before it's gone save_

OKNO
public01

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beauty in the age of digital art

<Struba> I would like to ask Dirk, although he doesn't talk about his 'easthetics" if he thinks there are certain elements in his work
<Struba> like interactivity for example that constitute an aesthetic for the viewer/ (or contributor?)
<pueblo> struba: interactivity as an aesthetic element?
<Struba> I think so (bu that's my opinion, -> it contributes to the way of perceiving) what does he think about this
<pueblo> ok
<pueblo> Struba can you tell me more about yourself so I can personalise your question?
<Struba> I think perceiving has changed and is no longer only sensory but activates and makes you use your eyes, ears different beacause u can interact. that how I perceive

it's beautiful until someone tells you how it works

<pueblo> currently they are speaking of the way industralization and its processes affects our perception in daily life in unconscious ways
<Struba> I am writing my master thesis on one of Jodi s works, Untitled Game. and the creating of a different aesthetics because of new ways in which the new media are perceived/used
<Struba> I know Dirk doesn't want to comment on this. but I want to ask anyways
<Struba> Maybe he says something interesting. you never know
<Struba> I am a shewink

<wikinibot> Beauty (disambiguation) |
morning glory | Jules Joseph Lefebvre | art |
emotional | perception | life | vitality | health
| fertility | happiness | Goodness and value
theory | meaning | being | nature | cognition |
harmony | attraction | pleasure | Self (philoso-
phy) | religion | ignorance | Narcissus (mythol-
ogy) | vanity | ideology | dogma |
prejudice | ethics | human rights | commercial-
ism | culture wars | feminism | The Beauty
Myth | aesthetics
<sophie_apo33> There is maybe a contradic-
tion between aesthetics and inter-action : the
second one refers to an active "subject" related
to a situation and other "subjects" while the
the concept of aesthetics refers to contempla-
tion… Developping interaction means going out
of aesthetics and entering a regime of produc-
tion of practice…
<Struba> I thin interaction in itself constructs
so many possibilities it seems to be a shame to
say it is a cliche.

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shame to say it is a cliche.

google
beauty
out

transdisciplinary practices

<**wikinibot**> 'High tech' refers to tech that is at the cutting-edge - the most high tech
<**wikinibot**> currently available.
<**wikinibot**> There is no specific class of technology that is high-tech - the definition
<**wikinibot**> shifts over time - so products hyped as high-tech in the 1960s would now be
<**wikinibot**> considered, if not exactly low tech, then at least somewhat primitive. This
<**wikinibot**> fuzzy definition has led to marketing departments describing nearly all new
<**wikinibot**> products as high-tech.

<**sophie_apo33**> what do you mean by "open networks"
<**wikinibot**> wiki
<**wikinibot**> wiki :: disambiguate :

<**pueblo**> hi xgz
<**xgz**> ah _ escaping the masses/madness
<**pueblo**> so tell me xgz, you were speaking about networks, do you also see the relation between them and power

<**xgz**> sure _ wanted to comment on it because these are very aesthetical moments when you see how power acts and when you are trying to go against it
<**xgz**> and the good thing is that you don't have to leave the field of technological arts for it hihi

show it in its functional minimum

<sophie_apo33> to answer to Elke: first of all, technology, digital technology is more and more used for any kind of practice today, so from this point of view we have a kind of huge machinery of interconnected machines which end up working on many different fields, many different spaces at the same time. For this, because the digital technology is "penetrating" the totality of reality, it not only enables transdisciplinary practices but forces
<sophie_apo33> practices to become transdiciplinary
<pueblo> thnks sophie
<pueblo> I will bring this in
<sophie_apo33> so maybe what is interesting to understand is : in what sense do the "disciplinary practices" become "trans", in which way the boudaries that make them different are put in question be technology, in particular digital tecnology ?

<sophie_apo33> what is interesting in art, and we see many researchers or activists etc. getting linked to art practices, is that it is in itself a transversal practice that can involve different mediums, techniques, ways of working, themes, issues, and all this through the production of something common at the end, a kind of common language. In this sense yes, art is social and an important social practice today
<pueblo> but I also think art works beautifying forms of control
<pueblo> specially in technologically powered forms of art
<annemie> but how far social involvement and aesthetics can go together?
<sophie_apo33> fascination for power is a question of "psychology" and not of art : esthetisation of politics, this how Walter Benjamin analysed Nazism… very ambigious…

<xgz> maybe about sound and body: is love frequency dependent?
<pueblo> absolutelly
<xgz> damn _ ok disappearing and starting to patch up something effective then
<xgz> bye

dirk pasmaens, jodi.org

Dusan: For the games you have this manual how to play them and for the net how to use it and where to click and lot of your works for instance look as you're avoiding these manuals, go against them. That you don't really play it or use it, but misuse it. Then you have Adorno's idea that perception can be activity. And then it's like you are even against this statement.

Dirk: Yeah, I don't like that media or any kind of new media develop a theory of them-selves. As if I will not be because we try not to read it or look at it, because I think it's like in all the art it is about my expres-sion, my art, or our group. Anything media tries for its own explanations, like all these type of festivals like this are actually more a warning for me as an artist to take care that don't ever become like that, because it's so general, everything can be replaced by some-thing else and you won't notice it. I want to feel a personality of the maker, of the person in between this group that has a vision that will be real or strong. It is also very political because in many countries new media get money just by saying we're going to develop a project that is new media so there can be workshops on the site.. because the com-puter is the most powerful economical tool. So they will sponsor a lot of art including computers, networks and digital art because it will help functionality. It's not so clean.

