

BERKAN KARPAT
CYBERPHYSICAL ART [TOPOGRAPHY]

[Auszug aus der Rede zur Konferenz „Digital Art and Public Space“ Harvard u. Boston University/USA im Rahmen des Cyberarts Festival, Boston/USA 2003]

Since 1998, I have been working on a project series called „the Seven Daughters of Atlas“. The individual projects are manifested in public spaces. Their basic themes are the new, future human and the new worlds. In this way, they (deal with concepts like) have to do with the Electric Human and his world, the autonomous human, the Kemalistic human, the hypermodern human and his world, etc. Those are the various drams of Utopia. Utopia in this sense however does not always promise a positive view of the world. Often enough the human of the new age appeared in a menacing figure

To give an initial idea about my works, I would like to draw a comparison with Oriental maps from the Middle Ages. In these old maps, there are not only roadways and riverways, but also (and this is an essential difference from contemporary maps) myths, hero sagas, or very personal family histories which are calligraphied, cartographized

In this way, the cartographic gesture in these maps can be sensed as a ritual operation and not as a purely functional one. The maps attempt not only to reproduce the world, to photocopy it, but rather to narrate it, to image it; they show extracts from dreams, from the unreal. It is this tradition of cartographizing that I take up in my work.

But I take up the process of cartographization, of producing a map as a different gesture. I do not develop two-dimensional maps. My works unfold in public space as multi-dimensional processes. In these processes, the borderlines between the arts, the sciences, reality and imagination become permeable and are consolidated as conjunctions of this kind: „and...and...and“. As conjunctions, they form a texture. This texture has no dividing lines between arts, sciences, and other categories. However it is not just a mixed bag, not mixed media. This texture narrates, imagines, cartographizes moments of the new human, the new worlds. I call this texture a theatrical map or cyberphysical topography.

I conceive of the cartographic process as an experimental approximation of reality and also of imagination. Each theatrical map is a poetic attempt [or essay, in the French sense of the word *essai*]. The poetic attempt is not an attempt to photograph the given nor to create a theatric figure of reality. To do so would rather be reminiscent of contemporary maps.

So I do not wish to represent the world, to photocopy it, and none of the performers seeks to simulate a human. Rather, cartographic processes unfold into fields of actions of ritual structuration: they are a kind of representational prayer. A representational prayer about the utopian dreams of the human. The cartographized space is a possible space of prayer. In this sense, the work processes are closer to the prayer of the dervish's dance or the Japanese no-theatre, than to the western theatrical gesture.

To sum up: This cartographic bearing – as I understand it – generates theatrical maps/theatrical topographies. The theatrical maps are polymeric in their structure, and express themselves therefore as diverse processes. Diverse processes are the interplay of conjunctions of different speeds. As conjunctions they form alliances – in the ideal case: between the various sectors like visual arts, sleep research, theater, technology, literature, etc. In this alliance, they generate a texture without borderlines between the various sectors of life. As a texture they install themselves in public space at different velocities. Their velocity determines their legality.

I would like to elucidate more closely the trajectory of the work by way of three projects or theatrical topographies.

In Munich in 1999, I installed „DANCERS OF ELECTRICITY“ on Odeonplatz, a public place in the city center, for a duration of six weeks.

First you will see a 10 meter tall wooden tower. This tower could be a wooden sculpture in public space. Further it is a sound objekt. Furthermore it is a theater space as well: In the evenings 48 viewers stand inside it and attend a performance. The "stage" is in the utermost inner space of the tower. Performers spaces as well as the audience places are on diverse levels – (EXPLAIN on PICTURE).

It is also a light sculpture, since in its interior there is a rotating, reflective mirror ball.

This multifaceted interplay can be considered perhaps as a sequence from the interplay of conjunctions (wooden sculpture and theater room and light sculpture and sound sculpture and...). However, this is no arbitrary sequence of functions. Rather, all the functions cooperate with each other in sketching out the main theme, in cartographizing it.

So what is it all about: It is about two poetic and utopian thought – fabrics – the one of the Russian poet Velimir Chlebnikov and the one of the middleage theologian and poet Celaleddin Rumi. Their thoughts form the two main threads of the project. Both perspectivize in very different ways the future human. Both positions struggle with another: It is a struggle of voices about utopias: the mystic and islamic, the cubo-futuristic and socialistic.

Chlebnikov developed a „star language“ for the New Human. Rumi was searching for the divine word in the human. Chlebnikov envisioned the ELECTRIC HUMAN. As a mystic from the fifteenth century, Rumi idealized the beloved Schems (Schems means sun [in the sense of sun in the sky] as an ideal, perfectly mystical beloved. (According to Islamic tradition, Mohamed is the ideal human–every Moslem should act as he does.)

