Satellites Programme
W.W.W. (Whole World Working)

COLLECTIVE

Works by Michel de Broin, Alessandro Di Massimo, R. Buckminster Fuller and Ben Russell with design by Kaisa Lassinaro, Yorgos Stavridis with Dimitris Aatos Ellinas Devised by Anastasia Philimonos

03.12.16 – 05.02.17

W.W.W. (Whole World Working) is an exhibition devised by Anastasia Philimonos that brings together artworks and writings that consider the possibilities of a world without borders.

The exhibition centres on a book *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* written in 1968 by American architect and designer R. Buckminster Fuller. This text outlines that our understanding of the world is impeded by its division into nation-states and that demarcation by borders heightens economic and social disparity. He argues that the computer, which can operate beyond financial and political practicalities, offers a solution to this disparity. Fuller's ideas have inspired many utopian and emancipatory thinkers, particularly in the wake of the development of the World Wide Web. In the exhibition *W.W.W.* Fuller's utopianism is explored in relation to our geopolitical reality, particularly given the renewed energy of nationalist and isolationist politics since the financial crash of 2008.

An edition of Buckminster Fuller's text has been specially produced for *W.W.W.,* re-edited by Anastasia and designed by Kaisa Lassinaro. This is placed in dialogue with works that invite us to focus on the contradictions between geopolitical restraints and allegedly borderless information technologies. *Headmap Manifesto* written and published in 1999 by Ben Russell – who was previously head of the Silicon Valley game physics company MathEngine and has now slipped into self imposed digital obscurity– prefigured many networked technologies now omnipresent. Here it is displayed on a computer, programmed by Yorgos Stavridis and Dimitris Aatos Ellinas to degrade the text upon reading. Edinburgh based artist Alessandro Di Massimo's series of delicate map drawings trace shifting border-lines in multiple countries, reinforcing the material counterpoint to a supposedly borderless internet. Canadian artist Michel de Broin's video work *Keep on Smoking*, 2007, follows a bicycle, doctored by the artist to produce smoke, through the streets of Berlin. The dissonance produced by a pollutant

bicycle acts in this display as a metaphor for 'unlearning', a process that is deemed necessary for imagining a world beyond border demarcation.

All of the works are placed in a specially conceived installation, which purposefully blocks out the outside world and invites us to spend time with these speculative, sometimes optimistic works.

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W.W.W. is part of Satellites Programme, Collective's development programme for emergent artist based in Scotland. Satellites includes three solo presentations by artists and two projects presented by Associate Producers. The programme is specifically developed to facilitate artists at this pivotal point in their career through peer review, professional development, mentoring, exhibitions and events. Satellites Programme 2016 participants are: Jennifer Bailey, Mark Bleakley, Anastasia Philimonos, Katie Schwab and Hamish Young.

Ah Love! could you and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits – and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire!
- Omar Khayyam[1]

W.W.W. (Whole World Working) alludes to a condition that is as distant, fleeting and implausible, as it is promising, radical and longed for; but, more importantly, to a condition that (still) seems utopian. One could say, utopia is the opposite of pragmatism – or, for that matter, the opposite of politics. And yet, as Marxist political theorist Fredric Jameson once wrote, utopian imagination can trigger political thinking and subsequently action.[2] This is because, utopian thinking, being holistic, fundamentally questions our ways of, and the tools we employ for, forming our being and the structures within which we navigate. Being holistic and all-encompassing, it provides us with the (theoretical) equipment to question the forces that define the era of globalisation. So-called globalisation came with the promises of universal integration, and yet, also brought forth the realisation of newly configured regimes of power and exclusion.[3] Currently, borders of all kinds – political, economic, racial, gender-based, religious – are colliding with the erstwhile hopes of global emancipation. In light of this, *Whole World Working* aspires to offer a small contribution to current discussions on the potential uses of existing digital technologies to facilitate new ways of dwelling and working in global cooperation.[4]

In 1968, American polymath R. Buckminster Fuller, years before the information society was solidly established, wrote his *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*.[5] In this text, he argues that the only way to achieve global affluence is to avoid categorising factors arising from state sovereignty. That is, simply put, to circumvent borders and operate 'Spaceship Earth' with the aim of a universal, harmonious co-existence. Buckminster Fuller posited that the computer operating outside economic and political stakes offers solutions to existing disparities and unevenness. In *W.W.W.*, extracts from *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* are printed and bound in an oversized format that resembles an actual manual. As opposed to the commonplace manual which is handy, useful and provides lucid information applicable in the *very* immediate future, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* shifts between arcane statements and conceivable notions that appear inapplicable in our contemporary context. Nevertheless, Buckminster Fuller's radical imagining elicits profound thought on the reasons why society is still defined by questions condemned in *Operating Manual* – for example, "Where do you live?", "What is your race?", "What is your nationality?" and so forth.