Dusan: For instance if somebody would ask you to teach?

Dirk: If it's in an art school yes..

Dusan: Because often these workshops are about the technologies here and we want to show how to manipulate it or how to use it and sometimes it's faster than he or she had to get to it alone. So lot of these things departed from the art scene and ended up or are continuing at the educational level.

Dirk: Yes it's true. Like Cory Archangel, the game modifier, Mario modifier, is also teaching now and also gives workshops because he has to survive in New York. And here in Europe on the other side there are the funds, the subsidies, it's a cliche, but it's true, you can apply for an art funding. In America you have to sur-vive, if you get teaching, you do that..

Dusan: So are you able to live from the artworks you did?

Dirk: No. We have been able to get the funds than you give the review, you show what you have done in the last year or two years and then they think well was this interesting, they have pub-lic presentations.. it's another control of keeping art in society. It's another way. The other way is to see what you can distribute via galleries, and what public will want to give in return, as money or whatever, an the other is more abstract funding. Like for example there has been a time they have tried to revive or help film, the alternative film, everyone know you cannot make films.. so you have to apply to the commission.

Dusan: So it's like you have not this free will in what you do and you have to fol-low this political rules.

Dirk: No. Yeah.

Dusan: Yeah, anyway. What was the decision behind My Desktop work?
Dirk: Well, it's me, and someone else, doing strange things on the desktop, like multiplying folders hundreds of times and then totally random behavior, opening files, popping up, hundred of times and so on, it's like taking an instrument and start playing on it without any score. The desktop itself, you know, it makes funny, when you a Mac desktop, but also PC I guess that you open a folder and pheeeew, chick tchik, tak taks, all these little actions they make certain noises, so when you multiply multiply it hundred times, tchick tchak lililing, chku, it's like a machinery that went crazy, so you play on the desktop, on the interface only.
I pectacle, actually that this is it, there is a bit… there is already so much happening on the desktop, in the frame and around it, that the rest is almost a byproduct. That was a recording of this type.
We've made a software before OSS software which is a software which does strange things with your computer and which actually makes the user react a bit in panic. and then many times without neccessary with this … This is black and it's flickering, shit! I have to remove this! and then he starts removing and the there is a double under it and then he sees, oh shit, there are twenty of them, and then they start doing nervous things and then they, yes, it's more a drama that they imagine, it's not so bad, they only react.

Magde: I wonder what is the relationship between this and hacking.
Dirk: Hacking is more technical in general, hacking is almost the opposite but it's good also that it's..
Magde: When you get to someone's computer and it starts doing things he doesn't expect or it could be done this kind of way…
Dirk: But then you have the ways when you do it in a very technically advanced way that you create a friendly virus, then you have to do it very constructive. And you demonstrate so bad amateur behaviour that it almost has the same effect, I mean you can't imagine that someone is doing something so stupid or so different from the normal rules. For example multiplying folders, opening them at the same time, then throwing them to the trashcan and trying to delete it. A virus would do it a really advanced virus could do it, but you could also do it yourself when you were in the state of a five year old, let's say, a five year old child for example would do it for fun, because it would like it,

it makes sound and talalla, they think it's great. It's like a ball is not made for playing football only you can also just play with it on the walls, I mean it's not just to be played eleven players against eleven players.

Dusan: Do you also work with no computers?
Dirk: What is it? Old computers, you mean?
Dusan: I mean if you do anything where you don't use computers.
Dirk: A, yeah. We also did this thing with GPS, but GPS is another type of computer. You record it, but later you have to have the software to visualize it and things like that, it's all again on the computer. But that is the problem of the computer, you edit video on the computer, you can watch TV, you can write letters, you watch photos.. Everything is there, it has absorbed all analogue existing things into some kind of miniatur appearance, which more or less works but only inside the computer. You can telephone via the computer to Prague, instead of … Yeah, it can absorb so many things it's amazing, but scary also.

Character

0

100%

0°
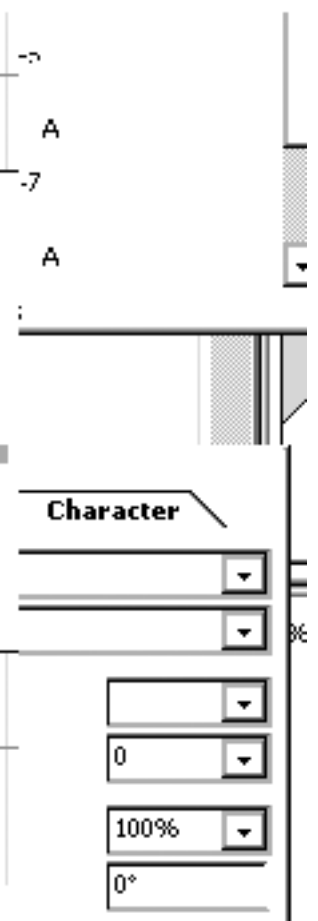
Dusan: The thing is that this is still not really the big topic for the artists, or maybe it is, and I'm just not aware of it?

