A brief overview of media art in Croatia (since 1960s)

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Between 1961 and 1973, the Gallery of Contemporary Art (now the Museum of Contemporary Art) organized five international exhibitions entitled *New Tendencies*. The first *New Tendencies* exhibition was organized on the initiative of the art historians Matko Mestrovic, Radoslav Putar, Bozo Bek and Boris Kelemen, and the artists Ivan Picelj and Almir Mavignier. The *New Tendencies* strived at a synthesis of different forms of the arts of the 1960s and 1970s. In the beginning, the movement characterized broad issues but later the exhibitions veered towards neo-constructivism, lumino-kinetic objects (mostly mechanically made, often under group authorship) and finally computer art and conceptual art. The first exhibition (1961) - apart from the participants such as Almir Mavignier, Zero Group (Otto Piene, Hienz Mack) and Azimuth Group (Enrico Castellani, Piero Manzoni) - contained works that were bent mostly on a system research (Francois Morellet, Karl Gerstner) and optical research of the surface and the structure of objects (Marc Adrian, Julio Le Park, Gunther Uecker, Gruppo N - Biasi, Massironi, Chiggio, Costa, Landi). The origins of the preprogrammed and kinetic art whose characteristic language would mark *New Tendencies* as a movement as early as their following exhibition (1963) had also been noted. The demands for the scientification of art favored experimenting with new technical media as a means of researching the visual perception based on the *Gestalt* theory. The third exhibition of *New Tendencies* (1965) probed the relationship between cybernetics and art and a symposium on the same topic preceded the exhibition. Vjenceslav Richter, Aleksandar Srnec and Ivan Picelj exhibited lumino-kinetic objects. The fourth exhibition (1968/69) was dominated by the information theory and encompassed an international conference entitled *Kompjuteri i vizualna istrazivanja*. The same year, the Gallery of Contemporary Art started the *Bit international* magazine. I have to mention the computer light installation by Vladimir Bonacic DIN.21 as a paradigm for media art coming

from the sphere of science. The work was installed in 1968 on the facade of the NAMA department store in Zagreb and was intended as a permanent exhibit. In 1968, Vladimir Bonacic and Ivan Picelj realized T4, an electronic (and computer programmed) object. Beside the computerized visual research section, a conceptual art section was also included in *Tendencies 5* (1973). Vilko Ziljak exhibited ASCCI photographs, i.e. digital printouts. Tomislav Mikulik, working for the television where he made intentional computer animation and television graphics, created an artistic computer movie 1973. In the early stages of the development of media art since the 1960s, we note two, at the time irreconcilable sources: modernist (supporting the idea of progress and science) and the anarchistic-individual approach of conceptual art (building on the achievements of the student movements from the 1960s). Conceptual art and computer art were prominently marked on the *Tendencies 5* exhibition poster. Matko Mestrovic was the main theorist of *New Tendencies* as a movement who tackled the problem of the relationship between art and society demanding the socialization of arts, abolishing the unique significance of a work of art and equaling art and science. See more on *Tendencies* under *Institutions, events, data bases*, and the on-line catalogue of a collection of works of early computer art by MSU exhibited as part of the *I am Still Alive* project (2000).

Taking a point of view diametrally opposed to the scientification of art, we can consider part of the conceptual art practice from the 1970s and 80s as part of media art. Numerous works of the media-aware conceptual art were made in the 1970s, such as a series of exhibitions with posters as sole exhibits by Goran Trbuljak (1971-1981) and performances of listening to the radio, watching TV, reading newspapers and talking on the phone by Tomislav Gotovac (1980-1981). Free experiments with mixed media were part and parcel of the poetry of the so-called Group of six authors who mixed media such as photography, film, and photocopy in the form of visual art, art books and (street) performance. The following input came to media art from the film milieu. In addition to his primary interest in working with experimental film, Ivan Ladislav Galeta created numerous photo and video works, installations, and multimedia performances. Tomislav Gotovac made gallery and out-of-gallery performances and photo collages inspired by movies. Vladimir Petek set up in 1971 the FAVIT art association (film -audiovisual research - television) and created a series of multimedia works with a number of collaborators, mostly multivision (multi-channel video, film and slide projections), and realized ten computer movies with Tomislav Mikulik in 1976.

