Mijana Peric
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More/Less Than a Cyberfession: A few theoretical short-(cir)cu(i)ts from [Learn to hear through the lies of your eyes]"

First day in UpStage I found my new theme. A theme for what? As a student of Group for Theory of Arts and Media, I had got a task to choose subject and write a paper related to Internet art. During pause from endless surfing through the sea of web-pages connected to digital-, cyber-, networked-, net-based-, web-art projects, I remembered that cyberformance group Avatar Body *Collision* had a performance in Belgrade a few months ago (it was in autumn 2004). Helen Varley Jamieson was on stage of Rex cultural centre, and rest of the cyberformance crew from the AB*C* collective was performing on-line, visible on big projection screen behind her. Audience in Rex's big hall was looking at their *UpStage* performance; or is more precise to say – we followed their manipulating with both parts of the cyberstage: physical and virtual. That cyberstaged performance was process of simultaneously dealing with both venues: traditional theater/performance art scene, on one side, and digitally synthesized scene-on-screen, on another. In some moment, Varley Jamieson's performing became quite disturbing: she was balancing with laptop on her head like it was an old book! Thousand question- and exclamation-marks showed up in my head: „What does she doing? This is crazy! Where she thinks she is? Who she thinks that we are?! Some billionaires (in postsocialist, post-civilwar, post-bombing, post-/ex-Yugoslavia)?! To play with laptop like that! All this is absurd! What is this performance about, anyway? About some rich kids from around the First world who can afford to play-and-break their expensive toys?!" These thoughts were passing again through my head, while I was waiting for an UpStage web-page to show on my computer screen. Loading of homepage was fast (if the word „fast" still can be used in same sentence with combination of terms such as „dial-up" and „Internet-connection"), but cyber-stage was loading, loading and loading, and I didn't want to give up from my newly found researching subject.

It is not sure how long I had had to stare at the splash message: „Hello audience! Welcome to UpStage!", but it was pretty enough for hosting variety of contemplative moods. In the matter of fact, that was good, because net-art-topic of the paper had to be somehow problematized: theoretically and critically re-viewed. Thinking pleiad which had started with: „Finally! I have found great thematic for the paper!", after a while became directed toward some problematic/al economy related issues/: „Someone crashes laptops in the name of new, „young" art, as a creative metaphor and symbolic act, and other will crash computer just because poor machine is few years „older", and, so, a bit slower." While I was wondering if my computer will succeed to load the web-stage that day, or next one, or ever, feeling in a way „Am I really welcome (t)here?" encompassed me.

„Is not hospitality an interruption of the self?", Derrida's question was echoing in my impatient body. And, whose „self" was in the question? My-self? Or some of the selves of the UpStage: as an artistic platform, of software application, host server, of programmers or artists involved?
Now, at the moment when the new UpStage software version 2.4.2 waits for its first official public show(ing), looks that, logically speaking, it could not be wrong to talk about new-version-of-anything as an improved self? But instead to examine possibility of cyberstage „subjectivity", my story leads to some other cyber-figuration.

First day in UpStage I found my new team too. Following an ongoing fashion in artworld, which is especially present in a cyber-artworld, I had to reach up one more thing to become fully equipped for writing of the paper. In question was reaching of the artist-as-researcher position. Or, as Graeme Sullivan named it in his book *Art Practice as Research*, an „artist-theorist".

But instead of proposed „artist–theorist" formula, which looked like that is calling for some kind of subtraction (artist – theorist = minus and for art and for theory), I preferred to get in my working team both of them, that is: „artist+theorist".

It's gonna pay off later - it's a logical end;
all the signs are pointing to it.
Everything's turning to red and you see blue,
so that's why you like it up here.

I wanna be blind.

When everything you want is not the way you want it -
you're on the right track,
sit back,
hold tight.

I was thinking.
Then I stopped.

From the first day on UpStage.org.nz cyberstage, we had stopped to think as before. We started with acting. *Qui*, real acting! Are you wondering who „we" were? Artist and theorist, of course. As a student in the first year of Theory of Arts studies, I did not consider myself for a real theoretician, that is, completly formed and competent. Just small part of competencies were mine at that moment. So, I had taken that „part", and started to/with acting. Other person was an artist, but also not a real one: she was of that cyber- kind. I met her on UpStage. In many ways she was similar to me, but in another so different. We started with our „acting" thanks to mutual attractions and distractions. But not just thanks to that: in order to write my paper, I needed someone who will introduce me to the whole thing, someone who will show me how cyberstaged art mechanism works „from inside". I did not want to act like a blind.
[Syntagma like-a-blind is meant for the case of „theoreticians" who can write a dozens of pages about some subject, without really looked at it previously. Also, it is meant for examples in which after brief examination of some red painting, theorist will elaborate about its blue side, and, eventually, close the whole case with conclusion that red painting is, „actually", a blue one. Sometimes, such kind of surplus of produced, derived and/or added meanings in art theories can sound so nice and *true-blue*, but I wanted to act in some other way.]
As Varley Jamieson noticed in her *Adventures in Cyberformance*, „much of the current discourse and research methodologies are focused on the interpretation and critique of artistic practice rather than on the actual process of creation." Maybe, - too much. It was time to say „Enough!" to interpretations and criticalisations of red and blue, and to take in consideration all collors and shades of cyberformance palette.
I started with detailed examination of not just some cyberformance, but from the very beginning of whole creative process which final part performing of a cyberformance is. The right moment for starting the observation had came in 2007. Well, I know the exact date of it – February 21st 2007, because that was the day when Tuxedomoon group held concert in Belgrade. Later that night, while I was still murmuring-singing „Live a thousand lives by picture...", my computer screen showed an e-mail from UpStage crew. It was an invitation for participation on the first cyber-festival on upstage.org.nz platform, which will celebrate launch of the 2.0 version of UpStage software.
I was delighted: „Finally! A new version of UpStage! With an improved sound feature! Now I can present my music through cyberformance!"