Magde: When you look at for example Slovak contemporary art scene, there are people who make videos and they use computer just for editing and that's it.

Dusan: Yes, maybe it's also connected, I'm wondering if you exhibit?

Dirk: Yeah.

Dusan: Now?

Dirk: Yeah, we thought it could be a good change of habits, yes, in the last three or four years, we did maybe, by now we did ten or twelve exhibits. I try to keep that small. But at least half of them were really bad, really bad and then some of them were good. And sometimes it's a pity that a good exhibit, that you learn how you see something and you can't repeat it or keep it.

Dusan: So what do you see as good exhibition?

Dirk: Good exhibit was when we showed the one in Eyebeam in New York, because there we showed the desktop things I told as really big projections. So the place was already big but the small.. What you normally see as a small desktop was gigantic, I mean big as you would see real in a presentation they put a the proto of the desktop. Desktop is always the layer, where they put the browser on, or you start Quake, or you start something, there the whole action is only in the layer you normally don't see. You see it all the time, but in the background since you are doing something, writing an email, or…. so this time, the desktop was the main actor. And yes, you think of files and folders as small things, there they were huge objects flying around and making quack, the sound was really loud and all this was very exaggerated, caricature. It was really like that. It was really this exhibit and at the same time, because it was not the only thing, we had a setup of very old fragile computers in retro style, if you want, we recreated with, we bought old televisions, really old, the opposite of flat screens if you want, mechanical, with knobs to change the channels, because that were the televisions of the eighties and we had …. as a   very strange little black computer and then the programs were on the casssettes - audiotapes. So this whole thing is not totally a computer - there was no typical screen and there was no hard disk. They used music, so the computers did not exist yet. The keyboard with chip existence, not a totally packaged total thing, you could see where these things come from. The flat screen originally was a TV, in the beginning, people connected the computer to the TV. There was no hard disk or container for the program, there were ttuutuutt, audio cassettes, so it was archeology. We had like ten or twelve of them and it looked like a big piece of hardware, because we thought we wanted to show the hardware side of things, not slick digital software, the software program, but we wanted to show that hardware as its typical influences. And we wanted to create a program with this, but we couldn't solve it, because most of these computers now are gone, no one kept it or archived it. It's a bit unfortunate because the whole retro style is so big now and it's so big because now it's presented in flat screens and several little iMacs connected to it, totally unrelated to the problems or origins of whether we try to say something about the machine or the computer. You look too much on graphics only, you're trying to sell stuff, graphics only is much more sellable, if it's on flat screen or on painting.

Dusan: Most things you do is presented as jodi made this, jodi made that, do you also collaborate with other artists?

Dirk: Yeah, we did a few, actually. We like it. But that's strange, that was typical for the beginning years, there were all the time collaborations, for fun. Almost like a blog in a way that via email I said next week I will open something strange on my website, but I need some things from other people, you and you and you, and make something. And then it was a little bit announced on the mailing lists, these small little projects were happening a lot. That stopped a lot with that group of people, but I see that people from the other generation collaborate all the time, blogs, etc. I think it's important to be aware of the group because many times you use tools which were made by other people, like if you want to hack a game or make a modification probably, that's unofficial, amateur program from Czech Republic, or Canada, from someone who was just a bedroom, a home developer of these things. It's good to be aware of that, of another. That is still happening, that people are aware, for example now you want to hack a DVD, or try to DVD go crazy, then you need other people who have been starting to do something with it, you contact them and ask how is it.. You have to collaborate many times for something new, because you don't have a total knowledge of this. Many times when the program is fully there it means that people who put the program there did already so many things with it that when you use it, they will recognize immediately that that's been done before. Experimentation is the best collaboration.

Dusan: Lot of the people who do the performances, the audience is there and there is an interaction during the thing itself. Is this appealing to you?

Dirk: Depends how, but in general the laptop performances, I don't find them very interesting, there's too much copies, a lot the same, there are few originals. It's because the choice of the program is again so limited, there are one or two programs to create rhythm or beat with the graphics and so on. That is another danger of the group, to be part of the

group, you have to follow the rules a little bit, this is about abstraction, and pure and reactions to very electronic music, and you make suddenly little puppets dancing around that are not part of that group. With VJ-ing and laptop concerts it's very much repetition.

Dusan: Then you have also these networked performances when the people are connected through the net, make a synthesis or have also input from the environment.

Dirk: Yes, it depends, it is difficult to recognize, you know, I try to look which is original. Visually you can almost not recognize it, because someone can do similar thing very fast just because he saw it a week ago in London and then he repeats it at home. I'm really interested in the person who makes it more than in the graphics only, like who is this girl or what did you do before and why? And maybe she is not standard, not a repetition, but anyway..

Dusan: During the years you have the experience of perceiving the images, then you develop the ability to see like this is the original combination of the things, then you start to think how it could be made or you ask how it was built and it might be useful for you.

Dirk: Yes, it's not forbidden to study the technique of something..

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Dusan: I don't know if I ever found anything that you or Joan wrote about your works.

Dirk: No, not much :)

Dusan: That's also part of this, then these works are appealing to people because they don't know really a lot about them.

