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ISEA 2008
ISEA 2008, National Museum of Singapore, Singapore. July 25 — August 3. 2008

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here recent new media communities have engaged in the proliferation of festivals and conferences, ISEA—the International Symposium on Electronic Art—remains one of the oldest, all encompassing and ambitious of these events. Held biannually in various cities throughout the world, this year's event took place in the Asian megalopolis of Singapore. With over 800 delegates attending, the festivals' five thematic axes: *Locating Media, Wiki Wiki, Ludic Interfaces, Reality Jam and Border Transmissions* were articulated over convergent platforms, from exhibitions, juried artist-in-residence programs (AIR)—the results of which were highlighted in the main exhibition at the National Museum of Singapore—along with conferences, seminars, round tables, workshops and networking sessions. An event such as ISEA promotes the entanglement of practices and an opportunity for the cross-pollination of ideas in the media arts.

Locating and Rendering Vectors

The praxis of geographic and locative technologies—from site-specific interventions to real-time representations of 'space'—is a timely area of analysis in this increasingly mobile society. As such, a series of conferences focused on urban and location-specific research showed the spectrum of work in this field, as well as its far-reaching socio-political points of inflection.
Daniel Sauter's presentation on his recent project *Light Attack*, an urban intervention work projecting 'light' silhouettes onto urban public spaces from a passing car, aptly questioned the role of the urban intervention artist as social 'ethnographer'. [2] Where Sauter's work looks to create interstices, wherein the public-at-large in concord with the artist, may co-structure an aesthetic critique/event. *Light Attack* escapes forging into the territory of technological evangelism by making the artwork's effects incumbent upon the work's open-ended structure, mutable uses, inherent mobility,

and fluid re-structurization accomplished by its encounters with changing architectural landscapes and participants.
The proliferation of GPS-enabled technologies posits a redefinition of notions and attitudes towards location. Dimitris Charitos' LOCUNET project uses locative technology—GPS enhanced mobile phones—from a communicational perspective to create and study variegated instantiations of locative-enhanced 'being'. Of interest is how a collaborative mobile phone-based game may construct converging modalities of 'presence'—from those in the physical world; the electronically mediated 'virtual' environment; and the imaginary environment created in the user's mind. This tactical interaction scenario creates a redefining of 'space' into 'place'. [3]
A more critical purview of the uses of locative media was Lone Koefoed Hansen's presentation *Lost in Location*, which untangled the failures of GPS navigating systems to mesh with real-life driving conditions. Giving ironically telling examples of driving encounters with construction sites, prohibitively narrow streets, and just plain misinformation (for example a road mapped into a lake!)—Hansen demonstrated the psychological chasm at work when using locative technologies as well as the limitations of these technologies to take into account the emergent needs of drivers.
The locative talk Post-Panoptic Era by Brazilians Milena Szafir and Mariana Kadlec on their recent interventionist/Fluxus inspired work featuring an ambulant mobile 'station' made available to the public-at-large to broadcast themselves in real-time over the Internet, was a reminder of the inequalities in access to technology across various countries and communities as well as the increasing importance of the Internet as a social, political and personal tool of agency.

Transient Borders

The evanescence of social and cultural borders facilitated by the incursion of communication technologies in contrast to increased concerns towards tangible geographical gate stopping in forms of border control, informed many artists projects and presentations. Maroussia Lévesques talk, *Lost in Transportation*, on the topic of her collaborative project with Jason Lewis, *Passage Oublié*, an interactive artwork enlisting airport publics to send messages via cell phones to a touch screen kiosk located in Pearson's International Airport (Toronto) on the topic of rendition flight, the questionable prac-

tice of detainee-transfer (predominantly Muslim men) to 'black sites'—international locations immune to the persecution of human rights violations used for unethical interrogation practices—re-emphasized the social inequalities of border crossing. Monika Ewa Codourey's presentation on *Territory as Interface* also focused on airports, specifically their politicized architectural design from the shopping 'free' areas, to deportation 'lounges'. Clearly, as mobility and nomadism of all kinds increase the re-enforcement of 'wanted' and 'unwanted' individuals, border crossings becomes more engrained in the architecture and design of transitional spaces.

