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Supported by:



KissPál videoworks

In the memory

of empty frames

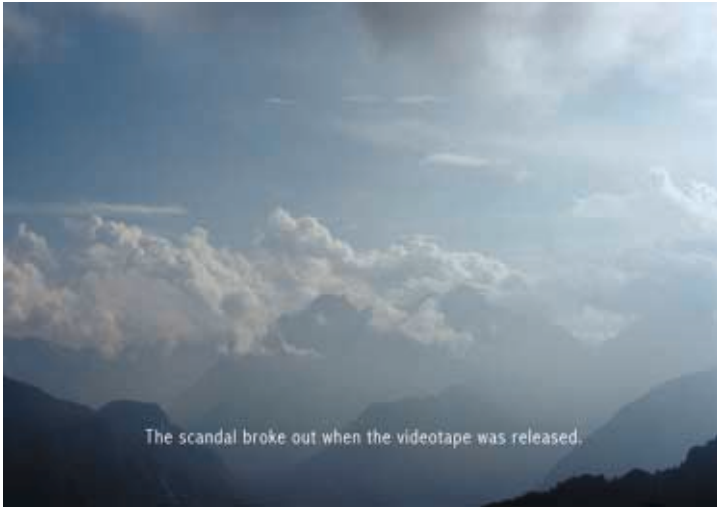
Duality and difference

▶ By Miria Swain

A film crew revolve around the dance floor, bound to the subject of their film - a man and a woman acting out a waltz scene. The footage, taken from a documentary film by Péter Gerő about the making of the Hungarian film *Jadwiga Párnája* (*Jadwiga's Pillow*) by Krisztina Deák, is used by the artist Szabolcs KissPál as the basis of *The Dance*, 2001.

What is immediately striking about *The Dance* is how it evokes a sense of a lost or bygone age, not least in KissPál's use of a washed out sepia tone reminiscent of early photography. This sense of a faded glamour is reinforced by the clash between the opulence of the actor's period finery and the contemporary casual dress of the film crew. And yet, although it may not be the intention of KissPál to evoke a sensual response to the work, his somewhat choreographic edit of the footage combined with his use of a piano sonata by Mozart as the soundtrack nevertheless invites a certain physical involvement with the piece.

Tracing the movement and exchange between the two dancers and the film crew, first clockwise, then in reverse, KissPál's edit moves the film back and forth in slow motion like a dance. A possible analogy between choreography and film-making is enhanced further by the actual installation of the video, presented at times as a life-sized back-to-back double projection, with the male dancer



sequence on one side of the screen and the female on the other. By presenting the video in this way, KissPál disrupts any static single or fixed perspective and instead prompts the viewer to experience the work as if like a Diorama, from multiple viewpoints - to move around the work in much the same way as the edit circles the filming of the on-screen dance.

Although the formal aspect of the work is undoubtedly important, *The Dance* speaks of more than simply an analysis of filmmaking or editing as craft. What is actually at the crux of the work is an interrogation of the relationship between representation and power. We are reminded that popular cinema has, since its earliest time, aimed to seduce its audience, to draw viewers into believing in the reality of the narrative represented. The first public film screening by the Lumière brothers in 1895 of a train coming out of a station was, for example, so convincing in sound and scale that the audience reputedly screamed in fear that it was going to crash through the theatre. In his book titled *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary describes the power dynamic between the filmmaker and the audience as the relationship between the „magician and the deceived”¹ - between those who have a certain knowledge and use it to have power over

those who don't. While KissPál may initially appear to be employing this device of control, the viewer is in fact given the power to define their own engagement with the piece.

