VOL 17 NO 1 A collection of articles, reviews and opinion pieces that
discuss and analyze the complexity of mixing things together as a
process that is not necessarily undertaken in an orderly and organized
manner. Wide open opportunity to discuss issues in interdisciplinary
education; art, science and technology interactions; personal artistic
practices; history of re-combinatory practices; hybridizations between
old and new media; cultural creolization; curatorial studies and more.

Contributions from
Frieder Nake, Stelarc, Paul Catanese
and other important cultural operators.
Leonardo Electronic Almanac
Volume 17 Issue 1

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PROFILE

Darko Fritz

Home, 2002, Darko Fritz, advertising billboards placed close to the borders, installation view: Croatian-Slovene border, Motel Ježev project, curated by Nada Berot, from the Migrant Navigator project.
Interview with Darko Fritz

by Lanfranco Aceti

Darko Fritz’s work through its personal and social aesthetics obliges us to analyze both the technological determinism of contemporary times as well as the contradictions of contemporary aesthetics trapped in the conflict of real versus virtual.

Lanfranco Aceti: What’s going on with you in these days? Any particular shift or new ideas and projects that you are working on?

Darko Fritz: I’m wearing many hats, all of them as a freelancer. I’ll expose a few of my identities shortly here, and later focus on my art practice. So, as a researcher, I became a member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) last week, and two days ago I came back to Amsterdam after a short visit to Bremen, where I shared views with computer-art pioneer Frieder Nake and his team on the CompArt project and database on early digital art. Next month I will run the 100 Years of Croatian Theatre Costumes and Stage Design (who holds the copyright) project realized with Neue Galerie, ZKM and MIT press since 2007, and concluded this year. This week I saw the working copy of the Nove Tendencije one-hour documentary film directed by Vladimir Knežević and produced by Croatian Radio and Television, to which I’m participating. The film is shot in the environment of the bit international exhibition in ZKM, Karlsruhe that I curated, and includes some historic photo and film footage that I discovered in different archives. It will be broadcasted next year. As a curator I’m preparing a new season of the grey) (area - space of contemporary and media art in Korčula, Croatia, a micro-scale summer gallery and related non-profit association, that I have run since 2006. Also, in two weeks I’ll close my selection of contemporary Croatian video art for the CologneOFF 2011 - videoart in a global context. Concerning my work as a graphic designer, the finalization of the voluminous monograph of architect Igor Frančić will be in two months. Next week I’ll receive the ULUPUH Annual Award for the exhibition design of the 100 Years of Croatian Theatre Costum and Stage Design 1909–2009. The printing of the NLN a portfolio of computer-generated prints from 1969 by Vladimir Bonačić published by the Museum of Contemporary art Zagreb is is going on these days. I initiated the publishing, and worked at entire production process in close relationship with both the Museum and the bcld cybernetic art team (who holds the copyright) and wrote one of the introductory texts on Bonačić’s work, and made the graphic design of the portfolio. As an artist, I can’t attend the opening of the exhibition of sound works produced at Croatian Radio and Television that happens today (21st Dec 2010) in Split, where my work ‘AN STILL_ALIVE.HTML from the Internet Error Messages project is on display. Over this year I was preparing two new art projects: one is a collaborative open-end art-science boat-travel research project that I initialized, Adriatic Time Capsule, that takes into consideration olive oil culture alongside other topics related to the Adriatic as part of the Mediterranean region and a notion of the time capsule and polity context of its creation. Another project that will also examine possible scenarios of the future bears the working title South Zagreb - Unfinished Modern Project. The project is based on a reexamination of an urban plan for South Zagreb (new Zagreb) from the 1960s and its partial realization. It will consist of a gallery and video installations and AR (Augmented Reality). As both projects depend on external funds, I hope something will be realized within the next several years. Meanwhile, I’m developing several new works for the ongoing project internet Error Messages that began in 2001.

As my answer serves to introduce my range of interests and daily activities, I would like to express two things: firstly, that I don’t find myself as an all-rounder, and secondly I am critical of phenomena of micro-specializations as preferred and often forced modus operandi in the corporate, academic and art worlds. I find my work filling the gap between contemporary art and media art and culture. As you can see from my activities, there is an interest for a closing period of Modernism in the 1960s and its reflection in contemporary art and media art Zagreb is is going on these days. I initiated the publishing, and worked at entire production process in close relationship with both the Museum and the bcld cybernetic art team (who holds the copyright) and wrote one of the introductory texts on Bonačić’s work, and made the graphic design of the portfolio. As an artist, I can’t attend the opening of the exhibition of sound works produced at Croatian Radio and Television that happens today (21st Dec 2010) in Split, where
I hope you don’t mind but I wanted to ask what is humanity’s fixation with databases? Is it the constant desire to own, almost in a sexual possession, in order to affirm one’s existence as a demigod able to dispense life and death?

