

Lea

LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC

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.

M I S H
W V 2 H

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204_NO_CONTENT, 2007, Darko Fritz, horticulture unit, 3,6 x 31 m, 2220 cactusses Echinocactus grusonii [each cca. 18 cm diam.], vulkanic lava, desert sand
 installation view: El Efeque, Fuerteventura, Canari Islands, Deambulatorios de una jornada, en el principio y el proyecto Tindaya [Wanderings of a day, in the beginning and the Tindaya project],
 curated by Nilo Casares, from the *Internet Error Messages* project



Error to Mistake

Notes on the Aesthetics of Failure

by

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“One day in the near future anthologies of 20th century inter-office memos might be as treasured as the correspondence of Virginia Woolf and T. S. Eliot.”

— J. G. Ballard, *A User's Guide to the Millennium* (1996)

Two dominant scenarios of the future of humanity have marked the (post)modern century behind us.

According to the first, optimistic one, we will reach unimaginable evolutionary peaks due to technological perfection; this disciplined and orderly functioning of machines will bring humans to the final state of evolution where the body never leaves the coziness of the pre-natal state of fullness and happiness. The other scenario gives a more concerned view on the technological advancement and supremacy, haunted with the images of Earth's exhausted natural resources that will put humans a few evolutionary steps back – to

First published in

Darko Fritz (ed.), *Archives in Progress* [projects 1987–2007], HDLU, Zagreb / Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art Rijeka, 2007

Types of failure as defined by WWW.INSTITUTE-OF-FAILURE.COM

ACCIDENT / MISTAKE / WEAKNESS / INABILITY / INCORRECT METHOD / USELESSNESS / INCOMPATIBILITY / EMBARRASSMENT / CONFUSION / REDUNDANCY / OBSOLESCENCE / INCOHERENCE / UNRECOGNIZABILITY / ABSURDITY / INVISIBILITY / IMPERMANENCE / DECAY / INSTABILITY / FORGETABILITY / TARDINESS / DISAPPEARANCE / CATASTROPHE / UNCERTAINTY / DOUBT / FEAR / DISTRACTIBILITY

their animal, 'pre-civilized' state. Although completely different when it comes to the final consequences on humanity, those two phantasms entail one thing in common – the impossibility to disconnect present-day humans from their evolutionary new technological environment, an environment that should bring them to the final resurrection or to the final end.

Technology and machines are not created *ex nihilo*; they are the children of imperfect humanity. Human obsession with machines hides the desire to create all we are not – perfect, flawless and eternal. This race to create mechanical-beings-we'll-never-be has been used as a tool in inter-national political fights for dominance many times in the past. Nevertheless, as Slavoj Žižek has noticed, the cold war between the USA and USSR became unnecessary when it came to the creation and perfection of super-computers. According to him, this is primarily because computers entail a permanent lack, a permanent mistake in their own essence that will provide enough room for future more developed and more perfect models. This immanent imperfection of a brain-machine became its structural condition that guarantees its development and future.

Nevertheless, humanity wants to stay blind and deaf for this and chooses to believe in the perfection of machines, being surprised every time when the system shows its holes and mistakes. Darko Fritz's series of works entitled *Internet Error Messages* takes for its subject those glitches, delays and crashes, cracks and gaps in the 'perfect' system of technology-based everyday life at the beginning of the 21st century. Fritz decides to displace those functional messages out of their 'natural' technological environment and questions their real function. In the original environment, those messages have the function of showing us the possibility of the system to communicate with us, delivering messages about its internal processes. Through the selection of particular messages, Fritz

decides to pinpoint the emptiness of the global digital database (204 NO CONTENT, 404 FILE NOT FOUND), the exhaustion of its resources (503 OUT OF RESOURCES), the hidden rules according to which the system accepts or rejects our actions (406 NOT ACCEPTABLE), the existence of different systems and their structural incompatibility (405 UNSUPPORTED MEDIA TYPE), as well as invisible trajectories and movements within the system itself (302 MOVED TEMPORARILY).

Through those actions of decontextualization of system messages, Fritz erases the illusion of their functionality; he turns them into what they actually are – ornamental screens whose purpose is to



Detail from **204_NO_CONTENT**, 2007, Darko Fritz

hide the holes in the system. Fritz decides to take them 'out' and put them back in an 'unnatural' natural environment, using land and flowers to replace pixels and electronic signals. Their new form is ephemeral; it lasts until the organic matter lives, showing us the 'true' transient order of things as juxtaposed to the promised eternity of the technological universe. They become a part of the landscape, assembled for the gaze coming from above, forcing us to re-examine our godly position in creating and managing the usual environment of machines.



302_MOVED_TEMPORARILY, 2004–2005, Darko Fritz, horticulture unit, 3,5 x 40 m
installation view: intersection Ulica Hrvatske bratske zajednice + Av. Većeslava Holjevca, Zagreb, from the *Internet Error Messages* project

In his decision to use both analogue and digital machines and systems, Fritz wants to establish a connection between the two, testing their ability to communicate with each other but at the same time showing us the speed of change and the abandonment of technical tools in just a matter of months. Fax messages were a dominant way of communication just a decade ago. Today, they already function as tombstones of previous times, allowing us to perceive their aesthetics not any more as functional but as purely visual pleasure. In his actions of sending fax messages to different art institutions (series of works entitled *Fax.nl*), Fritz not only underlines this, but he also tests the art system and the way it defines and recognizes works of art. The failure to recognize them as such means their erasure from the dominant narrative of art history and their exchange value becomes zero. This way, it becomes clear that the system is not an entity that exists by itself; it depends on and is made out of the human beings who have the power and agency to accept or reject things as art or something that is not.

Those visual expressions that I dare to name *the aesthetics of failure* function as a constant reminder that things might and do go wrong, and the failure of a machine to fulfill its promises of bringing us perfection and eternal happiness becomes the condition of its actual existence. Stripping them off of their functionality, Fritz shows the lacks those messages try to hide, warning us of the ongoing processes in highly bureaucratized present-day societies to transfer all decision-making to machines as being dangerous in

its essence. The distribution of power to a machine that makes mistakes and has no empathy with the smashed human being on the other side belongs more to the other, pessimistic scenario of the future. The possibility to become a statistical error needed for the functioning of every system does not sound comforting at all. As the lucid quote from the beginning of this text reveals, it seems that the fax and email messages we exchange today might be the way for some future generations (in the optimistic scenario) to decipher the essence of our existence. And Fritz's work shows that this cannot be done without acknowledging the ones considered to be mistakes – empty, blank spaces in the technological memory. ■



404_FILE_NOT_FOUND, 2003, Darko Fritz, horticulture unit, 2,5 x 25 m, installation view: Forum, Zadar, Artistexture / Zadar Uživo 03, curated by Iva Radmila Janković, from the *Internet Error Messages* project

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

