

## project description

**LivingTomorrow** realises a territory of place and placelessness. It mixes from a database of video fragments to three simultaneous, horizontally-projected image 'streams' -- video fragments of the classic northern Dutch landscape and imperial skies, images of the urban corporate headquarter area on Amsterdam's fringes and highly abstracted images derived from the colours and textures of women's headscarves. Into this visual context it fires 'remade readymades' – video fragments from an internationally popular soap opera, complete with new subtitles. These characters, the artist's puppets, speak of real-life events in Holland as well as their desire to see beyond the world of appearances.

There are three **LivingTomorrow** works:

-- the **LivingTomorrow** installation using three projections, where MPG2 video files are peeled from the server via the database and the results are unpredictable. It becomes akin to a performance by the system itself, first staged in March 2005 at Montevideo.

-- the **LivingTomorrow** installation for three projections from DVDs. This installation is a replica of one hour of installation running live from the server in March 2005 at Montevideo – a documentation of a system performance.

-- the single channel version **LivingTomorrow: the episode**. This 24.5 min work takes all the re-subtitled television soap opera files and puts them together, one after another. It also 'tiles' them to create new patterns and by doing so, plays with the meaning-dissolving-into-pattern aspect of the original files. This aspect is present in the installation version, particularly as the three projections link together horizontally which confuses the line where one projection/discrete image begins and ends. Perhaps this dissolve-into-pattern is the key idea of the work, as an attempt to realize visually the desire to 'see beyond the world of appearance' – also a fundamental idea of Islam.

## results of research

These are here discussed in terms of the main work of the residency, the **LivingTomorrow** installation which called files from the server via the database. It mixes images shot originally as digital stills, as video and reworkings of scenes from a television soap taped to VHS, to which I added new subtitles and created other, parallel storylines.

All the files have been significantly changed from their original, while still bearing the traces of their initial materiality. This is particularly the case for the television material which was taped over a month during a period of intense electrical storms in the city of Brisbane, Australia. The original recordings reused in this way show a space of television – as a simultaneous event space transmission of both broadcast and reception – but one which is hacked into by the weather itself. It's made noisy, it breaks up – massively interfering in both its broadcast signal and its reception, speaking also to the reality of the local instance within a global media flow.

## **how the narrative came to be**

I began by shooting all the material and building up a set of files that I was happy with. These were largely 'context' or location images within which to set the story. I had been thinking of various story-lines to write into the work and was playing with various pieces of footage, but kept coming back to the 'Bold and the Beautiful' material I had taped before leaving Australia in March 2004. From this I began to select usable scenes, ones which might lend themselves to new subtitles, and also ones which could potentially be watched repeatedly with new sets of subtitles being added to them. I found three scenes into which I could write phrases and lines which sometimes might refer to the action on screen and which could also handle other narrative directions.

The work I had begun to do, which at the time was complete in itself, albeit a totally abstract meditation on landscape and pattern, soon became the context, the setting, for this story. So, the day came to begin writing the subtitles onto the three scenes. The story was to do with one of the characters in the Bold feeling spiritually bankrupt who wanted to 'go over to the other side' – to wear a headscarf in order to 'see through this world of appearance'. However, as this was against the rules she had to be murdered by one of the soap's lead characters. The other two scenes related to this story, but were also about one character being given an engagement ring while she was already engaged, and the mix-ups this caused.

I began writing the subtitles and these were rendering overnight when the next day, in the morning of November 2, 2004, Dutch filmmaker Theo Van Gogh was murdered. This was a great shock – the virtual crashed into the real – and set the tone for the next set of subtitles written into the same three same scenes, and then other world events were written into the third set of subtitles of the same three key scenes. The texts which I selected excerpts from can be read via link on main machinehunger page (see link below).

The nine key story segments (ie those made from the same three soap files, forming three 'sets') are devised to be read in any order. There is though a discernable beginning set, a middle set and an end set. This may or may not become apparent to the viewer of the installation whose access to this narrative logic is subject to the vagaries of the database, that is, the system's selection.

## **the database aspect**

During the project I was struck by the idea that the archive is the database and visa versa: where does the archive begin and end? The files themselves are named in accordance to their possible play chances in the database, so in this way the archive is the database, they are in symbiotic relation to each other. Another question raised by the database structure, in terms of narrative, is: when is it finished? A database can be added to all the time, there is never really a moment of finality as there is with say burning a dvd or making a video master tape. So the very selection of the files became paramount, as in the file selection constituted the raw material of the narrative and the

possibilities of its emergence. This aspect, that it can be added to constantly, also means that the work can respond rapidly to events in the world as well as changes in thinking and direction. It becomes a very fluid thing, a malleable medium.

