

***The following interview between Katerina Gregos and Jenny Marketou appeared in TIME OUT, Athens,Greece on July 23,2003. It is experts from the discussion between the two which took place on June 19,2003 at the Unlimited /Art Forum during the Art Basel 2003.The discussion was present by THE BREEDER, Athens,Greece and Unlimited/Art Forum.***

**1. Katerina Gregos: How would you describe your work to someone who had never seen it?**

Jenny Marketou: In 1995,coming from a background in photography and installation I began to create interactive video installations that involve the viewer and the viewer's response to a given situation and to insert sculptural time. The elements of my work is reality and fiction, electronic and real space, time and memory, identity and geography,individual and collective, the private and public domain. By incorporating photography, video, film, sound, electronic memory, prerecorded and lives images into installations, architecture and public interventions I have used the museum or gallery as a place of production. I have tried to decontextualize things in order to create works that have destines of their own.

Most recently I became very interested in using the internet and information technologies in order to explore the cultural and social relationship between art and technologies and the impact of the electronic media on our contemporary sense of self, community and place.My goal is to create social networks and various modes of production in order to produce visual experiences and new forms of representation of human connectivity and interfacing which respond and progress in recognizably non-random, but at the same time unpredictable ways. One approach requires structure and hierarchy and the other requires inhabited experience, enactment or performance and a very active viewers participation.They are both fragile, unstable, displaced and move between representation and abstraction.

**2. K.G. Your latest project, "Flying Spy Potatoes", is an intervention in public space, which raises the highly topical issue of surveillance. What exactly does the work consist of and how does it function?**

J.M. Dissecting the fear and its relationship to contemporary urban public space "Flying Spy Potatoes" are a series of digital video recordings entirely shot during rush hours in three major rails portals of high security in New York City such as Grand Central Station, Pen Station and Port Authority which were declared under the Bush administration with "Orange Alert " security against terrorism as " Hard Targets".

As the title suggests to create this work I recorded through the vertical vision of the “bird eye view” of a custom made wireless camera mounted on two oversize helium birthday balloons which I was holding at the end of a 30 foot tether while I was walking around the rail portals. The images captured from the camera were transmitted remotely to a wireless radio receiver and then were recorded on tape on a wireless video cam recorder.

The camera which is presented as a character follows the ambiguous movement of the balloons which are moving slowly by the air up and high in the ceiling . The uncanny process of wireless video recording and the misuse of “surveillance technologies” which I have developed especially for this project converts all the “information” and “materiality” into images partly representational and partly abstract and saturated with flickering pixels of shadowy human figures which move continuously across an empty and horizon less space. Time does not flow towards a resolution but it is congealed as a pressure block waiting to explode.

The use of silver “birthday balloon” as the container of the “surveillance” eye is an explicit metaphor for the myth of “science”, “technology” and “discovery” and “curiosity” into everyday life. Using myself in holding the flying “balloons” and enacting the camera reveals the artist as a parachutical agent who penetrates the “system” of power . For me the use of “play” is a kind of experimentation and invention and very important element in my work.

3. K.G . You have mentioned the "esthetics of surveillance" in the context of this work. What exactly do you mean by that?

J.M. Starting with TRANSLOCAL in 1996 and later with SMELLBYTES, TAYSTESROOM and DELETE, I am using models and tools of information, intelligence and surveillance technologies such as internet, databases, tracking systems, hacking, CCTV, web cams, big brother and reality shows .

My goal is to make the above systems transparent through the process of “reverse engineering” in order to explore fear, memory and illusion and to interpret, represent and mirror psychological states and processes, and their breakdown.

In the case of Flying Spy Potatoes I am attempting to involve the viewer in psychological state which breaks down. What is the difference between how the military looks, and how a civilian looks? Where is the erotic in the voyeuristic act? Who does the seeing when the presence of the observer is eliminated in to “zero degree” ? What are we doing when we use the vision feature of the spy cam or CCTV camera to secretly observe someone?

I want to think of the particular agendas to which the technologies and modes of looking are attached, rather than just the technologies themselves, and to think about the new visual conventions that arise. Surveillance esthetics have seeped into popular culture, and they certainly do constitute a new visual language. But the choices have to be carefully made, especially if you want to dig deeper. Especially into the psychological, sexual, or interpersonal dynamics, because the surveillance apparatus is internalized in perception and behavior. By internalizing the conditions of the technical structure of the apparatus brings up the "use" or "misuse" of technology for self-definition which reminds me the process of work by of June Paik and Charlie Chaplin. and which has had a big impact in my work. So the esthetics have to encode what is happening and the changes that they are bringing to representational conventions of image making and how they have influenced our perception , behavior , human connection and art process.

**4. K.G. As a result of your noticeable appearance passers-by warned the police because of what they considered to be your "suspicious" behavior and you were arrested and held for questioning. Though this was probably not your intention, do you think this adds another dimension to your work and if so how?**

J.M. Somehow I always prefer to talk more about the stories and trajectories which take place behind the scene for the realization of each of my projects because they are sometime more alive then the " end result " itself and the story behind adds another dimension in the experience of the work. Growing up in Athens, Greece my memory of public space has been that of freedom, unconstrained of any fear of surveillance devices and militarized control. So living in New York in the post 9/11 era I experience more and more the constrain of fear under the new laws and regulations which elaborate fear in the warfare against terror .This fear has legitimized total " surveillance" under the name of 'homeland and individual security" and against the intolerance of any human diversity in America.

Obviously my arrest and detainment not only demonstrates how public space can also operate as the " performance of surveillance" but also as "control of performance". All mammals share three neurophysiological responses to fear, anxiety and control. They freeze, flight or fight. While the first two involve disengagement and distancing from the source the third involves direct engagement. It is very obvious that with the proliferation of fear in the Civic Realm artists and activists fight back through " creativity" and "imagination".

Concerning " Flying Spy Potatoes" obviously under the circumstances it became to use Joseph Boyeus term a " protest piece" a kind of a creative " discourse " of the depersonalization of violence and the increased erosion of our privacy. The piece confronts the controlled nature of the public urban space revealing a

peculiar 21st hollowness born of our collective faith in safety and technology. It stands as a metaphor for the fragility of those human beings and those lives in the fear of the might of police and military authority and it is a meditation on the uncanny powers of surveillance devices in the urban public space.

**5. K.G. Surveillance has been a part of human nature since the beginning of organized societies. While we cannot probably conceive of a surveillance-free society, what would be, for you, acceptable forms of surveillance?**

J.M. Katerina your question is very utopian and I am afraid I will not be able to answer with a "utopian" answer. I believe by either watching others or being watched by others we develop a sense of community which reminds me the version of the neighborhood watch. To me that this is the military/industrial complex's version. But community always implies exclusion, setting up an us/them dialectic. And with exclusion, there are always borders and segregation. So it is hard for me to see a satisfactory relationship between community and surveillance because any kind of unwilling "surveillance" is a form of control and loss of privacy. In any case security, privacy and freedom are very complicated issues and certainly they are culturally determined. I am afraid that I am running out of space to elaborate more on these issues.

Katerina Gregos is an independent curator and art critic who lives in Athens, Greece. Katerina till recently was the director of DESTE Foundation, Center for Contemporary Art, Athens, Greece where she curated several exhibitions with Greek and internationally acclaimed artists.

The BREEDER Projects  
<http://www.thebreedersystem.com/>