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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.

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PROFILE

Darko Fritz

Home, 2002, Darko Fritz, advertising billboards placed close to the borders, installation view: Croatian-Slovene border, *Motel Ježevo* project, curated by Nada Beroš, from the *Migrant Navigator* project

INTERVIEW WITH DARKO FRITZ

The Future of Nostalgia, 2002, Darko Fritz, horticultural unit, 9 × 9 m, installation view: Volksgarten, Linz, Talking the City, Transpublic, from the *Migrant Navigator* project

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Lanfranco Aceti

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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 am about to conclude the first phase of my from-scratch research on the beginning of the computer-generated art in the Netherlands (supported by Fonds BKVB, Amsterdam), that maps the field and consists of a chronology, bibliography and list of participants, institutions and networks. I hope this research on computer-generated art in the Netherlands will someday become public in a more visible form then the planned short text format, as was the case of my years-long research of *New Tendencies* international movement and network that resulted in *bit international. [Nove] Tendencije – Computer and Visual Research (Zagreb 1961–1973)* touring exhibition and publication 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 Vladislav 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 Franić 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 *PLN*, a portfolio of computer-generated prints from 1969 by Vladimir Bonačić published by the Museum of Contemporary art Zagreb is is going on this days. I initiated the publishing, and worked at entire production process in close relationship with both the Museum and the *bcd 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 *I_AM_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 political 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 (now 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 on-going 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 world.

End of the Message, 1995, Darko Fritz, installation view, Obsessions: From Wunderkammer to Cyber-space, Rijksmuseum Twenthe, Enschede, curated by Bas Vroege, from the *End of the Message* project
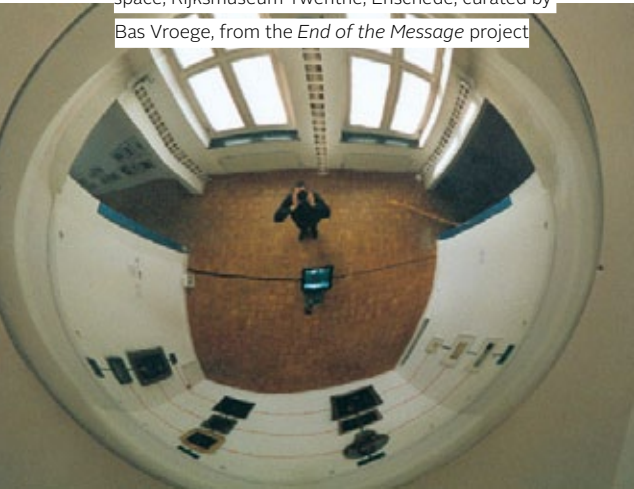
I hope you don't mind but I wanted to ask what is humanity's fixation with databases? Is it the constant desire to own, almost in a sexual possession, in order to affirm one's existence as a demigod able to dispense life and death?

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 critical theory) of today.

Appropriating equal rights for using scientific tools and methods and related technologies, participants in humanities realized the cultural value of databases, and in practical terms that is a better way of protecting their territory to get their hands on databases instead of others doing it for them and manipulating databases as they wish. I find that it creates a new

balance at the battlefield between humanities at one hand and corrupted science on the other, a science that got aligned with corporations, governments and the military machine long ago and that count people as consumers and voting entities. Luckily for the reputation of the science, there are still a few honest scientists out there, but the overall situation is alarming. Things are not great on the humanities side either. Most of the academics from the field are determined by education and university label, corrupted in their positions-hungry and carrier-minded power plays. Pseudo-revolutionary content that is produced in academic frame balancing neoliberal powers only for the sake of the status quo is another subject that exceeds the frame of this interview, I guess. Same critique as for humanities goes for recent pseudo social engagements in contemporary art that shout *Revolution and social justice!* (a trend still echoing *Documenta X*, 1997) but thinking of the next invitations for some *biennale* and higher prices of their white-cube projects.

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 the other hand the idea connected with destroying museums – erasing the history and starting from scratch (like Futurists, or Zero movements from the 1960s) is maybe not as productive at this time. We are facing a global amnesia of great achievements of the world's different civilizations. Instead of destroying I opt for revalorization and reconstructing database

systems. Education systems and mainstream media around the world actively advocate amnesia, serving partial contents. Information becomes infotainment. Not hard-to-discover fakes such as September 11 happen in front of our eyes and politicians don't take a stand. The word 'opportunism' in many dictionaries does not provide the reader with the negative context of the word. In the Western world the databases with consumer behavior data seem to be most valuable nowadays and corporate world freely and openly playing with them.