So this main thema conditiones the diverse functions:

As a sound sculpture: When one approaches the wooden tower from afar, one can hear the tower whispering. One hears Chlebnikov's extreme sound lyrics in Russian and Rumi's poetry in Persian. The closer one approaches, the softer the whisper becomes. And when one is very near, the tower becomes silent and then begins to vibrate. At this point, one is able to touch the voices, feel them.

As a light sculpture: the sunlight and the moonlight reflect in four eight-meter long mirror strips. They set the mirror ball in motion. It is the poet Rumi who often beheld in his poems the beloved Schems or God not only as the sun, but also as a mirror. The beloved as the sun which turns. Rumi is also the founder of sufismi. e. the whirling dervishes – the mystic movement in Islam. While praying, the dervishes rotate on their own axis like luminaries around the sun. The natural light of the sun and moon are foiled by the electric neon light. This binds the light sculpture also to Chlebnikov: He envisioned the Electric Human as the human who acts autonomously, and effeciently creates the new world by means of electric power.

As a theater space: On several evenings, the struggle of voices takes place. It begins at a height of 8 meters: two speakers recite in Persian and Russian texts of Rumi and Chlebnikov. Pure recitation is already a turning-away from the figuration of the world; reciting in the Islamic sense is a religious act. Perhaps I should mention that some of the mystic Rumi's texts are to be considered religious texts. The work of Masnavi-Serif is called the Koran of the Persians. Already here, the beginning of a ritual structuration of the cyberphysiccal topography is evident through the choice of text. However, please don't view my work in the sense of a prayer in church. The holy moment of making theater has become rather forgotten in Western theater.

A third speaker moved vertically and recited a text that the author Zafer Senocak and I wrote. (By the way, Zafer and I created texts for all of the pieces.) A transparent tube was wrapped around the speaker. In the tube, a fourescent green fluid swirled around like a dancing dervish.

The struggle of voices finished at the ground level through by way of oil wrestling. In traditional oil wrestling, powers are measured. It is not about winning or losing. Rather, the oil wrestlers are troubadours of the body.

I like to see this sculpture as a dervish hat, whome it resembles in his outlook. Like Dervishes – you may say in a western context a wandering beggar monc – the wooden sculpture wanders from place to place, it installs itself temporarily as a nomad. It speaks about love, about the future human, future dreams. The dervish hat, the cyberphysical topography is an instance of nomadic irritation, which modifies the permanent architecture and the socio-architectecture: the topographic memory of a city begins to falter and in an elevation of imagination, something hardly noticeable burns into the collective memory.

(Incidentally, I was quite irritated when in December I was flying back from Boston to Munich and saw a promotional film about the city of Munich which featured a brief shot of Odeonplatz – including the wooden tower.)

Thus the theatrical topographies are nomadic interventions which temporarily irritate the permanent architecture.

Perhaps one further example from another project.

2001, I installed THE ROBINSON SYNDROME 2 in Munich's English Garden.

Robinsonsyndrom is a project that deals with the enlightenment's idea of the Autonomous Human based on three different Robinson Crusoe stories: an old arabic by Ibn Tufail, the well known Robinson Crusoe by Daniel Defoe and an old Japanese no-play called Shunkan.

The problem was:

The English Garden is a Gesamtkunstwerk by the garden architect Friedrich Sckell which, is protected under the Registry of Historic Places. For this reason, no sculpture or installation is allowed to be implanted in the Garden – not even temporarily.

The municipal government felt that to do so would be like painting on top of a Picasso. After a two-year long negotiation, I was permitted to realize my project, which meant: I was allowed to set 30 plexiglass cubes with 1000 goldfish into Kleinhesseloher Lake, changing the lake into a surface of play and the rowboats into stages and spectator spaces.

My official title was: fish salesperson presenting his goods – never say bureaucracy is not creative! Now it is yet again the case that no one is permitted to change the face of the Garden.

I do not know what ultimately convinced the authorities to consent to the project... perhaps it was my own stubbornness or the advantageous city politics. Perhaps also it had to do with my discovery that there was a spiritual connection between the garden architect Friedrich Sckell, who planned the Garden and the twelfth century Arab philosopher Ibn Tufail. Apparently Sckell was influenced by Ibn Tufail. In the twelfth century, Tufail wrote the philosophical treatise „Hajj ibn Jaquzan“. The treatise is like a Robinson Crusoe story. In it, Tufail describes how a person, growing up on his own on an island, may find his way to God through pure, logical thought. Kant and Schelling knew this work, and it is likely that Sckell did as well. The thought suggests itself, since the Garden is an Enlightenment Garden. Sckell also proposed that „Each tree is a symbol for a free, free-thinking citizen.“

Out of this context, aspects of Defoe's novel „Robinson Crusoe“ can be seen developing. Tufail's work was a model for Defoe. A further, supplementary trajectory can be found in the no-piece „Shunkan“ All three works, which are the textual basis for the projekt, are Crusoe-esque stories. And an interaction with the world and life is constructed out of the posture of the solitary person. In Tufail, the protagonist makes his way to God. Defoe comes across Friday and functionalizes him. Shunkan, the Buddhist who has lost his faith, seeks his pain, his basic self, through his desparation. All three works, as well as Sckell's Garden, sketch out utopian moments of societal relevance. Like human hubris: seeking the ability to form nature upon human will. Thus Sckell implants an architectonic nature into nature. I wanted to have thousands of goldfish floating in the air like autumn leaves. And I implanted glass cubes into the Gartengesamtkunstwerk of the English Garden.

