



JK Fotograf Festival is proposing in its 7th iteration named “Eye in the Sky” a condensed timeline of understanding and analysis of a rapid technological development of our times and its social and political implications. In this respect your work stands at the forefront of a possible vision of days to come, considering work of Joana Hadjithomas & Khalil Joreige addressing from current perspective almost historical form of digital manipulation through spam emails, which they were archiving and analyzing since the late 1990s, transferring their findings into a complex exhibition set up and a publication, then going one step further to Trevor Paglen’s tendency to uncover deliberately hidden veins of technological superstructure forming our daily digital experiences and their shadows, thus uncovering the other side of the given status quo. Information Skies, your latest film, presented as a sequel to The Sprawl (Propaganda About Propaganda) and a middle point for your upcoming cinematic experience Hometown, formulates a futuristic vision almost in a sci-fi character and enclosing this proposed timeline not that far from our now.

MH Thank you. To be honest, time appears to be mixed up to the point where past, present and future have become quite randomly compressed into a single “now.” In any case the trajectory that we started with our documentary The Sprawl (Propaganda About Propaganda) is about the experience of inhabiting the current technological-political superstructure from within. Both Information Skies and also Hometown are focused on the emotional remainder, perhaps more so than ever, that characterizes that condition of inhabitation.

JK Judging from The Sprawl (Propaganda About Propaganda) and Information Skies, this future trilogy also narrates a certain timeline. How would you describe the mutual genealogy of these three films?

MH Whereas The Sprawl (Propaganda About Propaganda) led directly to Information Skies, with the same lead character, Georgina Dávid, playing in both films, Hometown and Information Skies are like twins in their fictional rendering of the condition of living with fluid truth and contradictions. Both projects are inspired by what remains as a base below and throughout the tech superstructure. It’s important to note that Hometown shooting was only just completed in Kyiv. All three projects are intended as time-based artworks, meaning that their installation in an art space allows viewers to experience their narratives intuitively and in a less linear way than cinema allows for.

JK In his manifesto “The New Normal” for a current Strelka Institute program your friend Benjamin H. Bratton mentions that results of their practice aim at the year 2050 as a target. Saying that 2050 is for them not a vague vision of a future, where our current problems are deferred, but that designing for 2050 is happening now. What does the future entail for Metahaven?

MH The Strelka School mission statement for The New Normal is driven by its agenda as an architecture and design-led project. It is necessary to bring back a sense of future-oriented “grand design” that is nevertheless working with mistakes, accidents, and glitches, rather than some perfect and smooth implementation of a plan or ideology. Within this program we focus on the role of visual and linguistic texture, image, poetry, and narrative, that may give these iterations of future thinking their character. More concretely, we have been focusing on the poetry of Marina Tsvetaeva and Ariel Dorfman, and on Andrei Tarkovsky, as an influence to our work, whose ideas on duration and time can be developed and extrapolated into today’s digital culture. We recognize the way duration impacts our ability to imagine the future.

JK Our society is historically based on narrations predicting possible further developments. In last years we hear more and more often from different sites that we reached a stalemate point when predictions are no longer possible. Adam Curtis is saying that “no one has any vision for a different or a better kind of future”, Bifo Berardi defines our present as an era of impotence, when we collectively lost an ability to critically judge and thus formulate our next steps on a path to the future. Do you see this as a pessimism of older generation of thinkers growing up during the Cold War or a genuine concern applicable to all of us?

MH The impossibility to think ahead and to plan ahead is striking everyone in a very practical sense. There are real, and huge problems, with employment, with livelihood, with pay, with pensions. It is today considered utopian to demand decent living conditions and decent pay. Indeed, the collapse of Leftist future politics and their fracturing into various identitarian, green, and pirate factions on one hand, and a “center-left” on the other, presents a perpetual crisis, but it can be made worse by nostalgia for futurism. It seems most important to, in the face of these huge issues, find something concrete to work on and to believe in, and express what is necessary. The future begins by being not always reactive.

JK That leads us to *Information Skies* itself and its visual character. You're depicting a future with very minimal means, it's a sci-fi without an overwhelming landscape of distant cosmos, interstellar vessels and techno-fetish. In some of your youtube presentations, you are referring to Tarkovsky. Probably that's already an answer. Can you explain it further, please?

MH We are interested in the tradition of sci-fi by minimal means, applying psychology to the situation, rather than props or special effects. This tradition received a significant boost when Tarkovsky, with Arkady and Boris Strugatsky, reworked the novel *Roadside Picnic* for the screen, resulting in *Stalker*.

Information Skies with its yellow subtitles uses elements of "art-house" cinema on the level of visual texture, but it is really a hybrid project that also uses animation sequences and garment design. We are interested in the combination of cinematic texture and duration with digital video, where one condition of image can inhabit the other. So our admiration for Tarkovsky has little to do with a return to an appreciation for extraordinarily long films or "serious cinema."

JK Your adoration for Tarkovsky is naturally entangled in *Information Skies*, what other references to the tradition of cinema are you referring to?

MH The animated sequences further develop our interest in anime as a sort of "international style" of propaganda. The *Sprawl* (*Propaganda About Propaganda*) featured two Russian anime sequences, *Katryusha* and *Nyash Myash*, and it was important for us to continue this trajectory in *Information Skies*.

JK Your practice is gradually evolving over the years from research and design oeuvre to the politically engaged artistic practice of objects and installations. What about a shift to the film medium? Not necessarily a video, but a feature film and a documentary practice?