Dirk: That's another danger, that they write a lot of stuff on top of it. And if we are not doing that, that's not really a conscious choice. We, I especially, did a lot of writing and mailing into mailing lists, but that was all unreadable stuff. Sometimes cut and paste from the text and with a lot of graphic stuff in between. Sometimes they looked that as if you would

start to read them, most of the time they were not ascii drawings, they were ascii texts. I did hundreds of them, a lot a lot a lot. I also tried to do it in the serious mailing lists. That time rhizome, I bombarded it.

Dusan: Then they kicked you out.

Dirk: Yeah, after a while. It brings up many times a discussion, like this is really interesting stuff, we should address it or this is spam.

maja kuzmanovic, foam

Dusan: Why did you choose the subject of beauty?

Maja: We were busy designing the magazine x-med-a with other three organizations and it was actually the first time that we worked with the different organizations having to agree on the aesthetics. And it seemed like people couldn't actually talk about it as easily as they can talk about concept or the structure of something. People were offended very quickly or were talking in a very opinionated and strong language. And we thought actually in all these new media conferences in the past years there is not much talk about aesthetics. So maybe we actually lost the ability to talk about it. I didn't think so because in our organization we talk about it all the time.

Dusan: So now we talking about the x-med-a publication. It worked out finally.

Maja: Through lot of talking. At the beginning they did not want to say what they like, they did not want to give examples because of something and it took big effort to get people say 'i really really like this' or 'i really hate this' and show us things that they like. We were there to try to stretch this magazine inbetween all these people's ideas because there was something ultramodernist like 'i want concrete and steel and blocks of colors' and so on.
Dusan: So you came out of the point that it's hard to speak about, so let's speak about it. The guy from the audience came out with few points that a

lot of these topics related to aesthetics were discussed three or four hundred years ago. There is this approach to taking it as a progress in thinking and it might even look that the topic of aesthetics is sort of out of the date.

Maja: There was something we also wanted to see. Maybe it is. At the same time I think we should pass this modernist idea that we should have progress in everything. Even in the modernism they were still going back to things in the past though, so what we responded was – sure, it's an old idea, but it is an universal idea that keeps appearing no matter where and when. But at the same time if you talk to Guy van Belle who is really not so concerned with it, he still has a lot of opinions about it. There is this tension between people, for example Michael Samyn who thinks that after the 19th century beauty has died, he's very depressed about it, so having him and Guy at the same table was interesting.
**Dusan**: The point of Dirk Paesmans was that beauty is always already there, which was basically the same as Michael's, but at the same time they were not able to agree on the things.

Maja: I do agree that it is always already there, it's just that we don't really see it anymore. It's more likely that we look at the things that are problematic in the world.

Dusan: Do you understand your and FoAM's activities as being part of this media art field? In art history it looks like media art is hot new, just 3 or 4 decades old thing to focus on, but at the same time you are saying that progress doesn't work anymore..

Maja: I started to work in media art in the beginning of the 90s when we were all extremely excited about the possibilities of the technology and we were also thinking that we are going to save the world. But since a few years it just seems that it became kind of elitist group of people who don't really communicate with the outside world. In the beginning of this internet thing it was about 'yes, we're going to spread out through it again', because in the 60s and 70s with all this conceptual stuff it became very secluded. And now it seems that the same thing is happening at least in Belgium and at the festivals and conferences that i've been to in the past years. This enthusiasm is

gone. People still talk about the same things but it seems it is becoming the closed circle. So what we are trying to do with FoAM is to break this open into different fields. But still we are excited about digital technologies and it is what we do and use and make, but we want to break it open.

A A

A

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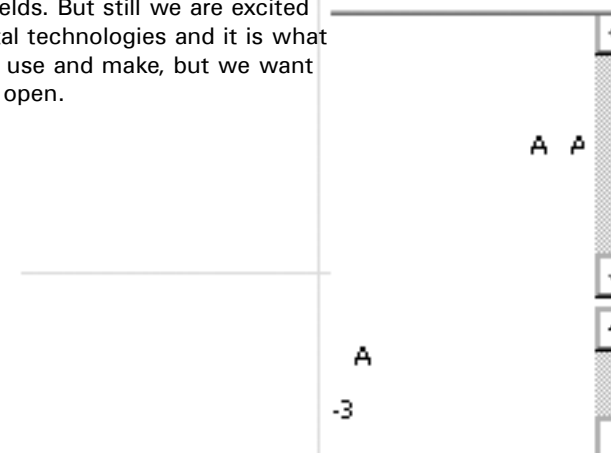
media art in eastern and central europe

<okno-077> media art in central europe could be a contruction of electronic media promoters and selfpromoters, milos
<okno-077> video projections are out.. just boring at least mostly, not only in eastern europe
<black> those all are issues beyond east europe
<pueblo> but in east europe there is also an art system
<black> just like everywere else
<Z> Media art doesn't need art systems.
<pueblo> media art system also exists Im afraid
<Z> But you don't need the systems.
<black> its been institutionalised for last 10 years at least
<rarita> by system you mean institutions?
<pueblo> also institutions
<pueblo> maybe we don't but we tend to organise everything in the same ways
<pueblo> I would like to see more nomadic forms of organisations of course
<Z> Digital media (unlike video) can be distributed without institutions.
<Z> Directly to the user.
<pueblo> yes Ryszard Kluszczynski is not happy about the fact that media art also works in the art system
<pueblo> but it is a fact
<auriea> because the artists want it
<black> well there is still issue that art system and subsequently museums cant find a way to collect distributed media art
<auriea> maybe they shouldn't collect it.
<xgz> think it is a very serious point that it is losing its alternative or innovating character because of it