At the performances: Two speakers on the lake recited the Robinson Crusoe stories. Their voices were carried forward by the mouths of the rowers. The rowers had megaphones. Rowers and „spectators“ floated on the nocturnal lake. A dervish did his round dance, his prayer as a citation of Tufail. (Tufail describes how a person meditatively becomes like a star through rotational movement, and succeeds in beholding God.) I myself became a fish. Dived around in the lake and cartographed my personal fear of the dark water in the cyberphysical topography.

During the Day: The cubes were sound objects: the natural sounds of the garden were changed through a Computer program working with the topographical data of the garden architecture – and emitted through loudspeakers installed on the surface of the lake.

For the viewers, I wanted to develop an initial bioport. They would drink sugar water, an emblem of the drink of paradise. Drinking the sugar water changes one's blood sugar. I wanted to measure the change in blood sugar with a blood analysis machine. These data, in turn, would change the sound that the boats emitted upon the surface of the water.

The viewer is converted into a constitutive element of the sound machine, into a constitutive element of the cyberphysical topography.

There are three different moments of encounter for the viewer:

1. He accidentally enters the cyberphysical topography. Apprehends pieces of it. Since I myself am always present during the „installation period“, a dialogue can arise between us.
2. He temporarily becomes as an element of the cyberphysical topography itself as passagier in the rowboats.
3. He processes secondary, tertiary information second - and third-hand. Either in the city archives, on digital media, or later in the windmill of the German Museum in Munich. I would like to fold the theatrical maps together and display them in the museum as artefacts of a cyberphysical topography.

That is the third project I want to talk about - The experimental space in the Deutsches Museum Munich.

Public space is a substratum of political and human coalescence. From this perspective, I think that the public ought to be able to have the opportunity to experience the development of the cyberphysical Art publicly and discuss it collectively. Even more so because the projects deal with utopias – which is always a collectiv dialogue.

For this reason, since 2002 I have begun to work publicly in the German Museum in Munich, to carry out poetic experiments, as a kind of sketch. The museum could be a sketchbook. The experiments could be initial stages of the cyberphysical topography/cyberphysical Art.. The German Museum, as a Technical Museum, is a specific public space. In it, the dreams of new worlds and future humans are archived and exhibited. Thus they form a theoretical framework to my works. The thought-machine of the German (technical) Museum envisions the New World of the future human in the spirit of technology. However, as a reliquary of the modern, its habitus is primarily rooted in binary ideology. This forcefield of a mythos-forming utopia verifies and modifies the cartographic theme of the cyberphysical topography. Thus the cartographic processes find their specific location for development in the German Museum as a diversified superimposition of the public space within the public space.

I began one of the first poetic experiments in the German Museum in July 2002. Generating a collective phase of REM-sleep (dream phase) as a homage to the Turkish poet Nazim Hikmet. The dreams are to be synchronized with the assistance of his conserved voice. The experiments are a kind of farewell to his futuristic thoughts. It is no longer about living a communal dream, but about setting individual dreams to the same beat, synchronizing them. It is no longer philosophy which creates utopia, but instead technology develops utopia, the sociotopia.

In the Museum, four people laid themselves to sleep. The conserved voice of Nazim Hikmet vibrated on their bodies. Similarly to breathing-when one inhales, the other participants fall into the same breathing rhythm – I thought that the voice would lead to a collective REM-phase. The REM-phases were measured using an EEG machine. At that point, a synchronicity did not take place.

And tonight, we will attempt the first trans-Atlantic dream synhronization. Eight people will sleep in Munich in the courtyard of the Museum and one person will sleep in Boston's Goethe-Insitute. Over the ocean, the voice of the poet should synchronize the dreams. Perhaps a collective REM-phase will result.

I would be happy if you would attend this experimental sketch. The cyberphysical topography of these sketches will perhaps be manifested this year at the Istanbul Biennale. On the Bosphorus River, on the sea, thirty people will sleep. Perhaps their dreams on the sea, on the no-man's land, will be synchronized. This is perhaps the first synchronous dream of hypermodernity.

Thank you very much for listening.