The circular motion of the film and the ambulatory experience of it as an installation also finds parallel reference point in the Panopticon (meaning observe all), a circular prison with a central surveillance station designed by Jeremy Bentham in 1791. The principle behind Bentham's design was not just to create an architectural structure in which prison warders would be able to see everywhere at any time, but lay in an understanding that control could be exerted over the detainees by making them feel like they were being watched even when they were not. Examining the Panopticon as a mechanism of power and control in his influential book *Discipline and Punish*, the French philosopher Michel Foucault declared: „Our society is not one of spectacle but of surveillance... We are neither in the amphitheatre nor on the stage but in the Panoptic machine”². Noting this subtle but significant difference between spectacle and surveillance is relevant to KissPál's work. Rather than being a passive spectator, the viewer of *The Dance* actively surveys the work from a variety of perspectives.

In addition to commenting on the politics of representation and surveillance, *The Dance* is also informed by an interest in image manipulation and the mediation of reality in a computer dominated age. Although the film process as revealed by Gerő's film is important, with *The Dance* it is clear that KissPál is more interested in the creative possibilities afforded him through an editing process and what these methods of constructing illusions of reality say about contemporary experience. The use of digital techniques as opposed to analogue methods of image making is obviously central to this, allowing as it does for the artwork to work across different space and time frames. It is a reminder that our own understanding of the world is one that is increasingly mediated by digital technology, from 24-hour news coverage to the Internet.

This idea is taken up again in KissPál's most recent video entitled *Director's Cut*, 2006. In this work a single view of some mountains partially obscured by clouds is the backdrop for a sequence of apparently unrelated news-like text statements. These statements are first readable then flipped so that they are backwards as if turning the screen into a mirror. It is not the first time that KissPál has used the concept of reflection in his work and the work specifically connects



with *Wordskin I*, 2003 and *Wordskin II*, 2004, two videos in which words overlay reflections in water of a house in the country (*Wordskin I*) or figurative sculpture from a fountain (*Wordskin II*). The use of reflection as a visual device could be read as suggesting there is a narcissistic element to filmmaking - that the image bears both the signature of the filmmaker and is at the same time self-reflective in that the viewer ascribes the image with meaning too. In highlighting this inherent subjectivity, KissPál's work lays claim to the notion that news, no matter how much it may pertain to be objective, is always a constructed viewpoint.

Shards of Glass, 2003, a video shot in the Zentralfriedhof, a graveyard in Vienna further addresses the nature of subjective representation. In this video a hand-held camera records a journey through the graveyard and an encounter with a deer. In following the deer further into the wild side of the graveyard KissPál's camera becomes like a gun on a hunt, seeking to capture the deer. Furthermore the way that the video is filmed encourages the viewer to feel like it is they, not KissPál, who are following the deer. The belief that it is possible for a camera lens to get close to a live experience of reality by recording actuality as it unfolds was one held by Polish documentary maker Dziga Vertov. In his 1924 essay 'Artistic Drama and Kino-Eye', Vertov proclaimed the primacy of the kino-eye

Private history

► Shards of glass

"I went there to find Ludwig Boltzmann's grave. To be more accurate, I wanted to see the entropy equation they engraved on his tombstone.

Then I chanced upon a long, narrow road amidst the northern lots of the Zentralfriedhof Vienna, I noticed that the tombstones on the right side of the road were different from those on the left.

I kept to the left, where the privet vines grew uninhibited over the untended graves the jungle often making the inscriptions illegible.

The area grew more and more abandoned, less and less civilized. In this arrest of time, I came behind the tombstone of a grave in whose case it was impossible to distinguish the cast-iron ornaments from the living vines, face to face with a deer. We were both frightened, he started to flee. I started to follow him, It was hard to follow his sudden appearances and disappearances with the camera.

The hunt lasted until sundown, and I was lured deeper and deeper and deeper into the unknown lot, until I lost him at a crossroads.

I had come home.

On the way back to the city I heard the news of the radio on the tram. Exactly 65 years earlier, on November 9, Kristallnacht had taken place."



KissPál



(cinema eye) over the human eye, declaring that the cinema of the future was the cinema of fact³. Although news and documentary films are undoubtedly a huge part of contemporary visual culture, media saturation has led us to question whether such a thing as factual film is possible; the camera will always be directed by someone after all.

