WEB STREAMING FEVER IN THE BALKANS

by Manja Ristić (Belgrade) & Tzveta Sofronieva (Berlin)

Many literary institutions use the Internet intensively: virtual libraries and readings available on websites, institutional presentations, texts and list of events... Usually these are more or less traditional spaces of literature using innovative presentation and advertising. In comparison, web streaming is a process in which the wish to create time and space is present in the possibility to be, communicate, act and create in many places at once and with many colleagues and audiences at once. This coming into being of literature in text, translation, reading and perception, combined with music, multimedia performance and discussions, flows together in an exchange of streams from different places simultaneously, which intertwine, communicate, flow into each other, merge, separate, and become new products. Using Ninjam means a delay in minutes and a polyphony of translations and voices as a jam session of musicians, brought together by Skype, allows visual meetings of people who had known each other only through their texts, and to, for example, play together in a live performance. Photos, films, mixing life and written poetry, installations and performances add to the happening. Small circles grow into broad fields which do not depend on the power holders and establishment in the literary business. Poetry finds new publics, inhabits new spaces. Geography and History are challenged again, a process very important for Europe and also very much for the Balkans today.

The web streaming poetry (that will find its full potential in the newly established project SUPERNOVA) as well as electro-acoustic jam session concerts performed successfully in the pilot project B-link Festival of the New Communications, produced a net of events initiated in Belgrade by the visual studio Gal 12+, Ozone Gallery and the AUROPOLIS – Association of Multimedia Artists, and bringing together their artist friends from other cities in the world. This is a short reminiscence on the very beginning of many present and future collaborations born in virtual spaces.

Belgrade web streaming fever started in spring of 2006, when a group of young multimedia artists from Belgrade, supported by o3One Gallery, started the B-link Festival of the New Communications, with visual artists Dorijan Kolundzija as the artistic director of the project. The festival presented contemporary web culture through lectures and presentations of web design, visual arts and live streaming jam session performances.

The technical side of the project emerged from a process of creative brain storming that lasted for several weeks between creative new media artists. It was decided that Ninjam software would be used as the main tool for transmitting audio signal, a software which is made for DJ-ing or strict form music but had never been used for improvisational electro-acoustic jam sessions. The unstable nature of the Internet flow was producing unpredictable time delays which made musical »meetings« in the virtual world more challenging for free improvisation. The server was set up by electronic music composer and sound engineer Rastko Lazić, and it was open for all the participants of the performances. However constant high speed Internet was necessary on each side, so after a few rehearsals the team visited the biggest Internet provider in Belgrade to request for sufficiently large bandwidth. Fortunately, the idea had it's appeal as a good marketing move for the ISP. After many days of connecting and reconnecting with artists from Denmark, Norway, Holland, Croatia, Macedonia, Slovenia and Switzerland the slightly »rewritten« Ninjam software and gallery server called »pigeon hole« started producing a stable virtual space for musicians and visual artists to meet and interact without prior agreements. The performing part of the Festival opened with a free live streaming jazz concert with Manja Ristić in the o3One Gallery (violin with analogue processor) and Brigitte Lyregaard and Mathieu Calleja playing from the Mill near Copenhagen (voice and percussions). Having a concert in front of a large audience and almost the entire media in town, in an unstable »time zone«, with friends projected on the wall, brought big satisfaction. Obstacles of geographical distance between participants vanished and the musical adaptability soon overcame the problem of the time delays, with delays ranging from 3 seconds to 2 minutes. Also the idea of live concert interaction between distant spots brought together a public that was not necessarily interested in free improvisational music. In the middle of the festival, Rastko Lazić »the technical brain« of the operation, went to Geneva to perform from there and had the worst Internet bandwidth speed

to be ever experienced, and he eventually had to use Internet bandwidth form an unknown neighbor in order to finish the concert. But for seven days, the evening events went really well, gathering different categories of new music and bringing different curious audiences. Many young creative people expressed their interest in using this technique for their own projects, since both software and the Internet are freely to anyone. The Festival made a little experimental »scene« with unconditional support of the 03One Gallery consisting international cultural networking for the young generation of conceptual multimedia artists.