Video art is the only form of media art dating back to 1971 and having a production that has reached critical mass. Sanja Ivekovic and Dalibor Martinis, both pioneers of Croatian video art, create jointly and individually a series of video works and installations and, as their personal preference, represent a

duality of interests of media art from the position of conceptual artists. Martinis is preoccupied with media itself and its physical and semiotic possibilities and creates a series of video installations (video installations at table in *The Supper at last*, 1993, video installation in a form of a well filled with water *Circles Between Surfaces*, 1996), interactive digital video installations (Coma, 1997) and hybrid works in electronic media (*Observatorium 1/2/3* exhibitions, 1997-98). On the other hand, Sanja Ivekovic moderates social (feminist) activity through art by setting up an association of women, *Electra*. She performs numerous video works and installations (In the *Frozen Images* video work, the image is projected on the ice and in the *Travel Until the End of Thought* work from 1994 the computer directs the video projection of body parts in stellar movement). She creates works in other media, too. Project *Gen XX* is a series of works published in the form of advertisements in print media in 1997 and 1998. The photographic reproductions show portraits of female top models and the name underneath (in the graphic form of logo) comes with a brief biography mentioned in connection to a heroine assassinated for her political activities in the anti-fascist struggle in WWII.

In the late 1980s, the *Nova Evropa* (NEP, founded by Dejan Krsic) group, *Studio imitacija Ïivota* (SIZ; Darko Fritz and Zeljko Serdarevic), Grainer and Kropilak and the *Katedrala* project displayed artistic activity carried out under a collective authorship (in the *Katedrala* project a computer programmer has been included as a full-fledged author). The above-mentioned used the media as their basic material (reproductive, electronic, digital and mass media) and inaugurated sampling/cut-up/quotation/recycling as an expression without specific stylistic characteristics, i.e. the rejection of the idea about the original. The medium of photocopy in the pre-Photoshop aesthetics of the 1980s (in the wake of experiences of copy art of the 1970s) was the prime graphic tool. In the case of SIZ and NEP more indicative were their media projects than the produced objects. NEP inaugurated a new understanding of equaling politics and art, not just by borrowing from political rhetoric but also by using it on an equal footing, in the spirit of post-modernist theories. In 1988, SIZ thrice opened an exhibition (of graphics) using three manners of opening: live broadcast over the radio, by a spoken word of an art historian, and by textual print-outs of interviews. In 1990, SIZ stopped working after having completed a three-year production and distribution (corporative) plan. The *Katedrala project* (Bakal, Fritz, Juzbasic, Marusic, Premec; 1988) took place on the anniversary of death of Andy Warhol and called for a transformation of image to sound of a Mussorgsky composition and the sound into a space performance of Kandinsky. It was a space generated by a computer using joint sound, light, and video elements set in motion through the movement of the audience and the signals of an EEC connected to the performer, Joska Lesaj, the opera signer.

A witty subversive action *Zagreb Virus* 1990, whose author was Svebor Kranjc,

took place at the 22nd Youth Salon exhibition (1990). Having sent a great number of (quasi)artistic products of various styles and under assumed names, the jury missed on a certain number of works. At the opening itself, the author personally distributed his catalogue in which he explained how a virus that the body (jury) failed to recognize entered thereby demystifying a part of authorship of the exhibits and leaving the other part undiscovered referencing the strategy of computer viruses. Kranjc had earlier on carried out a series of TV viruses (1989) where he had infiltrated the mainstream TV program by a system of simulacra as an art terrorist. He was a representative of the Image Liberation Organization. These strategies of simulation were characteristic of the conceptual art of the 1980s and were later often used in net art that could easily simulate a system of corporative representation.

The interactive character in its primary form is present in every video installation involving a closed circuit system and a live video link. Similar works originated in the 1970s but enhanced the probing of the medium in the 1990s. In the above-mentioned *Katedrala* project, three rooms were connected by sound and video closed circuit. Simon Bogojeviç Narath in his untitled work (Landscapes, 1991) set up a video link by using a small mirror that optically distorted the electronic image. Kristina Leko created a series of video link works with religious content, using wireless transmission across greater distances and employing to the fullest this technology for conceptual games with dislocation (*Flowers*, 1997, *Veduta*, *Kamenita vrata*, 1998). At the 1998 Zagreb Salon, Sandro Djukic set up a closed-circuit system with delay. Darko Fritz in his work on the *End of The Message* project used security video systems as a specific form of closed circuit (at the *Obsessions* exhibitions: From Wunderkamer to Cyberspace, 1995, and at Privredna Bank, T.EST, 1997). In collaboration with Ademir Arapovic, he has performed since 1998 a series of work *space=space* in which, using closed circuit only, they have extended architecture with the use of media. Andreja Kuluncic in her work *Man Constructor* (1996) used motion detectors as well as slide and sound detectors. In 1998, Sandra Sterle and Slobodan Jokic (Dan Oki) set up a complex interactive video installation *To Forget to Remember* and *to Know* on the subject of digitalized video image that changed according to the sound quality of the spoken text. The installation was created in an Amsterdam school for learning Dutch for Adults. Together they created an interactive internet work called *Interstory* (2001) where the participant was given the opportunity to work on partially pre-programmed film scripts. Sandra Sterle created a series of works, *Round Around* (1998), in the media of photography, linear video, and interactive CD-ROM. During a project called Go Home that lasted several months (in collaboration with Danica Dakic, 2001) she organized in New York a series of web cast dinners with guests and an Internet diary. Since 1997, Ivo Dekoviç has been organizing summer workshops and directed a *sub-art* gallery underwater at Razanj. A web site contains a continual video signal showing the