MH While indeed there is an evolution of the form of practice and the way we treat its main narrative, there are also some consistencies. We still practice graphic design, but it is no longer the dominant container of our work. Apart from a series of commissions to design books, websites, album art, and so on, which are ongoing, over the years we have as designers pro-actively engaged with organizations that we admired and identified with politically. In some cases we were able to develop,

through their story, a new story, but in some other cases this didn't work out. Even though all design and art have their content in the treatment more than in the subject matter, it became gradually necessary and also "natural" to develop our own scenarios. Our interest in moving image came concretely from a YouTube addiction, as well as from an interest in how YouTube algorithms and general behavioral online data mining tend to drag one further into tunnel vision.

JK Your current film works were shown in cinemas, film festivals, in installation set ups and also in the environment from which they originate and which they refer to, the internet and youtube channels. What is for you an ideal format for showing films, if there is one?

MH Whilst in principle online viewing should be a viable option for every moving image work, in practice there still is a bit of a shortage of platform alternatives to facilitate this in a way that is responsible to artwork, audience, and artist. Most if not all online art video environments are built on a Vimeo backbone. YouTube and Facebook video fill the rest of the space – that is, the vast majority of online video space – apart from the monetized content platforms like Netflix which themselves have a huge influence on how story and duration are seen by mainstream audiences.

We don't necessarily believe that, in the offline world, a cinema is the only right space to experience longer films. As said we are interested in re-exploring the physical space of art as a container for longer films, using the possibilities of viewers experiencing works in a circular rather than a linear manner, walking away and returning to, rather than being fixed in front of a timeline.

JK In *The Sprawl* and *Information Skies* you emphasize a role of literature and philosophy for an understanding of our times, why particularly Tolstoy? How is this interest going to evolve in your upcoming film *Hometown*?

MH The essay that influenced *The Sprawl* (*Propaganda About Propaganda*) is Tolstoy's 1897 *What is Art?*, a provocative and highly necessary assessment of the question that is the title. In his appreciation for folk art, ritual art, peasant songs, etcetera, and his denunciation of Wagner and Shakespeare, Tolstoy sets himself an impossible task, entrapping himself and the readers in contradictions, but his search for the honest and irrepressible core of the art expression, of art, moreover, as a

transfer of a relatable emotional core message uniting sender and receivers in a mutual union (which is for him a union with God), is one that enormously influences and inspires us. Why and how this influence has come about is a longer story. It has also left its influence on the Information Skies and Hometown scripts.

JK You are showing Information Skies with English and Arabic subtitles, the original version was accompanied by Korean/ English subtitles and the voice over in Hungarian. The Korean language was introduced for the audience of Gwangju biennial where the film was presented for the first time, how do those other languages refer to the concept of your film?

MH Information Skies is in Hungarian because the main character is Hungarian. We wrote it as a sequel to The Sprawl (Propaganda About Propaganda) and for the same central figure. In Information Skies the voice shifts from voice over to acting as in the second half of the film Georgina turns out to be the narrator. Subtitles are often seen as a nuisance, but as designers by training, we absolutely love them. The subtitles have been purely functional to the languages spoken in the viewing contexts of the Gwangju Biennale (2016), Mumbai Art Room (2016), and Sharjah Biennale (2017). In addition, they perform a kind of doubling or tripling of the spoken content, as all subtitles do.

JK If I'm not mistaken, you're showing your work for the first time in the Czech Republic, does this have any specific significance for the message given by your work?

MH Former Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland and Yugoslavia, used to hold a special position in relation to Western Europe because they represented the eastern frontier of its democratic and capitalist regimes and a transitional zone to the USSR and beyond. With the inclusion of the Central and Eastern European countries into the European sphere the line has been redrawn, but the question is for how long and in what way the unified body of the EU holds out against nationalist, regionalist, and other currents which have arisen in the past years. We find it exciting to be showing this work in Prague and hope for a lively reception.

JK Your work shows a strong interest in Eastern Europe, can you please pin point some reasons why is that so?

MH This interest is older than may seem. As you may know some of our work in Metahav-

en's early days was focused on questions of territoriality in relation to information networks and especially representation through online means. Then already we were interested in the entities in the post-Soviet space that were these spaces of exception and geopolitical black holes, existing in a legal vacuum, such as Transnistria on the border of Moldova and Ukraine. It is then and at these kinds of apparently marginal places that the "breakdown of the international order" begins with a series of historical land claims based on majority-Russian speaking populations, and so on, offering a blueprint for what happens in Ukraine in 2014. From a point of view of culture, literature, and poetry, we are very interested in the emotional spectres of Russian literature and music, and, as said earlier, in the notion of duration as it gets developed through ideas of long time-spans and vast territories.

JK Referring to the global art world and perpetuated gap between East and West, it could feel quite precarious to work under conditions of undervalued Czech art field. How does such an experience feel coming from economically much more stable western context?

MH We are not interested in art as a luxury product, but in giving an audience the best possible experience of an artwork. It doesn't matter where that happens.

The exhibition **Metahaven: Truth Futurism** is held within Fotograf Festival #7 Eye In The Sky.

Curated by: Jen Kratochvíl
Production: Adéla Korbíčková & Marie Štindlová
Installation & technical support: Lunchmeat
Coordination & festival dramaturgy: Tereza Rudolf
Guest coordination: Eliška Žáková
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Futura
Holečkova 49, Prague (5)

futuraprague.com
fotografestival.cz