

## Curating New Media: Condensing Spaces and Images

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### Abstract:

The paper explains two curatorial concepts that propose viable strategies for exhibiting new media art by presenting two exhibitions of ArtNetLab group as corresponding experimental case studies: *Algorithms of Inclusion* and *Le Génie des Jardins*. An aspect of the transformed relation to reality as a consequence of technological innovation is set for each model as the theme that a selection of new media art works reflects upon by building interactive functional communication models.

### Keywords:

New Media Art, Video, Digital Image, Interactive Installation, Curatorial Practices, Postmedia Condition, Artnetlab

## 1. Introduction

This paper will present two curatorial concepts for new media art exhibitions produced by ArtNetLab Society for Connecting Art and Science.<sup>1</sup> The *Algorithms of Inclusion* exhibition

demonstrates projects that involve visitors on the basis of certain algorithms, which consequently means that some visitors are excluded from communication. At *Le Génie des Jardins* exhibition static new media images are created and then perceived as results of the decoding

<sup>1</sup> ArtNetLab Society for Connecting Art and Science (<http://black.fri.uni-lj.si>; all URL's accessed on 22 December 2010) was established in 2000 as an interdisciplinary initiative and a collaborative platform for the Academy of Fine Art and Design and the Faculty of Computer and Information Science at the University of Ljubljana. Its mission was to fa-

cilitate production and exhibition of new media art projects by the youngest generations of artists. The core institution of ArtNetLab between 2004 and 2007 was the organization of the International Festival of Computer Arts (<http://www.mfru.org>) that opened up the possibility of direct contact for young Slovene new media artists.

processes of dynamic images. The gallery space itself has a different function when it hosts new media art: it is no longer the “white cube” in which traditional artworks are put on display, but instead it builds a field of entrances into the techno-modified experiencing of reality.

## 2. Algorithms as frameworks for communication

The gallery room at the *Algorithms of Inclusion*<sup>2</sup> exhibition functions as a *mise-en-scène* for entering the experience of techno-reality. The four exhibited new media art projects are artistically conceptualised functional models for dealing with the techno-modified social space. The techno-manipulation of the social space “layers” and hybridizes the gallery space with a set of intertwined networks that exclude certain social groups from interaction with the artworks by building the inclusion for others. A visitor enters the interaction with each installation on the basis of their social and cultural background, thus the interaction becomes meaningful. On the other hand, specially built algorithms define the inclusion on the technical level.

*Wordless (Brez besed, 2005)*, the interactive installation by Vanja Mervič,<sup>3</sup> requires of the visitor to type into the computer their citizen’s personal identification number (CPIN). The CPIN uses, among other information, the date of birth and encodes the data with a special algorithm, so that each citizen obtains a different number and can be identified. In order to get a personalized view of the artwork, the visitor has to identify themselves with CPIN that is assigned to them by the state in a decidedly impersonal manner. The video projection shows a grid of images that are selectively replaced by videos according to the CPIN number of the visitor; so

that each visitor gets a different constellation of video fragments. The artwork thus visualises the visitor’s restrictedness. The installation shows videos only to the viewers that type in the number that is coded with the same algorithm that Slovenia uses for the CPIN of its citizens, while all the others are excluded.

The project *Archaios Xenê* (2006) by Gorazd Krnc<sup>4</sup> includes the visitor of the gallery into the video image and into its narrative that is shaped by an ideological and political rearticulation of the classical Greek myth about heroic women in contemporary life. The author downloaded hours of heterogeneous video material from the Internet and manipulated it with video effects to obtain synthetic, layered and at the same time politically charged images. The viewer recognizes fragments of history and becomes disoriented in the field of mixed political tendencies built into the collage of video images. In place of an algorithm there is a narrative that defines the entering point in *Archaios Xenê*: the voice-over that reads Plutarch’s text. The exclusion protrudes from the xenophobic political uneasiness and violence in the videos.

*Data Dune (Podatkovna sipina, 2005)* by Narvika Bovcon, Barak Reiser and Aleš Vaupotič<sup>5</sup> is “a smart space” that is built in real-time around the user’s entering into the virtual 3-D reality. The space of virtual desert is endless; a special algorithm calculates and renders it from the user’s point of view throughout the distance to the horizon in all directions and updates it in real-time as the user moves in space. Another algorithm controls how objects appear in space: it monitors user’s position and whether they have visited the three objects that were generated (at a certain distance  $r$ ) around the visitor. Only the visited objects are replaced with new ones after the user walks the given distance  $d$  in any direction, whereas the non-visited objects reappear around the new position of the visitor at the

<sup>2</sup> *Algoritmi uključivanja/Algorithms of Inclusion*, 15.–17. 3. 2007, O3ONE Gallery, Belgrade. Curators: Narvika Bovcon, Aleš Vaupotič, Marko Stamenković. <http://black.fri.uni-lj.si/ozone>

<sup>3</sup> Coding: Kristijan Pugelj, Josip Varga, Primož Škrjanc, Luka Prašnikar, Tjaša Horvat, Jelena Anastasov.

