



ecology of techno mind

ARS ELECTRONICA 2008 | FEATURED ART SCENE : KAPELICA GALLERY | LJUBLJANA

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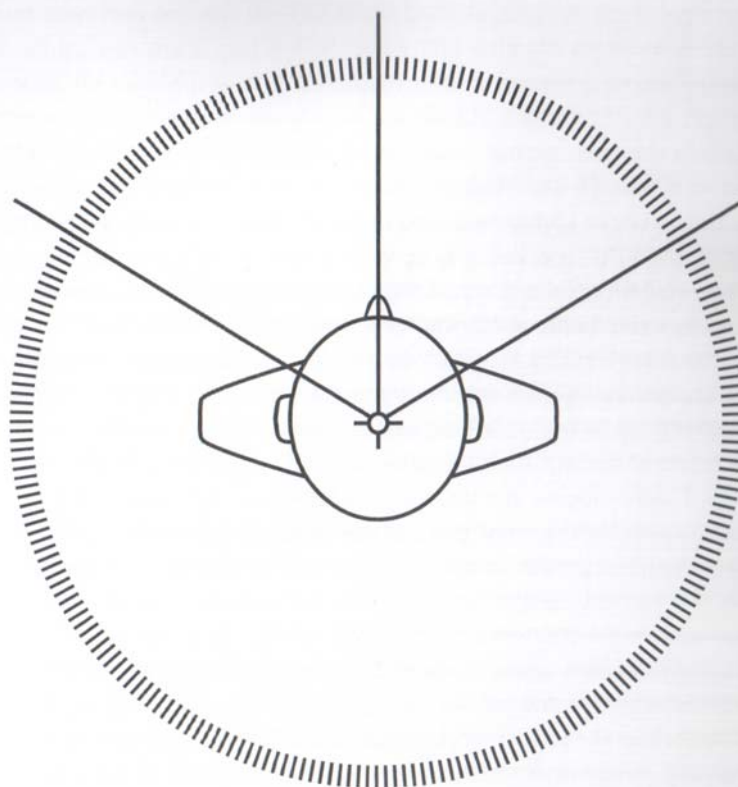
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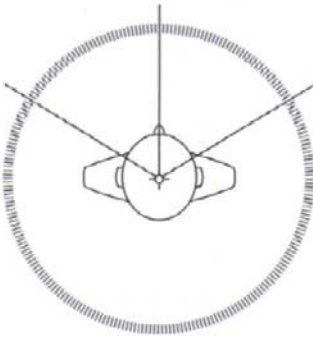
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JURIJ KRPAN : *concept introduct*



The first task that I set myself when the Student

Organisation of the University of Ljubljana asked me in 1995 to turn what used to be a chapel into a gallery, was to bring onto the 'market' a programme that would cover artistic practices which other galleries did not. Kapelica Gallery would thus become a space for the presentation of installations and participatory exhibitions, performances, actions and lectures/presentations by artists relevant for the contextualisation of a programming framework that has from the very outset been focused on contemporary investigative artistic practices - activities that topicalized primarily the increasingly technicalized urban society which, buoyed by popular technological solutions, creates new divisions in the fabric of society. Rich societies and rich groups of users had privileged access to computer-supported technologies and used it to reconfigure certain existing centres of power, in the process creating room for the emergence of new ones. The traditional strongholds of power became even more potent but greater public access to computer technologies also made them more vulnerable. At the same time the newly emerged fields, despite being clearly consumerist, promised a freer and more creative space, giving actual and illusory participation in society vital meaning. The newly created space coincided with the geopolitical rearrangement of Eastern Europe, which decisively destabilised the entire Europe; the illusion of open possibilities and experiences where artistic and cultural circles took the initiative in emerging social formations, proved the extraordinary power and constituting ability of the civil society and art in society. In Slovenia writers and alternative artists, foremost among them the retro-avant-garde hybrid Neue Slowenische Kunst with the music group Laibach, painting collective Irwin, the Scipion Nasice Sisters theatre group and other sub-departments, traumatised the self-image of Slovenian nation to such a degree that the nation was capable of redefining itself. The momentousness and fatefulness of artistic creation in the constituting of contemporary society is for Kapelica an imperative inherited from the turbulent 1980s.