Audio/Transmissions

The contested and yet often imperceptible spaces of micro sounds, audioscapes and radio frequencies was seminal this ISEA. Zach Poff and N.B. Aldrich's *Appropriate Response*, a generative audio installation creating ongoing, dynamic conversation between modified television sets reconfigured the cut-and-paste auditory landscapes of the everyday while Nigel Helyer and Daniel Woo's *Run Silent; Run Deep*, an audio portrait of the Singapore harbour created by recording underwater acoustics ranging from sonar to whale songs was geo-spatially presented via a navigable map-based video composition.

Jodi Rose's *The Global Bridge Symphony* captured the unique vibrations, tensions and sways of bridges from the world-over and re-worked these to create a locatively effective data mining of the sonic potential of engineering structures. While Kelly Jaclynn Andres' *Finally, We Hear One Another paired visitors to wear mobile phone enhanced caps* transmitting each participant's auditory environments to the other. One of the more interesting aspects of this remote audioscape sharing was the choreography involved in trying to 'compose' the audio experience for the person listening at the other end.

One of the highlight performance events, Marko Peljhan's (in collaboration with Mathew Biederman, Brian Springer and Aljosa Abrahamsberg) tactical media performance *SPEKTR!*, featured real-time audiovisual 'mapping' of the local electromagnetic spectrum creating a series of transforming sound and video landscapes. Scanning the night sky, *SPEKTR!* picked up conversations from passing planes, amateur radio conversations, satellites, digital data streams and natural radio sources and transformed these into a audio-video event which was supplemented by an archive of video/audio.

Embodied Play

Nicolas Bourriaud has posited relational aesthetics as the essential tenet contemporary art.[4] Interactive art borrows many of the strategies of relational art, principally in having the art embodied in the 'event.' Hence play-and actionis a central element of new media art. The ways in which 'play' may be articulated and re-mapped by new technologies foregrounded many of the works and presentations at ISEA, subverting ordinary interface expectations to create whimsical and likely disturbing reconfigurations of set interactive paradigms.

Douglas Easterly and Matthew Kenyon's conference on their collaborative projects, developed under the umbrella of Studies of Work Atmospheres and Mass Production (S.W.A.M.P.) offered a mordant critique of American consumer and political practices. Works such as *Consumer Index*, a work which subvert the Nelson Family marketing data research by having Kenyon scan shelved goods in a local Wal-Mart via an embedded video scanner concealed in his mouth demonstrated the artists dedication to 'messing' with statistical representation. Their 'Improvised Empathic Device' featuring a sharp tool embedded into a black armband worn by the artists at all times which delivered a painful prod every time a soldier was/is killed in Iraq, was a reminder of the political folly of this current ongoing invasion. In an even more disturbing instantiation of politicized play, Claudia Costa Pederson's talk on Critical Play Interfaces featured Wafaa Bilal's, one month long real-time web performance, *Domestic Tension*, wherein the online community was invited to 'shoot' (via a web-enabled paint ball gun) a 'terrorist' (the artist, who is Iraqi). The ensuing carnage of over 6000 shot paint balls is a prescient warning of the violence

that can be waged through dehumanizing technologies, a motivating factor to create better, more embodied and socially engaged interfaces and if ever there was one.

Conclusion

An event such as ISEA is an opportunity to take the pulse of media arts on a global scale—and discover the works through close proximity of their makers. One criticism was the missed opportunity for greater linkages between disciplines and practices, predominantly through the greater integration of artist presentations into the main thematics. I look forward to Dublin's 2009 edition and to particularly experiencing the transformation and advancements of locative media, in-situ interventions, ludic interactions and audio-centered experiences.

