

## artists' experiences

TIC  
artists in context



**Alessandro Quaranta,**

Italy

Terra Nova in Copenhagen - Denmark

Alessandro, originally from Turin, is a young video artist whose artistic approach is informed by the unpredictable character of the relation to the other. For six months, working at the Terra Nova cultural centre in Copenhagen, he has collaborated on projects which draw on the residents of the local neighbourhood, most of whom are immigrants or isolated or homeless people.

In response to this perceived context of migration and solitude, Alessandro chose to develop his project around the theme of the table - a symbol of encounter and exchange. So he invited strangers he had met in the street, in groups of two, to share a meal prepared by him. His guests then found themselves sitting across from two other virtual dinner guests, who appeared on a screen installed opposite, also eating a meal which had in this case been served a few hours earlier. The actors in this arrangement, who were in turn filmed, first exchanged comments on the dishes offered them by Alessandro, then turned in puzzlement to look at those who had preceded them at the same table. Listening to the comments of their predecessors, attempting to identify what had been prepared for them, they seemed to forget the nature of the arrangement and attempted an impossible dialogue with these virtual fellow diners, who were themselves absorbed in their own experience.

By inviting almost two hundred people to share a meal in this way, above and beyond this chain of virtual communication, Alessandro created a network of human relations formed through chance meetings in the neighbourhood. Recognising people seen on the screen, Alessandro's guests could at last pursue the dialogue they had attempted, exchange views about the experience and share what they had just lived through, thus perhaps forming a jumping-off point for a new human adventure.

Among these two hundred guests, the meeting with Jack, a young tetraplegic who spoke using a voice synthesizer, made a particular impression on Alessandro Quaranta. From this remarkable meeting a project emerged which was presented at the Lille Aéronef during the Rencontres Européennes de la jeune création.

Jack was set up in an access gangway to the lighting-rig, high in the darkened concert hall. Far-off and apparently inaccessible, lit by the bluish light of his computer screen, his face stood out, alone, in the half-darkness. On the wall behind him were projected the messages he was writing on his computer, but

these were too distant to be legible. After ascending some quite steep service stairs, the meeting with Jack took place away from the public gaze, in a small space that seemed suspended, precariously balanced, above the void. At first there was silence, as Jack's silhouette, sunk in his wheelchair, stood out against the blue background of the projection. Then, unexpectedly, a synthesized voice with sci-fi film overtones, asked "Who are you?", while the same sentence came up in white letters on the screen which was projected on the wall. This gave rise to a rudimentary sub-titled dialogue, in which time acquired a new dimension, producing a mismatch between the unpredictable path Jack's shrivelled hands took to reach the keys of his PC, the smiles with which he punctuated each of these movements and the clinical coldness of the installation. Then, as each word and sentence was achieved, each a minor victory in the battle with his disability, the moment came when Jack was able to write, "Can you give me your hand?" Then the virtual speech faded and the encounter moved into a rediscovered real register of moving, sensitive and powerfully authentic physical contact.

Alessandro both questions today's media and combines them in his projects: virtual images and sound, video and the new technologies. The installations he presents are not, however, fixed works of art, but reveal an approach that is to be discovered and shared. The artwork is built up progressively in interaction with the public, who reveal it as they use it. The installation is, thus, both medium and object of communication.

In a way Alessandro Quaranta doubles the effect of the arrangement the better to cancel it out. In this redundancy, the spectator is thrown back upon himself and on the reality of the other. The image emitted, whether recorded or live, attracts the eye. The visual medium plays its role fully, but, at the same time, it introduces the spectators/actors into the process that will lead them beyond the comfortable proposition of a virtual encounter to venture into an authentic relation to the other.

A drop frame, as it were, a passing-beyond that is inspired by a deep respect for others and a permanent quest for their most spontaneous and authentic reactions.



Alessandro Quaranta, *Allo, es tu là ?*, Lille 2000



Alessandro Quaranta, *Chain reaction*, Copenhagen 2000