For the moment, I had forgot about stories on art and theory, red and blue creations, my theoretical paper about practice-based-research... I could not wait even for next morning, but immediately had called (and woke up) Teodora Peric, a singer, and Ana Markovic, a passionate flute player. As a trio, we could make a few covers of Tuxedomoon songs (group was celebrating its 30 birthday in 2007), and play them on cyber-festival on the July 7th 2007. I would play keyboards, and do other sound production work. Everything was settled, and only one person I forgot to include in my plans was a cyberartist I met and with whom was collaborated last two years. „Maybe it is not needed to make her bored with this project. After all, she is an experimental cyberartist, and we are planning to make some traditional tribute-concert." The word „traditional" in last sentence meant to be „music, music, and just music", that is, a well-known good old single-art discipline.

Shortly after I had sent my proposition to UpStage-festival organizing team, a reply broke down my concept for the tribute. „Hello, thank you for your proposition, but mp3 feature is not yet implemented to our software. Maybe in next version of UpStage. Sorry."

But I did not want to give up. „You started a tribute, and there will be a tribute! Even if we have to deal just with text-to-speech tool, I am sure there is a way!" Those were the exact words of my friend cyberartist, to whom I complained about no-music impossibilities of UpStage v.2.0.

The experiment started, and also I could continue my research for paper from the closest sight ever, because cyberartist was spending with me almost every day during next few months on cyberstage. I carefully observed her experimenting with text-to-speech „music": compiling, combining and repeating of lyrics, compiling, combining and repeating of words, compiling, combining and repeating of letters, vowels, rhymes, exclamations, cries, sighs... That was her creative methodology. After a while, she applied same method to a visual stuff, and to other kinds of texts. Free compiling, combining, cutting and pasting of various materials, with three open source softwares: OpenOffice, GIMP and Audacity - that is the shortest explanation of her technical practice. She was calling that: found images, found sounds, found sentences, found words, found art. In the manner of speaking, she was telling everything by saying nothing.

„But what about copyrights?", I was asking. „What?!", she replied, „As a theoretician you should know very well that quoting is allowed to everyone. If you copy to your work up to 5% of any other work, it will be considered as a quote, not as a plagiarizing." Well, it was not my role to act as a judge, but to observe how and what cyberartisan is doing. I really wanted to be somehow less objective, and more in a mood of absorbing the subject, instead of inter-pretending it. According to how John O'Toole explained the situation in *Doing Drama Research*, for whom this re-searching process „explicitly differentiates between the research goals of the artist and those of the academic researcher, asserting that the aims of the former are more subjective than those of the latter", for me was important to overcome such an academic distancing, and to come near to the cyberformance field as close as possible.

Last but not least issue in my rapprochement was the position of the audience in relation to cyberformance. Incorporating of the spectator into cyberstaged spectacle was the process which I was looking for. Working title was: a participative cyberforming. It was close to interactive improvisation concept, since „verbal scenery and improvisation are key components of online performances, which depend in large part, if not entirely, on text". Through the chat-box, which is visible on the right side of your screen, the linguistic part of UpStage cyberformance is subject to change during it, as is equally available to performers and audience. As I had heard from another UpStage cyberformers, „it actually turned out that the most important medium for us was the dialogue box, where each of us could be present in word form. The word is my body as I enter into the screen." Audience, do you have something to confess and express?

I have got to build a new machine.

I am tired of what is on your screen.
I have got to build a new machine.
I am tired of what is on your scene.

One question remained. The cyberartist I was talking about, whom I had met on UpStage in 2005, who was that? Well, she repeated her *motto* so many times during our collaboration: „Anonyme is best! Anonyme is best." It would be really pity to reveal her identity now, and to drop all these seven years in one night (or in one evening, in one morning, depending what is your current time-zone). Also, I do not want even to mention our ever-going struggles, at very moment when it is pretty obvious that she is using much more than 5% of my hard theoretical work for her cyberformance. As is already said, I am not here as a judge, I am just an observer. And you?