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Constanze Ruhm
X NaNa / Subroutine

Opening: 22/04/2005, 7 p.m.
Duration of exhibition: 23/04/2005 - 11/06/2005

Press release

X Characters (2002 -)

Reading women's travel writing, one notices an absence of the past. Women who leave are not nostalgic. They desire what they have not had, and they look for it in the future. The desire does not take shape as 'return' but rather as 'voyage.' Nostalgia is substituted by dislocation (Paola Melchiori).

Since 2002, the ongoing project "X Characters" has been developing a programme of media/cinema works connected through seven female characters. These characters are originally drawn from seven different films, ranging from 1960s auteur- through post-modernist 70s cinema to Hollywood mainstream productions of the 80s.

"X Characters" develops new templates and scripts for these characters over stages. Each "persona" retains their distinct movie-identity while being scripted further along new unexplored tangents and being placed in dialogue with each other. The process of character- and script development included a series of live, internet-based scripting workshops held in a chat room. The results were then distilled into a set of connected scenes composed as character dialogs, all set within the boarding area of an airport. The final script, "X Characters / RE(hers)AL" (2003/4) was produced as the initial main template for the entire group of seven characters. It stands as an ongoing, performative script between New Media, theatre and film.

X NaNa / Subroutine (2004)

In computer science, a subroutine (function, procedure, or subprogramme) is a sequence of code which performs a specific task, as part of a larger programme, and is grouped as one, or more, statement blocks. Codes like this are sometimes collected into software libraries.

"X NaNa..." (2004) was developed as a subroutine to the original programme, "X Characters / RE(hers)AL". It represents the first of a planned series of character spin-offs. In "X Characters / RE(hers)AL", the figure of "X" laid out the original position-marks of the seven women. Through "X NaNa / Subroutine", "X" signifies a newly created interstitial space in the closed narrative of the film *Vivre sa vie* (Jean-Luc Godard 1962), and at the same time points towards a subsequent production called "X Love Scenes". In this next production which will be realized in 2005/6, the marker "X" turns into a projection surface for a new version of the character of Giuliana from Michelangelo Antonioni's *Il deserto rosso* (1964), which is split into three sub-characters.

Insert

It is a paradox that a shot recounts an event for which it actually leaves no space. One might even believe to have seen it, as the shot sequence occurs continuously. But the event ends already before it can begin.
(Christine N. Brinckmann)

In "X NaNa / Subroutine", the character NaNa has managed to free herself (by her own means) from the dead end that was originally offered to her in the film *Vivre sa vie*. In the new work, Nana becomes NaNa: she is transformed into a contemporary version of the original Godardian character. Working as a sales girl in a record store, NaNa tries to avoid falling back to her former illicit activities that among others included data-bootlegging. Things get complicated when a former colleague-in-trade pays her a surprise visit. He presents a job "with her name written all over it". NaNa appears to reluctantly accept the commission, in order to ensure that she remains free on her terms while she is confronted by her Godardian heritage. She performs one last data-search, in order to locate her original "source code", the film *Vivre sa vie*, whose resolution demands her character's death.

NaNa is the first character emerging from the original template of "X Characters / RE(hers)AL" with a new story. NaNa creates and keeps open a new space in the closed conventions of the Godardian narrative. She does so in order to establish a condition that will allow for the next productions of each character to define their relations within, and all mediated through the "X". Thus, her role in the overall programme is also to chart and indicate a sense of spatiality required for the programme series of fellow X-characters still to come. Therefore, Nana is at the origin of a series of contemporary narratives, each scripted specifically for each one of the six other characters. The syntax of the programme "X Characters..." is developed out of a weave of relations that is closer

to a networked space in behaviour and operation. NaNa also foregrounds what all other characters desire as well. By conveying her illicitness as "freedom", she suggests the potential for independence, so directed in force as to enable her to alter even her own original script.

Cinema Muse-alogy

What makes new media new is that they mediate powers of invocation: powers to call things up.   (Chris Chesher)

In his article "Why the Digital Computer is Dead", author Chris Chesher points out that there exists a cultural continuity between the ritual of invocation and the execution of digital commands. Chesher describes digital programme routines as quasi-magical refrains, as contemporary echoes of the ancient cultural form of invocations as "calls for assistance", typically addressed to a Muse.

Hollis Frampton, one of the seminal American avant-garde filmmakers of the Sixties (and a contemporary of Godard) suggested that "cinema has finally attracted its own muse." Her name: Insomnia. Framptons first film dates from the year 1962 (the same year that *Vivre sa vie* was released), it was called *Clouds Like White Sheep*, and is believed to be lost. Cloud formations evoking the outlines of sheep remind one of the popular technique of sheep-counting in order to bring about sleep. Insomnia, cinema's new muse, attempts to prevent that – this is why all that is left to the filmmaker is to record those ephemeral sheep formations on celluloid: in a startling turn, Frampton's lost film appears to be an invocation of the cinema-muse.

In order to regain control of her destiny, the character of NaNa claims to be Mnemosyne – mother of the nine muses, goddess of memory, and according to Greek mythology married to Zeus, the god of commands. Thus, NaNa / Mnemosyne activates the original myth to articulate and chart a space emerging at the intersection of new media and cinema worlds; a cosmos oriented towards the coordinates of "command" and "memory", between "Zeus" and "Mnemosyne" – a world emerging from digital operations and mythological invocations.

Mnemosyne guards human memories as well. In analogy to an understanding of "cinema" as a storage device and cultural archive, NaNa / Mnemosyne becomes Insomnia, the muse of cinema, as well. She invokes – falling back to her original story – a past "partly forgotten", altering it so she can continue to exist. She introduces a new spatiality signified by the "X" as an unknown constant. As a marker in the system, the "X" of "X NaNa..." points to that interstitial space of interruption produced by NaNa, and as shifting signifier in turn re-defines and links the other characters' relations and their narratives with each other.

"X NaNa / Subroutine" is an identity play as filmic insert. In order to establish a spatiality, the production searches for a syntax within and outside of conventions proposed by modernist cinema as well as "postmodern" New Media. Thus the film recounts the story of X NaNa's existence as a movement from symptom to trope, from film character to the mythological figure of Mnemosyne, and finally, to a contemporary movie character: "X NaNa / Subroutine" tells the story of an identity always in flux.

Constanze Ruhm was born in 1965 in Vienna

Some of her recent shows were "X Subroutines", Kunsthalle Bern, „X Characters: RE[hers]AL", 3. Berlin Biennale (2004), "Blindstorey / Silencetracks", project for "Made for Admont" (2003), "A Memory of the Players Version 1.0", Kerstin Engholm Galerie, „A Memory of the Players in a Mirror at Midnight", Entwistle Gallery, London (2002), Art Statements, Basel Art Fair, Kerstin Engholm Galerie (2000), „apartment" ferdinandeum video 13/2, Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, „Off", Kerstin Engholm Galerie (1999)

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