For those of us who conceived Kapelica Gallery, contemporary was open to new interpretations; in feeling about to redefine standards and criteria in art, we were interested in investigative, radical and explicit practices that went beyond pleasure and, in as consistent and precise a manner as possible, inquired into new conditions and circumstances of contemporary reality. On the one side the programming framework swelled with technology-backed artistic practices that were reflectively and critically focused on the lens of science and practical, applicative science, on the other side we were interested in radical reactions, socially misfitted artistic poetics that were intentionally alienated from the paradigm of progress and radically challenged science and technology. The gallery thus hosts projects which directly use, or abuse, technologies which were developed for entirely different purposes, exploring their industrial- and consumerism-determined use, projects that invent new, sometimes redundant devices whose poetics far exceed

the utilitarian imperative of ordinary interfaces. We dedicate special attention to projects that topicalize the reverse engineering of nature with their direct application of technologies and biotechnologies on the human body - as explicit merge of biological organism and inorganic mechanics as possible. These projects include, in the most expressive way, works by artists who stake their bodies in the true sense of the word by way of their utter unacceptability for the technologically accelerated and amplified society. We call them body related works, in which the artist's body is displayed with all its 'wet ware' and sublimeness, the ultimate experiential boundary. Blood-letting performances, invasive surgery, body modifications, genetics, sexual identities, biopolitics in general and many other originally composed artistically explored topics provide a reflective device which makes it possible to interpret cutting-edge biology, biotechnology, bionics, genetics, prosthetics, robotics, telecommunications, etc. - where tension and creative conflict generate an extraordinarily fertile production of meanings.

Artistic endeavour perceived this way, with its expertise and general social criticism, implies incompleteness, openness, process which, unlike the traditional, hermetic, self-referencing, autopoietic and recreational role of traditional object-based artwork, strives for the creation of artistic perceptual positions - positions which, unlike philosophy, provide a poetic, non-linearly speculative way of giving the spectator or visitor experiential insight into the topics that the artists deal with in their work.

I have often been asked how one gallery can present such divergent artistic projects as science- and technology-focused art and body art or body related works. It has frequently turned out that body related works are typically too excessive and offensive for a traditional gallery-and-theatre audience. Artists who use blood as their means of expression, who topicalize their physical handicap, sexual identities, body modifications,... are so traumatic for the majority of commoditised Western society that their reactions to such works of art are a priori negative. In criticising the excess and difficult images, this part of the audience uses traditional standards of aesthetics and recreational pleasure that masses tired of the everyday reality typically resort to. Instrumentation of art for the achievement of pleasure is still so internalised in urban and provincial culture that art is being refused any epistemological value. Despite the precise and often didactical explanations of omnipresence and legitimacy of the difficult content that is being topicalized by science and technology, traditional understanding of art relegates these explanations in the exclusive domain of science and technology. Traditional consumers of cultural goods perceive science and technology as something radically different, something which is beyond the sphere of interest for them 'who don't understand this'. They disallow contemporary investigative art the topicalization of scientific and technological development and its practical applications, anxiously deluding themselves about the proximity and omnipresence of psychophysical extremes as well as their own immersion in the technologized environment.

The seeming incompatibility of the aforementioned artistic practices had its most propitious overlap in Kapelica in the works of Stelarc, who explicitly implements robotics and tissue engineering onto his body; Orlan, who in her metaphysical interest intervenes in her body with tools used by aesthetic surgery; Arthur Elsenaar, who controls facial movement with a computer; Polona Tratnik, who portrays the individual's invisible world by growing micro organisms; Ive Tabar, who turns surgical and resuscitation procedures on himself into explicit poetics of an alienated subject, etc. In the exhibition Ecology of Techno Mind most of the artists we are pre-

senting are interested in body-technology synergies, conflicts and consequences of individuals in extreme environments (aerospace, remote environments), telepresence, and artificial ambiances. Food is invariably a universal field and increasingly a subject of artistic interpretation. Philip Ross and his hydroponics' gardens evokes the potential for growing in extreme conditions, whereas Patricia Ando Cvetković uses 2D and 3D printers to prepare food and Zoran Todorović makes food out of beauty surgery waste.

In trying to find an appropriate title for the presentation of such diverse and, occasionally, artistically diverging projects, I could not find a term that would be more general whilst at the same time consistent in summing up the common traces of the authors than ecology in association with the unusual phrase techno mind. I realise the ideological pitfalls of this term, its safety and widespread abuse, yet the sense of measure that the selected projects evoke is the least contaminated in value terms by the expression ecology and all of its semantic dimensions. This measure is neither total fascination with science and technology nor Luddite resignation, neither the fetishism of interfaces nor the romantic jumble of wires, neither hermetic art nor instrumentalised technology - or ecology as a stance that questions every extreme.