Discussing the widespread propagation of the internet and computers in the mid-1990s, Professor of Communications at Stanford University, Fred Turner, wrote that when '[t]he Internet and then the World Wide Web swung into public view, talk of revolution filled the air. Politics, economics, the nature of the self – all seemed to teeter on the edge of transformation'; a new society was about to appear, one that would be 'decentralised, egalitarian, harmonious and free'.[6] Illustratively, on 8 February 1996 John Berry Barlow, co-founder of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, published the now (in)famous 'A Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace'.[7] Here Barlow celebrated the possibilities of global communication as enabled by the internet and its (ostensible) absolute detachment from the existing world order. He wrote that '[g]overnments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. You have neither solicited nor received ours. [...] Cyberspace does not lie within your borders. [...] It is an act of nature and it grows itself through our collective actions'.[8] Barlow's words contradict Turner's critical position on the topic, that within this cybernetic picturing of the word 'the *material reality* could [surprisingly so] be imagined as an information system'.[9] Indeed, within the spirit of the so-called Technological Utopianism of the late 20th century the idea of a universally diffused, harmonious living facilitated by the World Wide Web was considered feasible. This, however, requires the abolishment of existing borders; to those borders Turner alluded when commenting on 'the material reality'.

Echoing the tensions between material terrain and networked, technological edifice, in 1999, developer Ben Russell wrote the *Headmap Manifesto* – an illustrated digital manifesto that advocated the usage of location-aware devices to create a global community whose members would come together in clandestine spaces, invisible to the non-networked eye. Connected individuals would use technology to augment reality, thus creating an alternate one, which would not fall under the existing laws of ownership and jurisdiction. Still, Russell, by the time he wrote his manifesto, had already realised the paradoxes existing between a global, networked site and the material plane. Hence, ironically referring to Starbucks and McDonald's, he concludes his utopian vision by emphasising what cuts across the content of his whole manifesto: the involvement of technology in corporate structures. *Headmap Manifesto* is shown in this exhibition mediated by a computer application (2016) made by Yorgos Stavridis and Dimitris Aatos Ellinas, that disturbs but also underlines its ambivalent content. The application temporarily changes the manifesto's language

and deletes its content, alluding to the limits of information technologies: their inability to overcome borders and their limited accessibility – in this instance, realised in linguistic shifts and moments of void content, respectively.

Di Massimo's *Borders* (2014) comments on the arbitrary nature of maps and the various powers that forge their (border)lines. *Mappe Mundi*, one of the drawn series comprising *Borders*, features nine variations of world maps. Spanning from 194 BC to 2014, the images juxtapose earlier visualisations, informed by a philosophical/religious perception of the world, to current, dominant representations with clearly delineated geographical borderlines. In addition, nine drawings placed underneath *Mappe Mundi* – showing maps from the construction of the Berlin Wall to the political map of Europe as appeared in 2014 – comment on the historical conditionality of borders, as defined by various geopolitical alterations. Completing *Borders* is a large drawing accompanied by three smaller ones, that depicts a revised European map; Alessandro plotted this map by overlapping the stock index of three catastrophic economic crises – the Great Depression (1929 – 39), Black Monday (1987) and the Subprime Mortgage Crisis (2008) – onto the political map of European countries. Overall, *Borders* functions as the antithesis to idealised perceptions of borderless technological structures, which might (partially) cut across geographical borders but cannot eliminate their overdetermined function. Namely, in Marxist philosophers Étienne Balibar's words, '[...] no political border is ever the mere boundary between two states, but is always overdetermined and, in that sense, sanctioned, reduplicate and relativized by other geopolitical divisions. [...] Without the *world-configuring* function they perform, there would be no borders – or no lasting borders.[10]

Concluding the exhibition, Michel de Broin's film *Keep on Smoking – Kreuzberg* (2007) follows a bicycle around Kreuzberg, Berlin. The bicycle leaves behind lines of smoke created by a generator which transforms the cyclist's physical effort into electric current. As de Broin has described it, the work twists the traditional 'green' discourse, 'proposing a sculpture that produces the sign of pollution', using, however, alternative energy. In the context of *W.W.W.*, *Keep on Smoking* metaphorically underscores the importance of questioning traditionally dominant narratives and the construction of new ones – processes that are essential to the realisation of, for instance, Fuller's utopia; whilst it alludes to a dystopic condition in

which those alternative narratives are precluded from coming into being.

Endnotes

1. Omar Khayyam, *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (Boston: International Pocket Library, 1992), p. 29
2. Fredric Jameson, 'The Politics of Utopia', *New Left Review*, Vol. 25 (January – February, 2004).
3. For a thorough discussion on the issue of the possibility of global social integration initially promised with the advent of globalisation – occurring after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union – and its clash with globalisation's actual integration only at the level of economy, see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's germinal books on this topic *Empire* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000) and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004).
4. For a critical analysis of this topic see Benjamin H. Bratton, *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2016).
5. R. Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth* (Baden, Switzerland: Lars Müller Publishers, 2008).
6. Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth Network, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), p.1
7. Available online: https://www.eff.org/cyberspace-independence
8. Ibid.
9. *From Counterculture to Cyberculture...*, p.5
10. Étienne Balibar, *Politics and the other Scene* (London; New York: Verso, 2002), p.79

Anastasia Philimonos lives and works in Edinburgh. She has a background in art history and recently graduated from the MSc Modern and Contemporary Art: History, Curating, Criticism at The University of Edinburgh; and Art History and Theory at The Athens School of Fine Arts. *W.W.W. (Whole World Working)* has been developed by Anastasia Philimonos as Associate Producer for Satellites Programme 2016.