<pueblo> yes and also says that he thinks media artists that were claiming a more revolutionary position towards the art system are loosing their revolutionary character
<okno-077> i doubt about the revolutionary elements in media art, it is more exception.. but people who invented the tools and tried to implement them in the society have been very creative
<xgz> basically when a media artist is seeing the art world with museums and galeries as its space
<Z> It's funny because in commerce and industry, this socalled revolution is still growing.
<xgz> sure, but still there is hardly people working consciously at an alernative circuit these days
<black> yes
<Z> The entertainment industry in particular is using more and more digital distribution.

<pueblo> I am curious, friends from eastern europe, how close to your history you feel Russian art?
<black> does art has ethnisity? is that what you asked?
<pueblo> well is a common background
<black> well the common ground is technologies and history of media developments

why not to introduce artistic practices to the realm of the military?

<black> does aesthetics are primal in todays media art ?
<xgz> no, media I think
<lena> beauty? or : the study of easthetica
<auriea> i don't know about primal… i just think there is a fetishization of the pixel
<auriea> or i mean artists stucked on a certain aesthetic forever

<luka> is there a medium which is not saturated with commercial practices?
<Z> cave painting
<lena> no caves in brussels…

<rarita> darko's so right about the amnesia people tend to have in the balkans
<Z> they shouldn't drink so much wink
<auriea> why did this amnesia happen?
<rarita> i think is some kind of unconscions mechanism to protect yourself from a history that is too messy
<black> denial
<pueblo> but not having a history at all makes things difficult too

<black> why there is so much rewriting of the history in the east?
<pueblo> we should try to do that in latin america too
<black> not good idea
<black> find parallel ones
<pueblo> I think when we have all very faraway references we have to rewrite the relations
<pueblo> yes parallel histories help

<lena> and make sure one does not prevail over the other

<luka> the wild east capitalism seems to have very little appreciation for research
<rarita> exactly
<luka> and even less for technological art
<rarita> and they don't need to invest in research that much when they can bring in expired technology from the west
<luka> maybe because both are 'geeky'?
<rarita> and they don't need to have, since they can profit enough from bringing in the technologies that got out of fashion in the west
<xgz> yes interesting is that the state does not seem to add cultural funding to its priorities of development, and companies are the real powers behind decisions but not interested at all in social and cultural funding
<black> in uk currently the media art is closely linked with social engineering and regeneration projects, i know that for east to addopt this is long way in future but may be even lucky to escape this merger
<xgz> and with the new evolution in EU, i have the feeling there is less and less money for culture, while mobility is totally phased out by now…
<black> is that in east or west eu you talking about?
<xgz> so for eastern, central and balkan europa it is interesting to follow up the current changes

<xgz> I am living in bratislava
<black> it seems that the sort of poetic work is also something that east will need to get through before getting out of that amnesia state we talked before
<xgz> recently was in romania (iasi) and was astonished of the very poor conditions in which people are working and making media art (streaming radio), and of course the political situation and its prospects is not very uplifting, seems that it is exactly like you said: core-EU is just interested in marketing its 'expertise' and harvest the profit, like the new dress of former colonialism…
<xgz> hey but isn't it more because it is videoworks, there are some other media artists in hungary i guess, who use more computer based tools, and make installations and net related works
<black> i think the general trouble is that in some cases , may be more in baltic than in balcans the denial of the past makes younger generation to reinvent the histories as new
<black> and yes how ever said it all looks in streets there is so much stuff happening in all of theses countries
<xgz> I have nothing against videowork but it tends to be more traditional and narrative

darko fritz

Rebecca: Would you like to situate yourself in the vast field of Media Art to begin with?

Darko: In 1988 I started working together with a group of friends, coming from different artistic backgrounds, on computer installations without really knowing what we were busy with. At that time there was a strong tradition of video art. Then, through experimenting, we found out that there also was a strong tradition of computer art that had been completely interrupted between 1960 and 1980. Computer art and video art were then completely separate fields. Worldwide the computer art scene has been rigorously cut down due to anti-technological statements rising in the generation of

the sixties late seventies, as a response to the Vietnam War. Those fifteen years of 'amnesia' in the history of computer art had the effect that everything that had been achieved in the field had been forgotten. It's like having forgotten what has been done in 1991.

In the beginning of the seventies there was a strong video scene in Croatia and since this area was part of former Yugoslavia it was a very free art. This in contradiction to many other East European countries, where this was quite a different story.

So, when we were doing these computer installations in 1988, factories produced special chips for us, we borrowed from an artist, Vladimir Petec, a slide projector that we then connected to the media signal that we controlled. It was kind of asking other colleagues for help. Multivision, Extended Cinema, Video art and Conceptual Art were present in this time. But Media Art in that time meant Video Art and not Computer Art.

Rebecca: What is your personal background?