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-

evich's *White on White* or unspectacular works of the art of the 1960s spinning up to contemporary practice. Recent developments in blog culture and social networks bring similar questions to the extreme, but not willingly or artistically. Such lack of engagement and focus on trivia is welcomed by dominant political power structures, in the context of amnesia that I mentioned before. As in the case of documents that Wikileaks has exposed, over the last ten years it become obvious growing gap in our society of missing links between important information on display, but hardly anyone dares to seriously dig and analyze the content within the documents. It's so sad that Wikileaks got global exposure only after getting involved directly with the us military and not before. In Western arts and humanities we witness competition
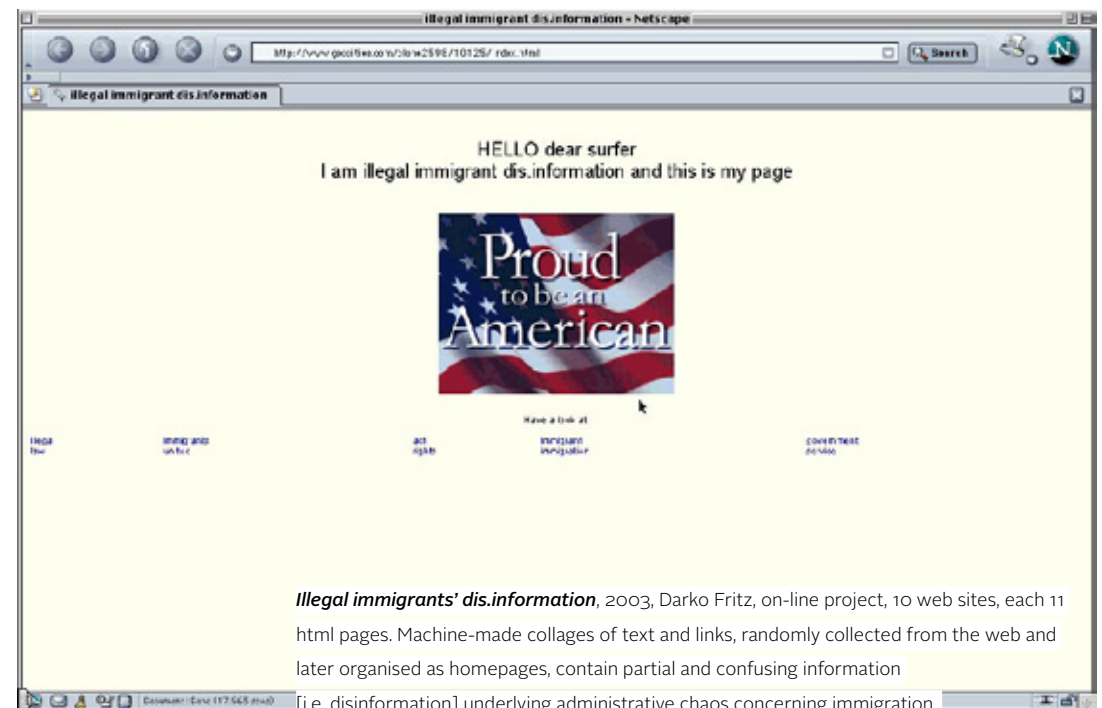
Illegal immigrants' dis.information, 2003, Darko Fritz, on-line project, 10 web sites, each 11 html pages. Machine-made collages of text and links, randomly collected from the web and later organised as homepages, contain partial and confusing information [i.e. disinformation] underlying administrative chaos concerning immigration. Archives: http://darkofritz.net/projects/migrant/home.htm from the *Migrant Navigator* project
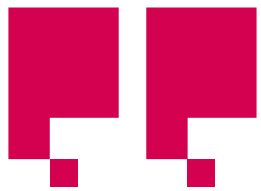
We can just imagine how some other field, such as solar energy, could benefit from that amount of investments and resources in artificial intelligence.

End of the Message [archives - live!], 1995–1997, Darko Fritz, triple video projection
Beta SP transfer to DVD, 60 min, projection 3 × 12 m, installation view: BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead, curated by Sarah Cook, 2005
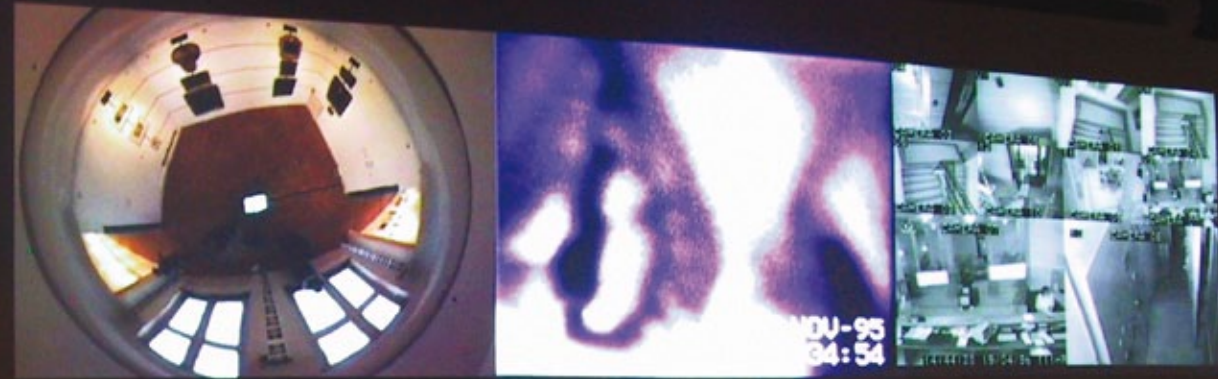from the *End of the Message* project

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 AI.

Corporate and government imaginary futures around the world have been exploiting techno-utopia hype for over half a century. Strangely enough they still find it efficient nowadays, and even more strange is that some people can believe in it.

My last question is about the aesthetic of failure. If all of the controls would fail and the supercomputers died a sudden death – would we go to its funeral? I am thinking if our dependence from the machine would be such that the loss would undermine our biological survival.
I'll like to offer an art installation for its grave. I'll not complain if we'll go back to nature and low tech. I'm preparing myself for such a scenario by running the gallery on an isolated island and doing the research on both olives and early computers – to be ready to get some food from the sea and build a computer when necessary. ∎

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