submerged gallery.

In the numerous one-channel video works by Narath, Vladislav Knezevic and Igor Kuduz, a new reality in the specific phenomenon of the video medium has been set up by a virtuoso use of digital effects in combination with model making. The setting up of a parallel media reality is a topic of an imaginary journey in a project that spanned several years called *Putovanje oko svijeta,* which Sandro Djukic created in photo and video media. Ivan Marusic Klif created a series of interactive mechanized automata with picturesque figurative scenes in the ambiance of TV monitors that inverted the expectations of the electronic image. Klif also created computer-directed sound and space installations by specifically combining high and low-tech (the exhibition in the tunnel in 1995), a complex interactive manipulation of live video image (closed circuit), and by himself programming software for his own needs (the exhibition at Klovicevi dvori in 2000). Davor Antolic Antas created a series of works by setting up a line of electronically programmed neon lights in the architectural structures (*Neon*, 1998-2001). Magdalena Pederin performed interactive light installations that reacted to ambient sound. One of them, a composition of several meters made up of LED diodes, was also the (inter)active stage production of the *Oko cuje, uho vidi* performance (Marusic, Kuhta, Rascic, 1997-1999). The sensors on the body of the performers set in motion sound, video and light interactions. The *Lights from Zagreb* exhibition at the De Parel gallery in Amsterdam presented light works by Marusic, Pederin and Antolic 2001.

Ivona Kocica and Kristina Babic have been working on the manipulation of the electronically generated and digital photography since 1994. Darko Fritz has explored different aspects of media art - as part of group projects such as *SIZ, Katedrala* and *Balkania* and various network art projects, as well as independently by staging fax actions (since 1991, *Hype*), digital photography (since 1990, *La Strategia del regno*), the laser installation *Measure for Measure*, 1992, the first attempt at webcast in 1994 (*Keep the Frequency Clear*) while one of the eight stages of the *End of the Message* project that spanned several years (1995-2000) has been on the internet since 1996. As part of the project, the *End of Message (Archives live!)* sound and video work takes place simultaneously in a gallery and over the radio (1996). Expert input was involved in the *Theater Time* project (1995) through the participation of theorists and critics in a TV program (that ran parallel to the event in the gallery and the movie theater). Since 2001, p.sound (remix), an open sound network piece has been taking place on the internet. A sound piece by Rino Efendic with taped sex phone conversations from 1998 inspired his colleagues from Split, the artist Petar Grimani and the curator and theorist Ana Peraica, to include sound pieces at the 21st Springtime event in 1998. Twenty-four authors created a series of sound performances and installations in a public space entitled ArtAKUSTIKA and the *Technology of*

Sounded Space web project, presented at the *Lada 98* exhibition (Rimini, 1998) that included a live audio stream. Ivan Marusic Klif created a series of sound performances in which he used various analogue and digital recordings and sound processors, as well as text-to-speech programs (*Planet majmuna*, 1997, *Komunistiãki Manifesto*, 2000). In the *Speaker System* project by Kristina Leko, apart from various actions and public installations, a part of the project was performed on radio air (the 3rd channel of HRT, 1994). The *Kad razmjena tezi maksimumu tad priljeze nuli* work (1998) was comprised of remixes of intimate nature from his answering machine. In collaboration with Darko Fritz she created a piece called! Kristina Leko, Darko Fritz and Nina Simone, a documentary recording of the exchange of the phone address books which was also an overview of their social and professional network. As part of the *Big Torino* exhibition (1999), Tomo Savic Gecan published an ad in the local newspapers with the date of the opening and the phone number of the gallery. The visitors could take turns answering the phone displayed in the gallery.

Ivan Ladislav Galeta created a series of sound projects (*Speed Up,* 1977, *Forwards-Backwards: Voice*, 1977, *Forwards-Backwards: Guitar*, 1977, *Minutenwalzer*, 1978, *Piano*, 1979, *Obrnuti Glas*, 1985)!