Darko: I studied architecture and I consciously decided not to study on a art academy. When I was young, eighteen about I studied commu-

nicology which contained psychology, sociology and this kind of things. So I got very early in contact with writings of Marshal Mc Luhan, Roland Barthes etc. My end paper was about 'the application of mass media in architecture'. I cited Andy Warhol and the idea of reproduction etc., Conceptual Art and Video Art.

Then I went to Amsterdam to the Rijksacademie voor Beeldende Kunsten to the Media Department and was happy to find it very prosperous. It was to my knowledge the only art school in Europe that had one at that time. Finally a place that was busy with what I was doing. The approach of the Media Department included everything but traditional media.

Installations, Photo, video, one little computer work but nothing really in that way yet. But that rapidly changed from the beginning of the nineties until now. Now its video editing all over, then it was only one little computer work. Every Academy has got a Media section nowadays.

Rebecca: It is surprising to see how your use of the computer gets translated into your work. In the works '204_ no content' and '302_moved temporarily' you create a complex paradox between organic and inorganic elements. You apply an inorganic element, a error message in internet communication to an organic shape since you plant the text with flowers.

Since '302_moved temporarily' is stretched over 40 meters you need to get into a machine, the privileged position of a helicopter, to get an overview of the text. Overview in public space is a very closely linked with surveillance. How would you define the political dimension of this work?

Darko: This particular work is a site specific work. You are right about the fact that the passer by cannot see the work fully, although it is situated in a public space. That's consciously made. The site lies on the entrance

or exit point of New Zagreb. The roads connect to the airport and the railway. The site is on the middle of this crossroad and is aligned with one of the street axes. Croatia is essentially a country of transition where capitalism rules in the worst possible sense. The culture of commercial billboards, their omnipresence, and their cry for attention is counterbalanced with my work. It is much bigger in size than the billboards but is flat on the ground. It doesn't correspond in content to the billboards but is a formal incision in the urban texture.

Rebecca: But what you 'advertise' in your silent 'billboard' is a failure message of communication…is it a criticism on real communication in society?

Darko: In Home_ Search_ Home I used the home icon from Netscape navigator browser. There I used this very universal pictogram that means 'home' on the medium of the billboard. The billboard stands next to a road. According of fraction of light the pictogram is more or less visible. There is no further explanation to it. So, it's really very open for interpretation. But that is of course a very risky way of making art in public space. The content is advertising itself.

Rebecca: So like the work we talked about before it is also a proposition to create like a void or a silence or an empty formula in the city that allows people to think about their identity…

Darko: Yes, visitors can fill in their own interpretation. If someone asks me -what does '302_ moved temporarily' mean- I say, sorry, nothing. It's an error message…My work cannot be defined as a target, like they do it in marketing. Target-zone, simple and clear messages… I am not using that sort of strategy. My work is more like internet art of today. It doesn't necessarily happen on the net anymore.

Rebecca: It is nice to see how you manage to transpose a content of computing into our everyday space without recurring to a machine.

Darko: Yes, quite often there is this 'problem' with interactive media art. There is often the illusion of interactivity. If you look closely at those 'open systems' they are really not that open because they are just parameters that you can plug in and combinatory systems that give you the illusion of freedom as well as political systems do.
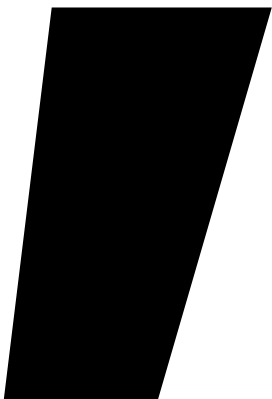
Rebecca: The beginning of the web was based on a military invention. If you as an artist use those commands again, don't you revitalize this way of thinking? How do you subvert it?

Darko: It has to be said that most technology is made for military purposes. In the USA academic military and corporate structures merge for that purpose. Fortunately, in Europe it's quite a bit a different story. As a media artist you always deal with technology that came, after having been secret knowledge, into the public domain. But the question you asked is a question that every media artist has to solve. I am using this metaphor what concerns myself. It's basically like adopting a child from a very, very evil family…

Rebecca: What is the social impact of your work?

Darko: No art can escape the political dimension…. The problem of Media art is that it is marginalized in reference to contemporary art. Although everyone will focus on conferences on their merging points, in reality they are separated circuits. The fundraising system, the galleries, the critics… it's a big gap.
The mission for my own work that I put myself a long time ago is the very utopist mission of filling this gap. I get lots of problems that way because for Media art my work is too traditional and for contemporary art my work is too technical… so that's that…

Rebecca: I still have a question about your relation to the artist book in Eastern Europe and Russia. There was a form of illegal private publishing known under the term of 'Samizdat'. The book form was then used as radical tool to subvert the political and artistic agenda of the regime. With the graphical approach you have in your work do you in any form link to this phenomenon? And does Media Art have this same kind of revolutionary potential as Book Art had then?

Darko: ….My very first works was actually Copy Art. I used slide projections that I copied, so the Xerox was my first tool to fabricate collages based on cut- copy- paste, appropriation of materials like quotations, use of typography. So, with based on that I made fanzines, ' Samizdat´. I made one book in an edition of seven and distributed it to people I learned something from. So ' Samizdat´ is a great form and I think internet covers that function now, and that's great…Self-publishing is an issue that stands at the very beginning of the discussion around electronic media.