At the global power stage, the humanities slowly started to fade away in the 20th century alongside the idea of the Modernism. The making of an archive and/or database is quite like the writing of history – in most cases it tells more about the historic circumstances of when it is written and who wrote it than relevant facts about its subjects. Critical analyses of the databases structure, as well as of its metadata and searching methods, are becoming important and an element of comparative literature studies (or part of databases as they wish). I find that it creates a new critical theory of today.

It seems that these databases have become a fundamental element of contemporary society – with the state and corporations attempting to ensure their own existence by owning people through databases. I am wondering if an aesthetic call for the destruction of databases today would be similar in its impact to the call of the Futurist for the destruction of museums and classic art.

Fortunately, art still allows us to think freely and shout such ideas. I hope we get over the fascistic area of political correctness that, for example, could result in the works of the Marquise de Sade – if he was a living contemporary – to be censored and never published. The same could be for the Futurists’ ideas you are referring to. I find radical ideas attractive such as the one you proposed. It seems that exposing the true facts about some databases (as its misuse in Facebook for example) doesn’t do the work. So, we must think of other options, and some destruction may be included alongside other more constructive solutions.

On a slightly different topic, is the lack of content the consequence of a rhizomic society based on the instantaneous lack of engagement in a self-glorification through digital existence? Being in the database becomes the ultimate affirmation of being – despite the content...

The sovereign media, whose tactics are sometimes used by artists, do not care about who will actually pick up the signal and don’t consider it as a problem. On the other hand, emptied content can be artistically fruitful as well, opening the space of freedom and resistance, with many historic examples such as Mal-
of participants and institutions driven by capitalistic value-system as well: presence in archives and databases expressed in numbers, academic points and numbers of quotations as points of reference trying to represent the content provided. Most of the art, academic and scientific content is not displayed in the public domain without some sort of payment, regardless if they have been subsidized by public funds. In most cases it is necessary to have gatekeepers in arts, but I support ones who take content into consideration, not the metadata about the author or institution behind it.

204_no_content is a subtle and impressive critique of all that surrounds us – do you believe that we are moving toward a society of the vacuum, within which there is no longer content and its context but only the medium with its data based message?

I still have a hope that this process will not win in this race. Just now I have seen on the Huffington Post an article titled Top Secret America on the use of databases to collect information on American citizens... My first thought was: “As if we didn’t know that already.” And the second focused on the end of democracy as a consequence of the end of privacy... Is the ‘piracy’ of databases the next step in order to free humanity from the enslavement of the current simulacrum of democracy?

The project Web 2.0 Suicide Machine by moddr & Fresco Gamba opens up this question in a constructive way; offer users a way to erase their profiles on social networks. The mask of fake privacy protection was unveiled and Facebook succeed to stop the project. Exposure and appropriation of the misused technologies are the first steps toward resistance to the current simulacrum of democracy, as you nicely formulate it. As showed back in the 1990s by Critical Art Ensemble and others, analogue civil disobedience only (as street demonstrations) doesn’t work anymore, the combination of digital and analogue is the option – as well as finding new unpredictable flexible solutions of tactical media. I find most important the simple fact that social environment is not given to us, but that is construct built by people. As we considering it as such, we can freely continue to construct and deconstruct and reconstruct it or build it again.

Is the supercomputer a reality? And if this supercomputer will be an ‘artificial reality being’ will it be the liberating cyborg of Donna Haraway or will it be the enslaving servant of contemporary oligarchies in a permanent and cyclical preservation of post-postmodern society as Paul Virilio could consider it?

I guess that known tension between techno-utopia and technophobia will continue as the way technology continues to be made and used in such diametrically opposite directions. The question reminds of the issue of who invents and who builds technology. Half-century long massive researches on AI with enormous funds (it will be fun to calculate actual investments in total) showed in fact so little results. Up to the agenda from the 1960s we were supposed to live among liberating supercomputers. Now in the 21st century we know that is not the case. We can just imagine how some other field, such as solar energy, could benefit from that amount of investments and resources in artificial intelligence.


Triple video projection

Beta SP transfer to DVD, 60 min, projection 3 x 12 m, installation view: BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead

Curated by Sarah Cook, 2005

From the End of the Message project
photograph Murat Germen, Muta-morphosis #79, Istanbul, 150 x 85 cm, 2011, 7 editions + 2 AP, courtesy of C.A.M. gallery.