<sup>4</sup> Coding: Urban Puhar, Jernej Zupanc. In Ancient Greek the two words mean “foreign women from the past”. The video was inspired by the Plutarch’s text *Bravery of Women* (*Γυναικῶν ἀρεταί*).

<sup>5</sup> Coding: Igor Lautar. <http://black.fri.uni-lj.si/datadune>

same distance. The objects are shaped according to formalized repetitions, reflections, *déjà-vus*, the interplay of positive and negative; thus the user enters the game of recognizing forms and their meanings in space. On the other hand, the desert itself carries encoded meanings, additional recordings and citations from the social and political reality; they break through the formal game of repetitions and include the visitor once more, engaging them in the recognition of the fragments of reality.

In his project *Sinking* (*Potopitev*, 2006) Tilen Žbona<sup>6</sup> explores the transformations of classical questions on art that are brought about by the advent of new media. The metaphor of sinking is elaborated in four stages. The visitor enters the project, i.e. sinks into the interaction by moving in the gallery space and by understanding the four video "haikus". In the first stage the artist and the project pose the question: Has the body of the artist already become a work of art? In the second stage the video presents artist's statement: Is artist's statement a statement of truth or a statement of art? In the third video we can see the work of the artist: according to Duchamp, the signature of the artist defines the status of the work of art, even when this is merely a mark of artist's fist on the eye of another artist. The fourth video is self-reflective. In it the second artist articulates the nature of the video as a planned recording of a more or less staged performance. When the second artist takes over the active role as the director and author of all four videos, the questions *who is the artist* and *where is the artist* repeat themselves in the second round.

In the interactive installation *Sinking* the video projection is divided into four video screens. The observer triggers the videos by walking through the gallery space following the instructions given to them by the installation system. By means of a PDA held in the hands of the observer, the system constantly monitors their position in the environment. This is performed through spatial data obtained from the signals from local wireless networks that allow the calculation of PDA's location. From this aspect the

*Sinking* system is unique, since "the big brother" is shockingly simplified to the domestic constellation of cheap wireless signal transmitters that are used by the artist who acts as a friendly nomad without even using the data flow of internet connections.

### 3. New media image

The *fil rouge* of the exhibition *Le Génie des Jardins*<sup>7</sup> in the "La galerie" in Paris is the relationship between the dynamic new media image and its static derivative. A video image and an interactive digital image are fundamentally dynamic; however, exhibited works explore the reverse aspect of the "acceleration" of the automated image generation (*Flusser*, 2008). Videos or software art projects are the source from which the visual artist extracts a "painting" or a graphic print. By means of printing or manually applying pigments to surfaces the traditional static image becomes a derivative of a new media image, which is in itself a flow of visual data. Peter Weibel (2006) stated that the main achievement of the new media is the forced rebirth of the traditional media. The painting and printing techniques and traditions now have to take into account their immersion in the multiplicity of media, the so-called "postmedia" reality of today's cultural forms. The consequence of the "new mediality" of these images – the static ones and the dynamic ones – is their focus on the relationships between singular images derived from different media that enter the works by means of mixing, layering, confronting, putting into context etc. Each image is a personal statement of a human and the montage of multiple images corresponds to a network of inter-human relationships including the visitor's interactions while creating a personal path through the work.

Gorazd Krnc reflects on the relation between the dynamic and the static new media image

<sup>7</sup> *Le Génie des Jardins*, 17.–23. 9. 2007, lagalerie, Paris. Curated by: Narvika Bovcon, Aleš Vaupotič. The exhibition was a part of the festival with the same title. [http://black.fri.uni-lj.si/legendelabastille2007/press/plakat\\_arnl\\_geniedesjardins2007.pdf](http://black.fri.uni-lj.si/legendelabastille2007/press/plakat_arnl_geniedesjardins2007.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Coding: Štefan Furlan, Uroš Jurglič.

in his paintings from the *Temptations* cycle (*Skušnjave*, 2007) and in his video *Three Doors* (*Tri vrata*, 2007).<sup>8</sup> Paintings are composed from a variety of images that are made compatible through their "common measurements" (Ranciere, 2007). The images in an artwork are confronted in a dialogic relationship; by means of the montage the artist establishes relations between images which have to be decoded and reflected upon in the process of viewing the painting or the video. Discursiveness brings dynamics into the reading of a static postmedia painting.