Artist appropriated this concept in the seventies in the Artist Book using text and copying as well. It triggered off other approaches like Mail Art and Fax Art and so on….Actually it touched everything that tried to make the old medium of paper transgress into the electronic medium of the Internet…
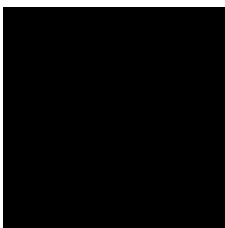
andreï smirnov, theremin centre

Pre-interview for the interview with Andrei Smirnov with Guy Van Belle

Magde: I'm curious what do you think is the best question for Andrei Smirnov?

Guy: Andrei, how the hell did you get there?

Magde: There..

Guy: Theremin Centre. It's a strange story, it's a good story. He used to work for this space museum in Moscow. That's great. And he worked with the brainwaves before. So it's like a really cool question.

Magde: OK, thanks.

Magde: When I watched you doing your presentation I was wondering how you actually started working with theremin and the Theremin Centre. What was the path that led you to music, but also this very technical and scientific way of doing it.

Andrei: Yeah, that's easy somehow. I think that as far as I remember, I started to build my first electronic music devices in the age of fourteen. So since fourteen I was doing this stuff and approximately when I was a second year student at the Moscow Institute of Physics and Technology, my specialisation was solid state physics and laser and anything that relates to the subject. And I decided in a while to get rid of this specialisation and to start to look at the electronic music, but in Russia it was almost impossible, because you couldn't do it professionally in this area. You couldn't get any education in the contemporary music, specially in the electro-acoustic music, so it was somehow a self-taught way. I had to explore a lot of literature and libraries and read a lot of things.

Magde: But than there was no internet, so was this literature available in Moscow?

Andrei: Strange, but yes. I think that my first book I found it in the autumn 1975, it was a book by Max Matthews. I don't remember now the actual name of the book but it's his main book on the computer music, he wrote in the sixties, about his musical program and so I started that and then I found a little magazines in the libraries, mostly American - Journal of Acoustical Society, Acoustical Engineering Society also, a lot of them were discussing this

topic. Somehow a had a huge labour at that time, articles, articles, articles, somehow sharing them..

Magde: So you continued studying and then you ended up directly in the Theremin Centre or you were doing something different?

Andrei: No, I had this idea to make a studio, but not for myself but somehow to collaborate with other musicians, just to make it obvious, i saw this program everywhere, people building their own studios and spending lot of efforts and money and finally they get the studio, but to get the studio, they just lose their creative potential somehow. So I wanted to make a studio for creative people, to combine facilities, each musician has something, so we can combine and make a separate community, so that was the initial idea of the Theremin Centre. To make a studio for experimental musicians who want to collaborate and develop something which is not possible when you're alone.

Magde: All these other people, they were also in a similar situation, that they were not able to get education in the contemporary music, so they were more into the technical field?

Andrei: First they went abroad, sometime approximately in the 1990 or 1989, because before that for me and many many young people it was just impossible to get an international passport to get abroad. So in Russia we couldn't get that education, the Soviets offered just no education. It's just great there! Very very classical, in conservatory you can learn how to write music of the nineteenth century, but you won't have any idea about Stockhausen, or Boulez. You know them, but nobody really teaches you how to compose contemporary music on one hand, on the other hand, electro-acoustic music is just not existing. So the Theremin Centre was some sort of exception. It's still an exception.

Magde: How is it now, it is not a state institution?

Andrei: It was a private non-profit organisation. I did it officially as soon as in Russia this law about non -profit organisation was accepted. It was approximately in 1993, or 1994. So I immediately created this Theremin Centre. But now, the situation is completely opposite, because now the state is trying to get rid of the all these non-profit organisations they develop new law which will really I think give them possibility to close in a while all the organisations which are not really good from the point of view of their political ambitions. Since 1999 I started to connect the Theremin Centre to the Moscow conservatory and now it's a part of Moscow conservatory. The name Theremin Centre since last december became official name of a department of Moscow conservatory. I think it is good, at least I can be more sure it will stay.

Magde: Yes, I see. So it's very much connected with the politics. In Slovakia is maybe more about the opinion of the public, I mean..
Andrei: In Russia it means nothing. Because virtually... I really, I had a very big shock in the 1999, when there were elections, and then I found out, I think very bad about the Russian society, the Russian citizens, because I immediately understood that the percentage like 5 percents of people somehow are thinking probably the same way as me but the rest, it looks like has a completely different way of thinking, but OK... so. I mean that's not political question. But somehow I think the situation in Russia is really not good especially for any sorts of arts or music. It's still not obvious but I'm sure that if it will continue like this, in several years we'll have a really strange situation because all these non-profit will just go down.

Magde: Because they don't have the state support, or why?

Andrei: The state support is really like, it's not an anecdote, it's the known story about state support that if you want to get support from Russian Ministry of culture - it's one of the latest laws they excepted, for example One Moscow theatre wanted to celebrate their 100th anniversary and now according to the new regulations they have to apply for funding but they cannot apply themselves, but they need to have some competitors. Only competition can give you some funding. So you need to find an organisation who wants make the same kind of grant.