Zvonimir Bakotin has created a series of web projects since the very beginning of the web. Examples of pioneering net.art work are *Transnavigation* and Fresh - shaped for the participation in the *Refresh* project, 1996, one of the first network art works on the internet. In 1996 he was awarded the first prize! for an experimental model of a 3D interface for the de DAM (De Digitale Stad Amsterdam). In 1997, he created a 3D project for the De Waag Society of the New and Old Media!in Amsterdam. Between 1996 and 1998, he created a 3D model of the Diocletian Palace that underwent an extensive testing on the Digitale Stata network. The Diocletian Palace is still a work in progress and the project will be put on the internet in due time. Merzbau 3D is a joint project with the Van Gogh television (VGTV) for the Sprengel Museum Hannover from 1999, a 3D interactive (VRML) model. A member of the VRML-ART board, Helena Bulaja called the visual artist, Petar Grimani to join in an internet project descriptively entitled *Freedom in the City or just illusion... 1/ 2Ook .WWWSCULPTURE .introducing real space to cyberspace and vice versa - METAPHORS*, performed at the 1996 Youth Salon. The newly designed portal incorporates in the work a simultaneous and multiple choice of web works of other on-line authors, created in the then new frames on the browser (Netscape Navigator 2.0). The project was first shown in the *Ars Electronica* web gallery in 1997. The next project that continues the idea - *Freedom in the City of just Illusion - Urban Alphabet)* also included the architect Vlatka Turniski and was first shown at the Zagreb Salon (architecture, 1997). The project used a new form of Netscape (3.0) and attempted at a fusion of about 50 web cameras from different cities. The project succeeded in exploiting the sending but not the receiving of the

web cast. The interesting point of the architecture of this work is in the use of the web user that set in motion a web cast in the gallery without consciously controlling the action.

In a series of his work, Tomo Savic Gecan used (that a group of people had conceived) new communication tools in order to make almost imperceptible alterations in space. The web users (by web cast) unpredictably set in motion (only a few millimeters) an architectonic element at the SKUC gallery in Ljubljana (1999). The sensorially detected presence of the visitors of the Begane Grond gallery in Utrecht briefly interrupted an escalator in the Kaptol shopping center in Zagreb (2001). In his next work, the sensors in a gallery in Los Angeles turned on and off the lights in the flat of the artist in Amsterdam (2002). Andrea Kuluncic has created a series of internet works since 1997. *Closed reality: Embryo* is an interdisciplinary web work that actively incited internet users to think out and participate in the discussion about the creation of new life. In 2002, with a group internet work called *Distributive justice*, she participated at the *Big Torino* and *Documenta 11* exhibitions. After her postgraduate studies in interactive multimedia (1996-1997), Maja Kuzmanoviç took residence in the Netherlands and Belgium. She created a great number of media work: web sites since 1996, CD-ROMs since 1995, performance, installation, video, hypermedia works, etc. In the *Once Upon a Time* project (1997) she used interactive photography, interactive film and interactive narration, and used and developed new technologies in collaboration with scientists. In 2001, she founded the FOAM association. Blazenko Karesin created a series of internet works. In *22%* (1998), he used a web browser with the *knjiga* keyword since the project tackled the subject of (high) tax levied on book commerce in Croatia, and in the *Strategic.Competitor* work (2002) he created a politically engaged and, at the same time, intimate internet piece. In the late 1990s, a new aesthetic of internet works appeared that abolished the line between art and design, the so-called *Flash generacija*. Ingrid Stojic participated with her *Interfaces* work at dotCulture 2002. The *Broadcasting* project (dedicated to Nikola Tesla, Zagreb, 2002) involved a series of video streaming performances of Croatian authors (Lala Rascic and Ana Husman, Ivan Marusic Klif, Marjan Crtalic).

The transformation of digital information into the analogue domain is present in the work of several authors. In the *Biblioteka* project, Sandro Djukic (since 1999) has been transforming media reality (digitalized video) into the archives of 200,000 video frames in the form of a book, being lost through the generations of digital compression, the possibility of returning to the re-establishment of primary (digital) format. In 2000-2001, in the *204_NO_CONTENT* graphic folder (2001), Darko Fritz and the net. artist Mez - Mary Ann Breeze (Australia) transformed the text with www. Reports on server mistakes and coded artistic texts into a graphic language on paper. Dalibor Martinis performed works from

the *Binarni sistem* series. In the *Zabranjeno parkiranje* work, the message coded in the binary code was written by parking 45 new silver and black cars in a line (150 meters) at the main square of the German town of Rosenheim. Several works with binary messages have been created by tolling the bells (since 2000).