Reception and shop

Entrance
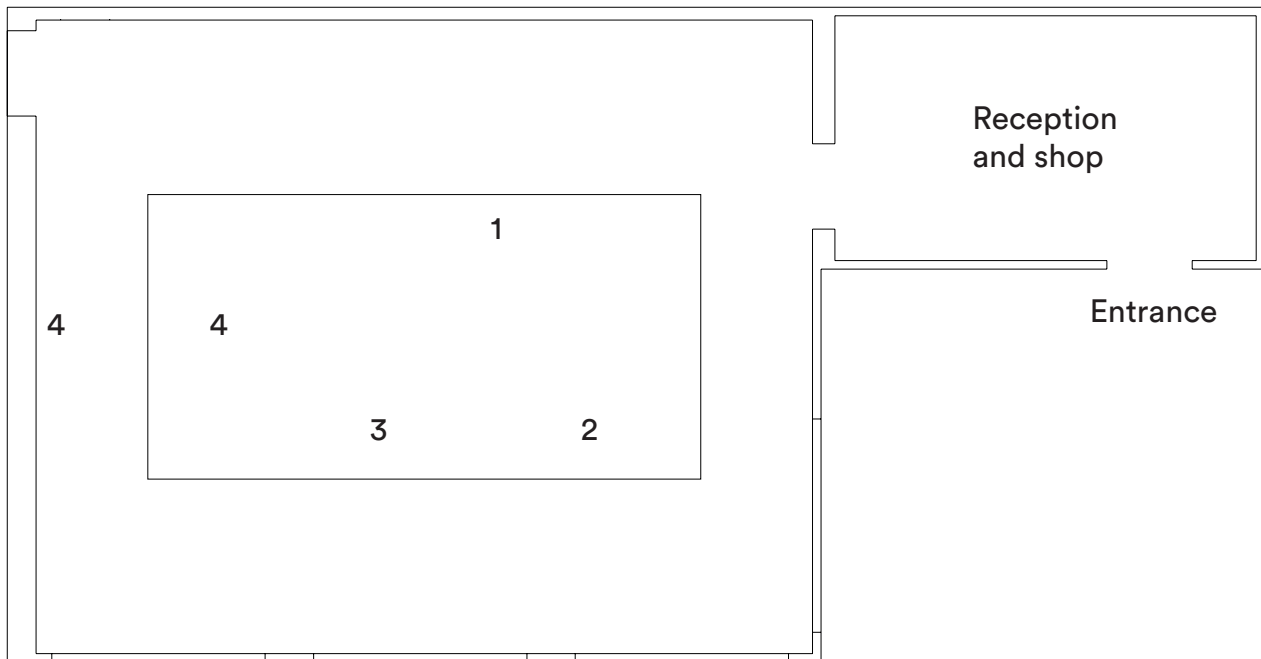
1. Michel de Broin, *Keep on Smoking – Kreuzberg*, film, 2007.

2. R. Buckminster Fuller, *Operating Manual for Spaceship Earth*, 1968, edited by Anastasia Philimonos and designed by Kaisa Lassinaro. Edition of 3, 2016.

3. Ben Russell, *Headmap Manifesto*, 1999, with design by Yorgos Stavridis with Dimitris Aatos Ellinas. Digital application, 2016.

4. Alessandro Di Massimo, *Borders*, pen, rubber stamp, tracing paper, push-pins, 2014.

Table – Top row, left to right:

The Mappe Mundi Series:
World map by Eratosthenes, 194 BC
World map by Cosmas Indicopleustes, 500 AD
World map by Isidore, 600 AD
World map by Al-Istakhri II, 934 AD
World Map of Guido by Guido of Pisa, 1119 AD
World map by Fra Mauro (Fra Mauro map), 1450 AD
World map by Heinrich Bünting (The World in a Cloverleaf), 1518 AD
World map by Sebastian Münster (Europa Regina), 1588 AD
World Map, 2014

Table – Bottom row, left to right:

The Berlin Wall 1961
The Berlin Wall 1989
The Berlin Wall 2014

Borders of Australia 1616
Borders of Australia 1788
Borders of Australia 2014

World War Maps 1918
World War Maps 1945
World War Maps 2014

Wall, clockwise:

Political Map of the European Union, 2014
Great Depression, 1929
Black Monday, 1987
Subprime Mortgage crisis, 2008

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