The initiative for experimenting with new performing multimedia possibilities brought a fresh wave of cultural values exchange. Web streaming culture finally reached Balkans in the best possible form, through the creative experimental scene.

As an outcome of the B-link Festival, Manja Ristić started a small project called »Poetry Aleatorics« (Aleatorica is a musical movement from the mid-20th century based on unpredictable phrasing) with the idea of integrating poetry with improvisational music. At the first session, works of poets were presented who were reading from their homes in London, Paris, Berlin, Prague, Washington D.C. and of course poets reading on the spot from Belgrade. With almost no proper technical rehearsal, this multilingual event broke silence in communication between poets isolated in their own cultural environments and opened doors for a more frequent exchange of work.

Soon after being invited to the network, Tzveta Sofronieva joined the initiative for the next event on November 19, 2006 in Belgrade, which on that date recorded the first snowfall of the year. Poets and musicians were connected under the theme »Discernments« and came from Sofia, London, Paris, Berlin and Washington D.C., and were followed by a concert of the Duo Eruption. Manja Ristić collected a large audience, while in Sofia the Red House hosted the premiere of a poetry book by Tzveta Sofronieva and gathered for the first time in Bulgaria colleagues and audience for a Web Streaming Poetry Event. Manja Ristić in Belgrade and Tzveta Sofronieva in Sofia were joined in London by Ana Seferović, a Serbian poet living in England at that time, who had read already with Tzveta during the Balkan Black Box Festival in Berlin, in Paris on an event at the PEN Center by Sylvester Clancier, a French poet with more then 20 published books and Rufo Quintavalle, an Italian-New Zeeland origin poet living in Paris, as well as in Berlin by the German poet from French origin Odile Kennel. The Bulgarian poets Miglena Nikolchina, Ekaterina Yossifova, Bozhana Apostolova and Georgi Gospodinov joined from the Red House in Sofia as well as in the U.S. living Lybomir Nikolov from Washington D.C. All were invited by Tzveta to join the »Discernments« event which was moderated in Sofia by the literary and music critic Dimitar Kambourov. Milena Deleva was the good angel in Sofia, who tried to learn all possible organizational and technical things from Manja and Rastko. All poets read poems live and translations of the poems were simultaneously shown on screens. The music of Duo Eruption sounded on all places and was seen on screens.

As a result of this ambitious but simple projects, 03One Gallery built up an original Internet Art identity. The most complicated web streaming projects were Internet theatre performances of the Danish contemporary dance troop »Recoil«, in collaboration with Rastko Lazić (composer and technical support). Audio/visual streams were sent from Copenhagen, Beirut and Amman, involving dancers, visual artists and musicians.

The second B-link Festival concert performances connected artists from San Francisco, New York, Oslo, Copenhagen, Amsterdam, London, Berlin, Ljubljana, and Zagreb. This festival brought us to master web streaming technology used for artistic purposes. People who started it are active in the cultural NGO sector in Serbia, developing the concept through independent projects. The team leaders were Dorijan Kolundzija (visual artists and director of multimedia studio Gal 12+), Milica Pekić Conev (curator and art historian, director of the NGO KIOSK), Rastko Lazić (electronic music composer, member of the Association of Multimedia Artists AUROPOLIS), Marko Stoimenov (free lance art manager), and Manja Ristić (violinist, poet and president of AUROPOLIS).

