

Me and the SI

by Ivaylo Belev

09.11.2011

About two years ago I came to Germany to start my Master studies in Informatics. At that time I had already lived for a year in Germany and had seen a lot of things but I had no idea what I would encounter this time. It was something different, it was something extraordinary, it was the Société Imaginaire.

But let's start from the beginning...

I come from a beautiful small mountain town in Bulgaria called Tryavna. I have grown up there in peacefulness and close to the nature. This is one of the reasons I love mountains, forests, the greenness and all the tranquility they bring with. In the quietness of such places, away from the big city commotion, one is able to hear his inner voice. During the holidays I visited my grandma and my grandpa in our village Agatovo at the countryside. They grew a lot of vegetables and fruits and had many animals. The immediate contact with the earth strengthened my love for the nature and healthy life which at some point evolved into becoming a vegetarian.

My early conscious life was mostly connected to school. The latter played an important role in forming my views about the world and I learned a lot of stuff but I will always be thankful for two things. The first one are the intensive English classes. Now I can't imagine a life without knowing English. As a matter of fact it has become the world language and not knowing it shuts the access to vast communication and knowledge recourses. The second thing I'm very thankful for is discovering my passion for computers which later turned into professional activities. Nowadays these two things – English and computers, may be taken as defaults but at that time this was not the case. That's why I'm very glad to have had them.

After finishing school the next natural step was going to university. But I didn't take it. At least not immediately. In high school the only thing I have been doing was studying. Indeed I didn't have much time for myself. Furthermore, besides the computers one more passion arose – chess. I love thinking, analyzing, cogitating and chess fits me superbly. I decided to take two years for my personal development regardless of the fact that I won a scholarship for best performance during the whole high school education and I would have received it, if I had gone directly to university. I didn't bend to the pressure from teachers and relatives to go to university but listened to my inner voice because it knew best what was the right thing to do. I have never regretted my decision, even more, I have always been absolutely happy to have taken it. In these two gratifying and beneficial years I also spent 9 months in the army which was also a worthwhile time for my personal development.

Then came the time to enter the university stage of my life. I just knew which is the best university for me to go to. It was the Technical University of Gabrovo in the city nearby. I applied only there with a first wish for a “Computer Systems and Technologies” major and my exam results granted me no problems with the enrollment. In the campus was green and all the university buildings were at walking distances – so it was a comfortable pretty study environment. Followed 4-5 fruitful years of extending my knowledge and horizons by the scientific stuff I learned at the university and the contacts with the wonderful people I met. In the meanwhile I did two internships and one exchange in Mittweida, Germany (in 2006, 2007, 2008/09) and I liked it a lot. Along with all the other things, it was a totally new and amazing experience meeting and living with students from over 20 countries! It felt like one has bits from every corner of the world put together. If you think they wouldn't fit, you are simply wrong. Although we were all different we had no problems with living in peace and having a lot of fun. Even more – being different was our common feature which held us together. This is an example in our more and more globalizing world that cultural mixture is not a barrier to peaceful living. It doesn't matter who you are and where you come from.

What matters is the human essence. We can still keep our traditions, keep believing what we believe in, but just treat others as human beings, treating them the way we want to be treated. Who will do harm to the others knowing that the same harm will be done to him? Simple.

After finishing my bachelor's degree in the spring of 2009 I needed to choose my further way in life. I was undoubtedly headed for Master studies. I would have no problems studying in Bulgaria but somehow my intuition confidently stated that I should apply for the University of Applied Sciences in Mittweida, Germany, where I already had a lot of experience, and this was my way to go. I listened to my inner voice and applied only there (neither in Bulgaria nor somewhere else). My decision was more or less adventurous because I would get a scholarship for one semester and any further studies were to be financed by myself. So I just told myself: "I'll go and either find a job parallel to studying or after one semester I'll go back to Bulgaria. Good in both cases."

Everything went fine and I became a regular university student in Germany. As there is a saying: "If you take your decision with courage, the universe will conspire to make it happen." Yet in the first month I got an email that a student has been looked for doing web development as a part of a cooperation between the university in Mittweida and the Batuz Foundation. Despite of having very little experience in this area, I applied and surprisingly for me I was taken. So I met Batuz for the first time.

To be honest, I was very impressed by Batuz' life. Not only by the enormous difficulties he had in his early life, but also by his decision to give up a possible life in comfort and richness provided by the generous market of art, and to dedicate his life to fighting for his ideas. In this consumerist world, where money is the Holy Grail, such an unusual step is remarkable, moreover that Batuz' ideas have a utopian sense. He has chosen not to go with the crowd but to pave new ways. Actually exactly those minds who dare to think they can change the world, are the ones who do it. If we go with the crowd we usually

don't get any further than the crowd. But real attainment is only achieved when one has the courage to head for the unknown.

What Batuz has done in his life is like a research, like an experiment. It all started with painting. Now looking through the six decades of his painterly oeuvre I can follow the evolution of his ideas up to the present day. From landscapes and portraits his paintings became more and more abstract. Then they purified into simple forms interacting with each other but yet coexisting in harmony. At the next stage Batuz' paintings evolved into two large fields in tension with each other. The two areas can be seen as opposed to each other or joined together, anyhow they stay in balance. Between them appears some sort of a border, however this border shouldn't be seen so much as a divider but as a bridge. Exactly "the border" has become the leitmotiv of Batuz' life.