The relationship between sight and subjectivity is clearly a recurring feature of KissPál's work, as is an interest in the history of optics and its relation to the development of the moving image. It is directly addressed in his video *The Garden of Blinds*, 2005, which is based on a story about the early 19th century Belgium physicist Joseph Antoine Ferdinand Plateau who invented the phenakistiscope (a stroboscopic device that produces the illusion of motion). Fascinated by the luminous impressions left on the retina by the sun's rays Plateau reputedly stared into the sun for 25 seconds and went blind, but famously claimed that he continued to experience visual sensations long after he lost his sight, to the extent that many did not realise that he had lost his sight. KissPál interprets this story in a video that he made by pointing a camera at the sun until it broke down. On editing, a pseudo warning message and a beeping were added to the footage as a reference to the projector that is used to show the piece and is like the phenakistiscope, a device that projects the illusion of

Private Conquest

► Grey

I was invited to a show which was supposed to be about identity. It was quite obvious to me that the sign for this issue should be of two components: something chosen by an individual and something projected onto him by a community. It took me months to realize that I was to search for a process that would model this dichotomy and would point out a bordering, overlapping territory, a neutral field. Without being aware I was in fact looking for a grey zone, for a situation which would suspend any judgements, a verdict-free vacuum that would surround a sign.

For this I needed a never ending process and a quasi-present sign. I decided to cut out a star from blue tissue. When almost ready I stopped the recording, and on editing I inverted both the colors and time direction.

The short transition between the normal and inverted footage resulted in a single completely grey frame.

This frame became the point of reference for the piece's symmetrical structure, from which the process of signmaking goes back and forth between presence and absence, intentional and unintended, the self and the others.



KissPál

motion. The supposed lifetime of the lamp coincides with the time it took to record the initial gesture and the end of the film sees the image dissipate like Plateau's sight into blank whiteness.

Plateau's story is important in the history of optics because it illustrates that images are not wholly facts, but phenomena modeled by sensations. In the early 19th century the exploration of the relation between physiognomy and vision led to the creation of all sorts of optical devices, which in turn led to the development of early cinema. One such invention called the stereoscope, consisting of two lenses and a central mirror, was of particular importance. A simple device that created by the insertion of two photographic slides, the illusion of three-dimensionality, provided proof that vision was binocular not singular. It also reinforced the concept of the idle eye; that images are completed in the mind's eye, and that vision is not simply a camera obscura like projection of reality. Unsurprisingly duality is a motif that recurs in much of KissPál's work. In his video works it sometimes manifests in the use of a split screen editing technique. Half way to NW, 2004, for instance, shows a view of a Dutch drawbridge, where a time delay separates the view of the right and left sides of the bridge. As the left side of the bridge lifts, people cross the lowered bridge from the right and disappear into the split. Only as the left side of the bridge is lowered and meets the right is there a fleeting moment of time converging, indicated by a figure that passes over the bridge from left to right.

A tension between duality and difference is explicit in much of KissPál's work, but it is worth considering that duality does not simply mean replication, a double or pair. It actually refers to the condition of one thing having two sides, faces or parts. This idea is visually explored in a number of KissPál's video works, most notably the two works entitled Rever I and Rever II, both 2001. In these works, a red and white spotted ball rolls (in Rever I) or bounces (in Rever II) in and out of different spaces. Both films make use of a digital slide technique to move the ball digitally (in parallel with its recorded physical motion) in and out of different framed environments. In Rever I, the ball moves back and forth from a peaceful country scene to an urban environment, the sound altering in conjunction with the image, while in Rever II, the ball bounces up and down through two different interior spaces. Occasionally, in addition to this physical reversion, the colours are reversed so as to add a further layer of manipulation to the digital movement of the single frames and apparent motion of ball between them. It turns out that the partially and wholly inverted colours are not actually

When attitude becomes a narrative

► Edging

The flight of birds is unpredictable. If one points the camera towards the sky and starts the recording, a bird might fly across the image frame in the course of time. It may fly in from any direction and may direct its course to any point in space, but the tape may also run out before the bird appears.