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Valérie Lamontagne is a Montreal-based performance/digital media artist, freelance art critic and independent curator. She regularly writes about new media art and culture in: *CV Photo, ETC, Parachute, BlackFlash, HorizonZero, Rhizome*. Curatorial projects have been featured at: The New Museum of Contemporary Art (New York City), the Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec (Quebec City), OBORO (Montreal), Images Festival (Toronto), CYNETart (Dresden), Columbia College A+D Gallery (Chicago). Her technology-based works have been showcased across Canada, the United States, Central and South America and Europe. She is a Special Individualized Program PhD candidate at Concordia University investigating "Relational and Ubiquitous Performance Art" where she lectures in the Department of Design and Computation Arts. Her research explores the resonance of embodied somatic presence co-structured with technological apparatuses expressed via live performance or networked environments.
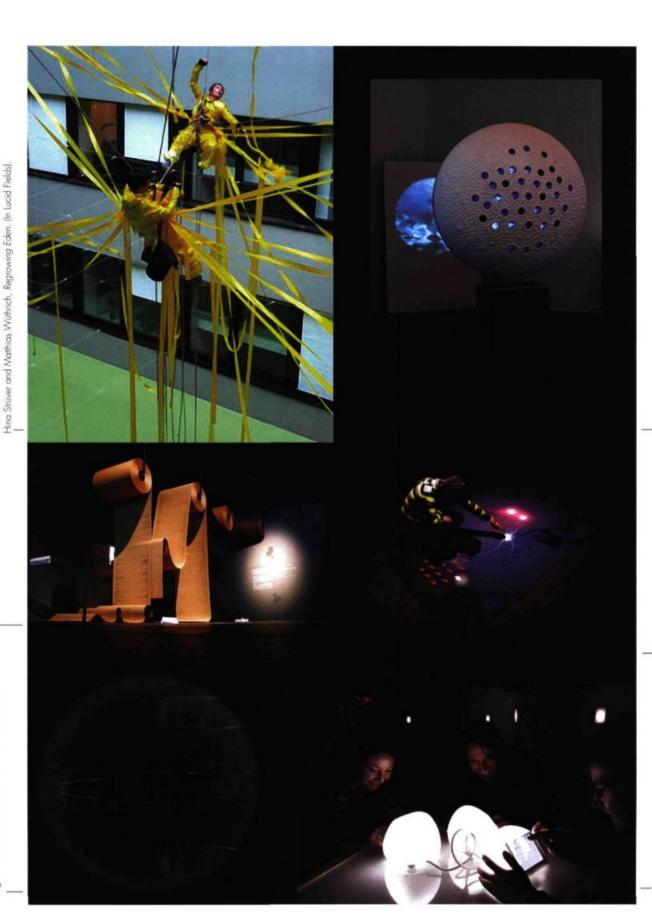
NOTES

[1] ISEA is now an annual event.

[2] See Hal Forster "The Artist as Ethnographer," in The Return of the Real (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996).

[3] Michel de Certeau's proposes that urban 'space' is transformed into 'place' via movement and storytelling in "Spatial Stories" in The Practice of Everyday Life Trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

[4] Nicolas Bourriaud, Esthétique relationnelle (Les Presses du réel, 2001).

DIY GORI: seed_121 69976400 | Jee Hyun Oh (South Korea) | Laboratory of Control and Mechatronics. (In Artists in residence).

Hina Strüver and Matthias Wüthrich, *Regrowing Eden*. (In Lucid Fields).

Jill Scott, *The Electric Retina*, 2008. Neurobiology at the Institute of Zoology, University of Zurich. (In Lucid

Angela Barnett, Andrew Buchanan, Darren Ballingall, Chris MacKellar & Christian Rubino, Immersion, 2007.
An Experimenta New Visions Commission. Interactive video projection. (In Experimenta Play ++.

Stella Brenna, *South Pacific*, 2007.
Single channel video + sound 10 min. (In Cloudland).

Priscilla Bracks, Gavin Sade & Matt Dwyer, Charmed, 2007.
An Experimenta New Visions Commission.
Interactive installation. (In Experimenta Play ++).