The extraordinary happened here. Batuz stopped being just an artist and began a type of activist life. His ideas went far beyond the paintings, he started applying them onto society. Like different forms "live in peace" in his paintings, why not different people live in peace in society. Batuz' life aimed at constructing bridges, overcoming borders and peace. And this was the beginning of a new world, the world of the Société Imaginaire, a world without borders.

In the beginning I didn't know at all what it was about with all those manifold activities. Also, my job turned out to be not only web development but I had to be able to handle diverse computer (and not only) tasks in various fields. Step by step I learned more about Batuz' ideas and his creation – the Société Imaginaire, causing the pieces of the puzzle in my mind to be continuously arranging.

As I read more and more about the ideas of the Société Imaginaire I realized that I've always been a part of it but I just didn't know it earlier. The Société Imaginaire aims at developing a sense of global community based upon the free, intellectual spirit. It is dedicated to overcoming borders, whether they are physical ones or imperceivable ones in the people's minds. The initial

reaction of the people who hear about the Société Imaginaire can be rather skeptical. But as we know from history this is exactly the reaction to every great idea which breaks through the rigid traditional view of the world. Although it is an “imaginary society” its ideas don't merely stay in the imagination of its members. The ideas are applied through many remarkable multifarious projects. I was pretty amazed what has happened on the border of Germany and Poland, or by the marvelous human chain masterpiece in Frankenberg, or the great project in the Antarctic, not even mention the daring actions in Afghanistan!

Behind these projects stays the humanistic idea of direct communication among human beings. Nowadays the genuine communication is missing. We are overwhelmed by an information flood which takes up our time and distracts our attention from the Other and our own self. The Société Imaginaire projects move different people to create works of art together and thus, having a common goal, to practically forget the differences and raise above borders that might have been imposed by their background.

I had the luck to experience such a fantastic moment of oneness in the summer 2011 when the Société Imaginaire was presented at the Technical University of Berlin. As usual for such events there were stands with information materials, presentations and speeches. There were even dances and also very delicious food from various countries. But what I'll never forget is the culmination of the whole event – the bread sharing ceremony. I've watch the videos from the project in Afghanistan and it felt good but to be part of the bread sharing lifted me one level higher. One can never suppose such a simple sign of friendliness what a great feeling can bring. Everyone around, regardless of nationality and position, was smiling at each other and sharing bread. I suddenly found myself in a whirl of joy and happiness! The moment was magical. It really was an incredible feeling!

Although living with other people puts challenges, we cannot live in isolation. The human population just hit 7 billion. And will keep increasing. This means we will need to interact with more and more people, and because of the globalization and the mixture of cultures – with more diverse people. Narrow thinking is not the way to go. We need to learn how to be tolerant to the others no matter who they are.

The problems in the world come from the identity crisis of the individual. Most of the people misidentify with the body and then they tend to think: “I am an American. I am an Iraqi. I am a European. I am an African.” This simply creates fragmentation, balkanization and can even lead to wars. We think that someone within “my country”, or within “my religion”, or within “my tribe”, is my brother or my sister, and anyone outside is my enemy. This happens because we fail to understand that we are all brothers and sisters, that we are all spiritual entities.

Just a notice – we should not mistake religious identity for spiritual one. Religious identity is very temporal, and spiritual identity is something permanent. For example, if I am a Christian today, tomorrow I can turn to Muslim, the next day I can become a Buddhist and so on. But we are spirit souls, so this is our spiritual identity. For religious identity one could go and kill some other person. But one who is situated in spiritual identity will never harm anyone. He will see anyone and everyone in the same light.

Spiritual identity and civilization go very much together. Because the more one is identifying with the spiritual aspect of one’s existence, the easier it becomes to be able to mix with people and to integrate into a greater society, without really minding whether this person is from this race, or from that country, or from this tribe, or from that religion. Because if we are spiritually situated, if we realize our spiritual identity, we will be able to live with people in an equal way. We all are people. We all have needs, desires and problems, no matter what race, culture, nationality or social status we have. We all are human beings.

Unfortunately the world is headed for a self-destruction because of the greed and carelessness of most of the people, who think: “If I am all right, why should I care for the rest of the world?!” or “I’m too small, I’m insignificant, I can do nothing about.”. This inertness is a crime. If we associate ourselves with the pure physical body, of course, we are small and insignificant. But the mind, the spirit – they are powerful! Batuz, a single man with a strong will, is a perfect example to show us that it is possible.

Our efforts are not in vain. We need to raise our eyes from our limited surroundings and start thinking globally, to realize that everything is connected and what we do matters. We can make the world a better place for living starting with the improvement of ourselves. Thinking positive, not losing faith, looking with optimism at life – this is the right way to go. We should find out what real values in life are. We should strive to achieve them and not to waste our efforts for some transient delusion. We need to take care of our world and give it a chance for a brighter future.

I see my life as a constant evolution. The Société Imaginaire is one of the latest stages in it and had a big impact on me. It contributed to raising my awareness for the society and the world. And now I’m a part of it and we are working towards connecting like-minded people who have reached a higher state of consciousness and care about the world. Everyone is responsible for the world we live in. Everyone can make a step towards peace and harmony.