The image of the slowly altering clouds remains an infinite yet empty set of possibilities until the vector of a bird's flight traverses it. The event signifies the beginning and the end of the story and marks two distant points in space, that is where the bird has entered and left both the imaginary and the concrete space of the lense's visual pyramid.

At this moment the spectacle becomes an event, whereas the image metamorphoses into a fact. "The world is the totality of facts, not of things" as we may have learnt from Wittgenstein, thus the only chance for the creator of the video is to wait until the featured object of the shooting perhaps reappears, like a gift with an inherent possibility for the story to be continued, at the same point where it left, and doomed the visual pyramid to emptiness.

The flight of the birds however, is unpredictable, thus leaving us with the method as the only release from the factual prison of the image.



Maria Marcos

achieved through digital manipulation alone, but that a green and black ball has in fact been substituted into the film sequence. Nevertheless, the inversion of natural colours to their opposites - white becomes black, red becomes green - recalls the solarisation technique that was first discovered by Armand Sabattier in the mid 19th century, and then perfected by Man Ray and Lee Miller in the 1930s. It also suggests an oppositional relation, which encourages us to think about how digital technology is partly defined by a binary code - a numbering system comprising of a pair of opposing values: 0 (zero) and 1 (one),

One work by KissPál seems to be particularly relevant in this regard. Rather than a video work, it is a sculptural work titled Szilikonvalcer (Silicon waltz), 2001, which consists of a pair of windows with identical, mirror opposite panes of smashed glass. The smashed glass instantly recalls the sound of smashing glass at the end of *The Dance*, itself constructed with the duality of male and female dancer in mind. As well as this aural connection, the title of the piece also seems to make for an interesting link with *The Dance*. There is of course, the very obvious reference to waltz, but the use of the word silicon also brings to mind the silicon chip, a basic component of any computer system. This point of reference provides further evidence that at the heart of KissPál's work is a combined interest in the creative possibilities of digitalisation and the nature of subjectivity and realism in our media-saturated age.

(A shorter version of this text was originally commissioned by Turner Contemporary on the occasion of Szabolcs KissPál's exhibition *The Dance* in January 2007)

Notes:

1 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer - On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* MIT Press (Cambridge, Mass, 1992) p.133

2 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1977) p.217

3 Dziga Vertov, 'Artistic Drama and Kino-Eye' in *Kino-Eye, The Writings of Dziga Vertov*. Ed. by Annette Michelson, trans. by Kevin O'Brien, University of California Press (London, 1984)

- ▶ Wish
- ▶ L'autre monde
- ▶ Rever I.
- ▶ The Dance
- ▶ Wordskin I.
- ▶ Wordskin II.
- ▶ Edging
- ▶ Grey
- ▶ Shards of Glass
- ▶ Halfway to NW
- ▶ The Garden of the Blinds
- ▶ Director's Cut
- ▶ Desert
- ▶ The Healed Km

videos

▶ **Wish**, 1998, 1 min.

Shows, screenings:

Master: BetacamSP, PAL
Première: ARTEC London, 1999.

2005 *Longtime* -
Trafó Gallery, Budapest
2004 KvadraT Gallery, St.
Petersburg
2002 *Ex-Rôltex* -
Deák Palota, Budapest



*Crumpled sheets of paper
wish to get flat again.*

▶ **L'autre monde**, 1998, 3.5 min.

Shows, screenings:

Master: BetacamSP, PAL
Première: European Media Art Festival Osnabrück, 1999.

*A Super8 found footage material is being punched
with a sewing machine.*



2007 *New Arrivals*
Modern Art Oxford **2005**
Longtime - Trafó Gallery
2004 *Kunst en Passant* -
Vienna / Academie des
Beaux Arts, Beyrouth /
Cubacine Cuba **2003**
Videobrasil XVI., Sao Paolo
2001 Maison Européenne
de la Photographie, Paris /
14. Stuttgarter Filmwinter
Exhibition **2000** *TRANS-*
MEDIA - Toronto, **1999**
L'immagine leggera IV. -
Palermo / CIC Paris /
EMAF '99 - Osnabrück,
(DE) / *Champ Libre* -
Montreal.