The database and its potential for narrative emergence was probably the key research element of the project. This also moved into thinking about speed and timing, as in how best to manipulate the very speed of emergence and timing of elements via the structure of the database, and elements like the length of the files themselves. I talk more about how this actually functioned in the 'technical description' link on main machinehunger page (see link below).

Then there is a spatial aspect of the installation, the three projections aligned horizontally. The images held within each single projection 'extend themselves' to the space of other, adjacent projections, opening a dialogue between the assembled images. As these images are peeling from the database in a semi-random fashion, the 'meanings' of the three together are, at best, temporary and emergent.

The work when it was playing from the server via the database was completely unpredictable. Even though I had added 'weightings' to each and every file for each of the three projectors (that is, their statistical probability of being played and to which projector/location in the installation) I was constantly surprised when watching it what combinations of elements would present themselves. Even though there were significant sets of possibilities, these were all overridden by the operative random element of the database, in the way it selected the files. This seemed to be a lot like life, in that one can set the parameters and have a certain idea of what might be about to happen but is always surprised by the unthought, the accident.

In constructing all kinds of narrative, both the author and the reader usually have an idea of where the next narrative turn might come from or go to. The author has to work out how best to set this up and the reader work out how to see the narrative play unfold. Predicting this becomes, for the reader or viewer, part of the pleasure or game. I feel that even though I have 'pushed' the potential for narrative connections in past works, **LivingTomorrow** via its database/random aspect took this to another level.

Working with Wiel Seuskens was very rewarding also. Having never worked with a programmer before I found that Wiel seemed to intuitively know what I needed in terms of the structure of the database and set up one which is both open source and easy to use.

### **time, meaning and pattern**

The unfolding of the files bears witness to a context, a location, in which the other subtitled scenes play out in what becomes a sequential order by virtue of watching – toward which one creates an order where there is the potential for one. By virtue of the repeat or possible repeat of scenes again and again, there comes in the installation a feeling of time stopping, or at least of being suspended. Perhaps this is also by virtue of the narrative reworkings of televisual material which have a special resonance or aura, combined with the particular image breakdown caused by the electrical storm...so that the new work imparts a strange time, perhaps drawing from the 'electronic' non-space of the simultaneous broadcast and reception time/space of television, but enhancing that

non-space by the logic of repeat and also of the 'meaning' constantly dissolving into pattern, across the three screens. Some viewers used the word 'hypnotic' to describe the experience. Another, speaking of the image clarity said that the work seemed to 'jump off the wall'.

## **sound**

The sound is a continuous 20min loop of fragments from the television soap – some of the sound from the actual scenes used as well as sampled bits of music from the series - - mixed with other elements devised by the composer Tim Elzer. In **LivingTomorrow: the episode** the 20min sound loop is used 'as it comes' alongside the 24.5 min visual track, creating accidental convergences as happen in the 'live' installation.

## **space and spatiality**

As in **eurovision**, **LivingTomorrow** was a conceptual prototype for another idea not yet realised. The next step is to make it stream and then backproject into windows, or against walls or other urban surfaces.

When I started the residency at Montevideo, the work was to be a research project into the potential of high resolution database video over the network -- also as an exercise into 'architectural media space', that is, how to work with images in public spaces in order to open spaces in the imaginary realms for passersby in order to construct temporary communities of meaning, and of transient, emergent narratives. However, over the course of the residency, I only managed to realize the gallery version as I spent a lot of time on writing, selecting texts and making the image files. In order to stream it the files need to be converted to MPG4 and tweak a few other things.

Why do it over the network? There are a number of reasons for this. The first is that the work can in theory be seen anywhere in the world. It can be broadcast to a shop window in Sao Paulo or a virtual environment in Canberra as much as it can be seen from the streets in Amsterdam. This also makes the work very 'live' and calls into question where the work actually is -- is it located at the server or as projected on site? Or somewhere in-between?

If it were to be staged as devised as a streaming work, one aspect of interest would be the new works' materiality -- one can try to maintain the resolution and quality of the video fragments at the server/hard-drive level but as soon as they leave these confines and travel over the internet to their final destination they are subject to the vagaries of the internet itself. The image, as recombined MPG4 packets, wears this passage through space and over time and this would become its new materiality.

## **thanks to**

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For more information on the work including: detailed technical description, full essay with footnotes and launch remarks by curator and writer Victoria Lynn, other viewers; responses to the work, images from the work and also from the installation, and links to texts quoted in the work, see:

<http://www.machinehunger.com.au/LivingTomorrow>

**LivingTomorrow**, the database installation work was produced by Nederlands Instituut voor Mediakunst Montevideo/Time Based Arts over the period of April 2004 to March 2005. The DVD installation version and **LivingTomorrow: the episode** were produced later in 2005 by Linda Wallace.