In his project *Panorama 360°* (2006) Tilen Žbona<sup>9</sup> explores the intrusion of the medium into the image. The image of the 360-degree panorama is composed of mediated visual material and built from the utopian point of view in which the artist has encoded his intervention.<sup>10</sup> In the video *13* (2007) Žbona reflects on the immediacy of media processes in creating the image. The author chooses various digital visual effects to change the image in the video and thus creates a digital artifact, which is the consequence of an aesthetic decision. In the digital video *Morphing* (*Morfing*, 2007) Tilen Žbona and Valentina Meli use the morphing technique to exchange the images of the subject and the object, i.e. the faces of the authors are morphed in order to build a hybrid identity that reflects the processes of integration of an individual in the society. The sequences from the video are layered and printed as digital graphics.

Vanja Mervič<sup>11</sup> uses a web cam to record the faces of visitors in the gallery and integrates them into a static image made after Leonardo's *The Last Supper*. The composite photograph in the project *Invitation to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dinner*

(*Vabilo na večerjo 20. stoletja*, 2006) functions as a photographic document of the past. The immanent static character of the photographic image is fed with the live flow of recorded visitors, who choose the roles of the characters represented in the image. The installation is realized in a low-tech manner, by means of mirrors that bring the faces of the visitors into the printed digital graphics.

The countless views into the virtual reality of *VideoSpace* (2003) by Narvika Bovcon and Aleš Vaupotič<sup>12</sup> are used in static compositions, i.e. in digital prints that trace the moving camera view in a frozen collaged sequence of screenshots. Moreover, *VideoSpace* can be used for automatic image production that results in the "flood of images" (*Flusser*, 2008). The simple use of the key "Prt Scr" for screen grabbing turns the virtual reality into a machine that the user points like a photo camera to take countless shots of the virtual space framed by the edges of the computer screen. On the other hand, media images (e.g. photographic images downloaded from the FBI's most wanted terrorists site or from pornographic sites) cover the computer-generated landscape in the virtual reality, thus bringing additional meanings (separate from the 3-D objects that carry them) into the space by encoding them on the level of textures.

Dušan Bučar takes a piece of material reality and builds it into a video image in *Salt – the 5th Element* (*Sol, peti element*, 2007)<sup>13</sup> and into a painting in *The Salt Light* (*Slana svetloba*, 2007). Salt crystals in both cases represent themselves with no additional mediators: they are recorded in the video and glued onto the canvas of the painting.

<sup>8</sup> Production: Gulag.

<sup>9</sup> Coding: Andreja Plut.

<sup>10</sup> The concept of the plane of interactive entering into the virtual image, e.g. a panoramic image, was developed by Srečo Dragan in his projects *Cyborg's Eye* and *Clavis Urbis*. See: Bovcon, N., 2009. Umetnost v svetu pametnih strojev. Inštitut Akademije za likovno umetnost in oblikovanje, Ljubljana.

<sup>11</sup> Coding: Matjaž Jogan, Boris Kodelja, Matija Mestnik.

<sup>12</sup> Coding: Jure Bevk, Tomaž Bobnar. [http://black.fri.uni-lj.si/mouseionserapeion/page3\\_en.php?query=+VideoSpace+Bovcon+Narvika+Vaupotic+Ales+2002+interactive+virtual+space](http://black.fri.uni-lj.si/mouseionserapeion/page3_en.php?query=+VideoSpace+Bovcon+Narvika+Vaupotic+Ales+2002+interactive+virtual+space)

<sup>13</sup> Actors: Doris Batelič, Toni Bučar, Andraž Sedmak, Tenej Davidovič. Music from the movie: *2001: A Space Odyssey* (director: Stanley Kubrick, 1968).

## 4. Conclusion

In the time of traditional art “beauty was in the eye of the beholder”. Nowadays the situation has doubled, and the observer is no longer merely the subject that observes – as the observer of a work of art used to be in the past – but they are also the observed one, for they are captured on security cameras. These cam-

eras can be linked to smart computer-based image-recognition programmes or satellites connected to computers equipped with locating programmes through which the observer’s place can be monitored and influenced. A new media art work is not a closed and static artefact, but it is rather a process that interactively involves all three protagonists – the artist, the technology and the observer.

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