▶ **Rever I.**, 2001, 3.5 min. (installation, loop)

Shows, screenings:

Master: MiniDV, PAL
Première: *Rever* - Óbudai T. Gallery, Budapest, 2001

*A ball rolls in a continuous horizontal line
crossing different frames and spaces.*



2006 *From a ball to a
holster* - Galerie Van
Gelder **2005** Bologna Art
Fair / *Art in the Age of
New Technologies*
ACCEA - Yerevan
2004 *Freedom Borders* -
Galerie Van Gelder,
Amsterdam /
Softmanipulations -
Budapest Gallery / KvadraT
Gallery, St. Petersburg
2003 *Softmanipulations* -
Atelierraum Martin Vesely,
Wien **2003** - *KREM* - MEO
Contemporary Art
Collection, Budapest
2001 *Csomópont Project* -
Budapest.

▶ **The Dance**, 2001, 4 min.

Shows, screenings:

Master: MiniDV, PAL
Première: Alapzaj 5. Dunaújváros - (HU), 2000.

*Based on a found footage the image represents the whole
technical staff of a movie production dancing with the
protagonists.*



2006 *New Arrivals* -
Turner Contemporary,
Margate (UK), *Madarske
Igre* - Galeria Yubin,
Belgrade **2004** KvadraT
Gallery, St. Petersburg
2002 *On my way to Tim-
buctoo* - IFA Berlin/Bonn
2001 *Siliconwalse* -
French Institute Budapest
/ *Context* - 49th Venice
Biennial, Romanian
Pavillon / *Solitude in
Museum* (K. Sander, G.
Winter) - Staatsgalerie
Stuttgart; Musee d'Art
Moderne de Saint Etienne

▶ **Wordskin I.**, 2003, 4,5 min.

Shows, screenings:

Master: MiniDv, PAL.

Première: *Duett* - Vár Gallery, Marosvásárhely (RO), 2003

2006 *Videt 06* - Vilafranca, Spain **2005** *Field-works* - Írókéz Collection, Szombathely (HU) / Dovin Gallery, Budapest



The mirroring surface of a Finnish lake gets blurred by the appearing letters of a text.

▶ **Wordskin II.**, 2003, 4,5 min. (installation, loop)

Shows, screenings:

Master: MiniDv, PAL

Première: *Gästateliers KulturKontakt Wien*, 2003

2006 *Videoblock* - Peng, Mannheim (DE) / *From a ball to a holster* - Galerie Van Gelder / *Körút Festival*, Budapest **2005** *Video Duo* - Erika Deák Gallery, Budapest **2004** *EU Positive* - Akademie der Kunst, Berlin / *Freedom Borders* - Galerie Van Gelder, Amsterdam, *Taste* - Vienna

On the mirroring surface of a Viennese fountain the inscription The End is imprinted, time to time disturbed by waves.



▶ **Egding**, 2003, 3 min. (installation, loop)

Shows, screenings:

Master: MiniDv, PAL

Première: *Differentia Specifica* - Prague Biennial, 2003, *Finalist N.J. Paik Award 2005.*

The flight of 160 lonely birds against the blue sky seemingly bouncing back from the edges of the image.