There is a new event on the horizon. The AUROPOLIS' SUPERNOVA project will gather poets, musicians and video artists from Europe hoping to establish creative network of people with progressive attitude towards poetry performance. This concept is not meant so much to popularize poetry, but rather to show deep dedication in searching for new performing

forms and overcoming the barriers of geographical, cultural, educational and even political distances. So to prove that people's mental and emotional energy, if integrated around the idea of spontaneous and open creativity, can materialize and produce wonderful art even in a space as small as an optic cable. The general aim of SUPERNOVA is to establish an independent open platform for performing original poetic forms enriched with contemporary audiovisual tendencies. The initiative is based on the implementation of new innovative concepts of live performance. The project supports individual artistic sensibilities, experimental forms, a progressive approach to the performance, live electro-acoustic experimentation, conceptual video, and the experimental integration of poetry, music and visuals.

Because Web Streaming is a beautiful process »and a beautiful metaphor«, said Tzveta Sofronieva, when initiating to write this article: »If we try to imagine a stream in a net, it is almost easier to imagine a net in a stream, isn't it? The touch of a space of a poem within springing water is both tender and a powerful experience, and we have it because of you [Manja Ristić], who I do not know personally but have known long as text, image, music and enthusiasm. The unreal real meeting, without expectations, and in the same time rich with intensive communication.«

Establishing a network between writers is of great value. However, everything that happened has to do most of all with Rastko Lazić and his passion, creativity and innovative force for using new technologies, and that by virtue of a simple chain reaction, opened one little chapter in young generation artistic networking, building up enthusiasm for the reconstruction of cultural values.

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Manja Ristić (born 1979), graduated at the Belgrade Music Academy as a violin performer and then finished postgraduate diploma at the Royal College of Music in London as a Solo/Ensemble Recitalist. Founder of the Association of Multimedia Artists AUROPOLIS in Belgrade, 2004. One of the many projects initiated by Association together with creative studio Gal 12+ and o3ONE multimedia Gallery in Belgrade was B-Link Festival of New Communications, experimental project that presented web streaming capacities as a tool for overcoming geographical distances in live performing. In 2007, together with NGO Cultural Front she started Forum Belgrade Initiative – Eastern Europe fraction of A Soul for Europe Initiative from Berlin, in collaboration with Felix Meritis Foundation from Amsterdam. She is an active member of several ensembles, classical piano trio ARION, experimental electro-acoustic trio ERUPTION and free jazz quintet Tale of the forbidden flower. Her first collection of poetry Book of Silence is published in June, 2008 by Cultural Centre DEVE. She works and lives in Belgrade.
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Tzveta Sofronieva (geb. 1963) studierte Physik und promovierte über die kulturellen Einflüsse auf Wissenstransfer. Studierte Poesie bei Joseph Brodsky. Sie arbeitete in mehreren Ländern als Wissenschaftshistorikerin und Kulturkorrespondentin, gründete das europäische Netzwerk »Verbotene Worte«, engagierte sich für interkulturelle Projekte, gestaltete Literaturinstallationen und übersetzte Poesie. Stipendiatin u.a. in St.John's College, Cambridge (1992), in der Akademie Schloss Solitude (1996), beim KulturKontakt Wien (2003) und in der Villa Aurora, Los Angeles (2005). Tzveta Sofronieva schreibt auf Bulgarisch und Deutsch. Sie hat seit Anfang der 80er Jahre Gedichte, Essays und Erzählungen in mehreren Sprachen veröffentlicht, wie z.B. 1994 die Theatererzählung *Saga über den abgerissenen Hof*, die 1996 experimentell aufgeführt wurde. Auf Deutsch geschriebene Texte erschienen in Anthologien und Zeitschriften, zuletzt die Kurzgeschichte *Frau T.* (transcript 25 [2007]) sowie Gedichte (Akzente 3 [2007], Manuskripte 178 [2007]). Gedichtbände: *Chicago Blues* (Bulgarisch und Englisch, 1992), *Зачеваща памет* (Empfangendes Gedächtnis, 1995), *Gefangen im Licht* (Bulgarisch/Deutsch, 1999), *Раз-познавания* (Wahr/nehmungen, 2006), *Завръщането на белия бик* (Die Rückkehr des weißen Stiers, 2007) und *Eine Hand voll Wasser* (2008).
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