Magde: Like what? The anniversary?

Andrei: Yes, so they fond one more theatre, OK, minister of culture wants it, OK so we do it. So they applied also to celebrate the anniversary of this first theatre, and they won finally.

Magde: No.
Andrei: They won. Nobody really knew what to do with it.

Magde: That's really crazy.. Who are these people who decide?

Andrei: I don't know how it finished but the situation was really strange.

Magde: And I though that bureaucracy in Slovakia is on the top level.

Andrei: No, Russian bureaucracy is… No bureaucracy can really attain the level of idiotism. It's not idiotism, I think it's really precise politics. Maybe you know, maybe not, but Russia has two ministries of culture. We had one minister of culture, but they fired him, and they made him the director of Cultural agency, new organisation, and the second person - the director of Moscow conservatory became the minister. But they have the same kind of possibilities, but one has money and the second has to plan. So one makes some plan and the other decides to give money for these plans or not. So finally everything is stuck, completely stuck. It's so stupid, but I'm sure that that's politics. Because for our new generation of politicians, for this Putin power, I think they just don't need any cultural activities.

Magde: Hm. So this is a policy to liquidate it? To get rid of it?

Andrei: Not get rid of it, just to make them as quiet as possible. Yeah, but well, anyway, it's really strange.

Magde: Is there some kind of organised or un-organised resistance on the side of the artists or the cultural public?

Andrei: It's Russia. It's Russia. Russia never had any resistance. That's also specific of our country, but people just won't. It's like this tradition of the kitchen conversations comes back when people would prefer to speak in the kitchen, but not openly, because now again this, more and more you feel this pressure. You see that people are just afraid to talk openly. Just reminding the not so far past - twenty years back, it was not like now but you feel the same feelings coming back.

Magde: I was just talking to Erika about this, that this is something that also in Hungary goes very slowly, to change the thinking of people about how they not should behave but how they can behave actually. That there are the possibilities to protest or not to be happy with something.

Andrei: I think in Russia no one will protest, we need really a big shock and last ten years, somehow, probably it was a mistake that nothing wrong happened. Because without really a strong shock, I don't know which kind of shock, nothing will change.

Magde: So what is your motivation to stay there? If you don't see much possibilities, is it this kind of trying to do something useful for the public, or is it really..?

Andrei: No, I'm in a really difficult situation somehow. In the nineties, sincerely I was really sure, I was believing that if we create a some kind of small community and develop it I'm sure that in parallel new communities will develop in the same way in a while, we will all somehow unite and we'll give some new quality to the society but it didn't work. Most of persons, you now I feel really bad, but I'm not sure it will stay too long, but I'm really linked to this history because somehow in the Theremin Centre I'm just sitting on a golden mountain, all these archives which are not developed and lot of very interesting forgotten information and I really want to develop it. So I'm trying to keep the balance.

Magde: So this one of the motivations? To preserve the things, develop them and make public?

Andrei: Yes, it's very important.

Magde: And how did you actually get to have all these things there? Was it your own work, or other people helped you?

save_

Andrei: You know, Moscow conservatory is a very special place, Moscow is the capital of Russia and also Soviet union and Moscow conservatory was the main conservatory in the whole country, that means that if anybody anywhere developed, invented some musical device, to get the patent they had to get some response of some expert. And all experts were in Moscow conservatory. Because that since twenties, all inventions were coming to the conservatory and getting some responses, so that's the basis of this archive. And also all developers, researchers making some interesting researches in music, were coming to the Moscow conservatory, making reports there, doing disertations, so we have a huge archive. And it was thrown away in the seventies.. Just in the garbage. But fortunately one clever guy moved it back and collected them in some corner, and when I came to the conservatory in 1992, he showed me this corner and I moved it back to the shelves.

Magde: And is public interested in this or it's more like a specialised thing for musicians…

Andrei: What's public? Of course, Russia is huge and most of it is just not interested in anything.

Magde: I mean public, when you, do you do concerts like this?

Andrei: Of course, lot of young people come and are really crazed about this stuff and they can't get the information anywhere, we really have a lot of people coming, and that's good that mostly eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old, they're so much involved and so much interested. So I hope they will survive. Of course the most important is to have those people coming, because when you get really a good response from people who come not because they're forced, or are not inscribed in the conservatory, but just because they found on the web the information and they're interested, they come and it's really a good feedback and good resonance.

Magde: That;s nice, I feel like it's a bit lacking in Slovakia.

Andrei: It's a question I think of personalities. If you have some crazy guy who can do the same, so, in this case, probably I would move, because I understand that. If I were to move somewhere, at least Theremin centre will die. That's really bad that I don't see any activities somehow take care about what we are doing. It's really pity, I was expecting that

it will become a kind of wave and will have new people. Just because it's not possible to survive, if you're doing the same thing. I'm lucky, because in the nineties I got some really good relations with the western studios, west and American contemporary musicians and so they invite me for workshops, lectures, so I can somehow keep the balance. But of course if I just stay in Russia and work in conservatory, I can't survive. So I have go in this sort of business. Probably the most interesting musicians coming to the Theremin Centre are professionally working in banks, they are lawyers, any specialisation except musical art. It's just not possible.

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