2006 *Points of view* - Skuc Gallery, Ljubljana **2005** *Active Image* - NCCA Moscow / *HAL* - Hull (UK), *18th Stuttgarter Filmwinter* / *LIVRAISON #5* - Lyon **2004** *Media City Seoul* / *N. J. Paik Award Show* - Phoenixhalle, Dortmund / *Play Gallery*, Berlin / *EU Positive* - ADK, Berlin / *KvadraT Gallery*, St. Petersburg **2003** *Prague Biennial* / *IntVs03* - Vaasa, Finland / *A+A Gallery*, Venice / *Revolutions Reloaded* - Galeria Artra, Milano / *NBK Berlin*

▶ **Grey**, 2004, 7 min. (installation, loop)

Shows, screenings:

Master: MiniDv, PAL

Première: *Gallery By Night* - Studio Gallery Budapest, 2004



2005 *Directors Lounge* - Club el Cultrún, Berlin **2004** *Gallery By Night* - Studio Gallery, Budapest / *So Far, So Close* - IG Bildende Kunst, Vienna / *Travelling Without Moving* - W139, Amsterdam / *Transeuropean Picnic* - Novi Sad

A six point star is being cut out from a blue tissue. When almost ready, both the colors and time are inverted.

▶ **Shards of glass**, 2003, 4,5 min.

Screenings, shows:

Master: MiniDv, PAL.

Première: *Private Matters* Múcsarnok - Budapest, 2006

2005 *VideoNight* - Marosvásárhely (RO)
2006 *Whitstable Biennial* (UK) / *Close Connections* - Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam



A suddenly turned up deer is followed in the central cemetery of Vienna on the 65th anniversary of Kristallnacht.

▶ **Halfway to NW**, 2004, 4 min. (installation, loop)

Shows:

Master: MiniDv, PAL

Première: *Travelling Whitout moving* - W139, Amsterdam, 2004

2006 *From a ball to a holster* - Galerie van Gelder, Amsterdam



Closed within a split screen the artist cannot leave the W. Süskind bridge over the Amstel, though he is the only one, who can cross it.

▶ **The Garden of the Blinds**, 2003, 3 min. (loop)

Shows, screenings:

Master: MiniDv, PAL

Première: *For Some Reason* - Maerz Gallery, Linz (A), 2005

2007 *New Arrivals* Modern Art Oxford
2005 *Backlit Gaps* - Galerie van Gelder, Amsterdam
2006 *Videokunst aus Ungarn* - Neuer Berliner Kunstverein / *Director's Cut* - Erika Deák Gallery, Budapest



A camera is pointed into the Sun until it gets broken. (In the memory of J. F. Plateau.)

▶ **Director's Cut**, 2006, 3 min. (installation, loop)

Shows:

Master: MiniDv, PAL

Première: *Regardless on Wheather* - Karton Gallery, Budapest, 2006

2006 *From a ball to a holster* - Galerie van Gelder, Amsterdam



A static landscape with a peak obscured by clouds is accompanied by CNN-like news texts.

► **Desert**, 2006, 3,5 min., (installation, loop)

Show:

Master: MiniDv, PAL

Première: *Re_dis_trans, Voltage of Relocation and Displacement* - Apexart, New York, 2006

2006 *From a ball to a holster* - Galerie Van Gelder, Amsterdam



A gun holster is placed in an envelope accompanied by an unrecognizable song. As the footage is inverted the soundtrack turns into the tunes of the well-known communist song, "Avanti Popolo".

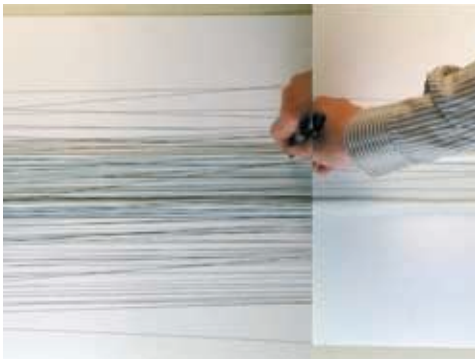
► **The Healed Km**, 2006, 2 min. (loop)

Shows:

Master: MiniDv, PAL

Première: *Director's Cut* - Erika Deák Gallery, Budapest, 2006

2006 Art Forum Berlin



A tribute to Walter de Maria's "The Broken Kilometer."

Layout: *Jelenlét*

Printed by: *Mackensen Kft. Budapest*

Texts by: *Szabolcs KissPál, Maria Marcos, Miria Swain,*

Acknowledgement: *Klára Kiss-Pál*