question your own ability to be part of it?*

*I. S.: ...Or, I am challenged by my disability to become a part of a group and adjust myself in a certain role... My fear derives from the idea of how to be an individual and create a personal original opinion and critique on society and political standards. Yet again, I want to become a member of a community, as well, as is obvious from the project.*

*A. L-T.: Standing at the artist point of view, since you have accomplished a task with the Chameleon Citizen project, what are your conclusions by now? Finally, how do you feel about it?*

*I. S.: Well, I think that one has to have more than 2 or 3 weeks to reflect on his experience. Maybe I will have better results in a year's time. Right now, I am talking about my impressions, instead. These impressions are pretty close to a fresh-made conclusion. It is like the reading of a text, or a book. With the first reading you have a general feeling about it, and then since you read again and again you are able to differentiate things, to evaluate circumstances, and results. And of course to get a feedback from the people who supported the project. Backed into the transcendental artistic point of view, and since you ask me to talk about how I felt working in those places... I constantly felt I was making an epitaph. Or better yet a monument to my past experience as an employee/worker, as I mentioned before. During the actual time of the practices, I was feeling liberated from the burden of formality. The places of action expanded into other parameters of perception. I could use my time to think about each place, the people, and the whole situation in different terms. I could color different tones of the environment. I tend to come to the conclusion that I was studying the space in terms of atmosphere, character, and motion. I was using the space to picture it, but from various perspectives. I was*

in transition. Being in an environment where I could easily lose my sense of typical logic because of the false understanding of the foreign language, I perceive my experience as being the same as millions of people who have been in this situation and have the same transitional feeling.

*A. L-T.: So, you perceived your environment in a completely different way than if you were doing the same project in your country.*

*I. S.:* Talking about being in a new country, in a new city, or in a new place in general, of being a foreigner, the limits of the self are in the body. In those places, I had no knowledge where things were, the tools I had to work with, how the whole building looked like, and how it was to move in it. Someone in this state of mind does not know where the appropriate place to be is, on each given moment. It is always like that, when someone enters a new space. It is a weird kind of freedom. And this is also the secret of the good experience out of my plan for two-day practice. When the second day came, there was still some charm to the whole set up left for me to discover. From the 3<sup>rd</sup> day on in the same job it became a repetition of the same acts, a routine. Of course this is not absolutely true. I am talking in a general form.

*A. L-T.: It seems in the end that the whole project was an adventure. What is the conclusion of the adventure, then?*

*I. S.:* First, I want to say that this is a part of a bigger one in my life, if I can call it an adventure. The funny thing is, the more I think about it the more I understand it is common life for so many people on this planet. I mean, to live in transitional spaces, in foreign countries, to travel all the time for work, studies, etc. I imagine the lives of businessmen, and immigrants, people who are forced to stay in exile their whole life... My small adventure is not something exceptional. Again for what it used to be in my familiar society, meaning Greece, labor class, etc., it is an exceptional life, meaning the so-called *cosmopolitan life*. Probably, here in Germany, because of the educational system and the wealth of the society, things have been different in the recent past. On the other hand, being an addict of comic books, allegoric myths and fairytales, a basic reason for me to become an artist, I remind myself of Alice in Wonderland. I compare her different adventures with mine. Alice manages to overcome her uncertainty of her subjectivity, once she has already experienced the paradoxical underground life she was thrown into, an allegory for the adventure of the individual in life, in my opinion, having achieved the creation of her own personality. In the end, I think what I have kept the most is the feeling of the process.





## Notes

<sup>i</sup> Short historical reference for the city of Weimar: Weimar is one of the great cultural sites of Europe, since it was the home to such luminaries as *Bach, Goethe, Schiller, and Herder*. It has been a site of pilgrimage for the *German intelligentsia* since *Goethe* first moved to Weimar in the late 18th century. The tombs of *Goethe, Schiller, and Nietzsche* may be found in the city, as may the archives of *Goethe and Schiller*.

The period in German history from 1919-1933 is commonly referred to as the *Weimar Republic*, as the *Republic's constitution* was drafted here while the capital, *Berlin*, with its streets rioting after the 1918 revolution, was considered too dangerous for the *National Assembly* to convene.

Weimar was the center of the *Bauhaus movement*. The city houses art galleries, museums, the *German national theatre*, and the *Bauhaus University*, which attracts students specializing in *Media and Design, Architecture, and Music* from all over Germany. During World War II, there was a concentration camp near Weimar, at *Buchenwald*, a little wood that *Goethe* had loved to frequent only 8 kilometers from the city center. More than 55,000 prisoners entered the gates bearing the motto "*Arbeit macht frei*"-- work will set you free. Visitors today can view areas used for shelter, medical experimentation, cremation, and labor. A somber, disturbing experience, yet one that must be endured.

UNESCO selected the city as *cultural capital of Europe* ("*Kulturstadt Europas*") for 1999. (*Wikipedia, The free Encyclopedia, www.wikipedia.org*)

<sup>ii</sup> The animal Chameleon: in reality the animal itself is solitary and rivalry. Some Chameleon species are able to change their body color, which made them one of the most famous lizard families. Contrary to popular belief, this change of color is not an adaptation to the surroundings but rather an expression of the physical and physiological condition of the lizard. The skin color is changed under influence of mood, light and temperature. The skin color also plays an important part in communication and rivalry fights. (*Wikipedia, The free Encyclopedia, www.wikipedia.org*)

<sup>iii</sup> "7-Eleven" is a corporate chain of mini-markets very popular all over the US.

<sup>iv</sup> "But as a result of his urge to know everything, to know the world in its totality, and to verify all thought by means of the criterion of coherence, which for him means that nothing must be left out which would leave thought incomplete, he confuses the distinction between "having" and "knowing" in experience, and ends by trying,

in Appearance and Reality to get an experience in which "thought has...to become one thing with sense and feeling", and by attempting to find out what immediate experience is before thought has destroyed it - since this immediate experience will, he thinks, give him a direct contact with Reality." "For Bradley the demand of thought is for self-consistency and all-inclusiveness; and "truth is identical with Reality in the sense that, in order to perfect itself, it would have to become a Reality". To be "real" is to include all experience, and this, of course, must include immediate experience; to determine the "degree of reality" of any thought, you must appeal to immediate experience - since without it as a factor any thought is a "prey to contradiction". (Robert D. Mack, *The Appeal to Immediate Experience, Philosophic Method in Bradley, Whitehead and Dewey*, Conclusion, p. 70.)

## Photography

All the photography made by Marcel Köhler & Anna Tsouloufi

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