The sense of measure and reservations about formalism of artwork is not intentional or characteristic of all the artists at this exhibition, so my introduction does not deal with them other than the fact that I made the reflectiveness ingrained in the selected artwork as criterion in my selection of works for Ars Electronica 2008. It is therefore a criterion which does not traverse the presented works of art or oeuvres like a guiding line, it merely highlights a long-standing criterion and gallery credo in the programme selection of Kapelica Gallery. In each of the exhibited works it is possible to discern the author's interest in critical reflection and a topicalization of social reality that not only makes the artwork a visually interesting installation, it also crucially extends the formal imperative. In making the selection for the Linz exhibition, I analysed the artworks spectrally in terms of their semantic, artistic, performative, political and other dimensions, treating them by definition as incomplete by default. This precluded having to interfere with the autonomy of the individual works and stretching them to fit the selected focus of the exhibition. In any selected artwork I only quote the portion that matches the criteria that I tactically pursue in my selection. The discourse of the gallery and exhibition thus stands independently of the autonomous artwork. The title Ecology of Techno Mind does not come from the phenomenology of the selected artefacts but from the long-standing political and programming policy of the Kapelica Gallery. At Ars Electronica Kapelica exists/insists as a disposition, a discursive prism through which one may view the segment of artistic endeavour that the gallery has been interested in since its inception.

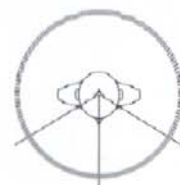
In order that the visitors of Ars Electronica 08 would not interpret the Featured Art Scene presentation as a discovery of Eastern European exoticism, we invited several non-Slovenian artists, to underline the fact that the production of the Kapelica Gallery was never nationally limited, for we have always made sure to keep in touch with developments on the international art scene. Considering the format and criteria for the presentation, we invited just a handful of foreign artists that Kapelica has worked with but who have not been presented at AE yet. This was an undertaking made considerably difficult by the fact that Ars Electronica curators are doing a very good job.

The international disposition, artistic as well as political, has always been at the core of the Kapelica Gallery. To lend our programme legitimacy, Kapelica has always had

to host artists and renowned foreign experts who acted as a vital and practical reference point for the public, the art establishment and expert groups in charge of disbursing budget subsidies. The art establishment, which relates contemporary investigative artistic practices - at least in the segment motivated by the world of technology - only with the dated historical role of Fluxus and art which places focuses on the physical and psychological corporeality only with the Body Art of the 1960s and 70s, is bewildered by contemporary investigative art, as it cannot comprehend it with the criteria of the provincial art market. The place where art theory and practice, the arts market and the prevailing ideology in culture overlap is the education system, but except for the Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Ljubljana there is not a single study programme in contemporary art. Education as a privileged state power system turns out to be a symptom of the society in relation to contemporary investigative artistic practices. A 'state' concentrated on cultural heritage thus pursues a kind of double management, where the bulk of the funds is channelled into traditional art but the state is also the biggest financier of contemporary artistic practices due to enlightened individuals working at the Ministry of Culture. This paradoxical duality is possible due to two tactical interventions from the outside: the pan-European political imperative on the need to create synergies with non-governmental organisations (this means the majority of creators and producers of contemporary art) and the involvement of artists and producers in international networks that are the source of the capital of expert references, which legitimises them in relation to official cultural policy that in turn pays its due to democracy with gnashed teeth.

If there is anything distinctly Slovenian or special about this year's Featured Art Scene, it is the extraordinary lack of institutionalisation and a fragility that perseveres in the chaos of neo-liberal and turbo-capitalist power games that have no sense whatsoever of contemporary investigative art and of cultural-politic hierarchy that have for years been subverting the development of art vitality by hermetically closing academies and blocking already initiated projects for a gallery and a museum of contemporary art. These radical circumstances have fundamentalized the investigative art scene to such an extent that artists and producers take art deadly serious: for these artists the strongest currency is the ethic imperative that does not yield in directness and explicitness, that sometimes goes beyond moral norms and legal boundaries just so that artistic expression would spring forth in all the truthfulness and importance it needs in order to question the values that the artists topicalize with their work.

Fortunately, there is another traditional aspect in Slovenia that is unfortunately disappearing rapidly but which still makes it possible, albeit indirectly, to preclude the moral and legal sanctioning or radical artistic endeavours: the sense of urgency, a non-dialectological sense of a must in society for an arts and culture that had been placed in the social superstructure in the only recently disbanded political project of socialism. Such opacity of perspective prevents the fledgling new urban civil society and the patchy repressive apparatus from carrying out repression rooted in traditional values and neo-liberal pragmatism over artists, galleries and theatres. Indeed, this is the historical factor that has for the past two decades been creating conditions for the unique series of projects presented at and produced by the Kapelica Gallery. The practical consequence is a 14-year run of projects that have put Kapelica on the international map of the most radical artistic endeavours; from the autumn of 2008 onwards, the Featured Art Scene is a thesis that we want to further confirm in the coming years.





TASOS KANELLOS
LIP

9:23, 21.02.2006

ATHENS

MICRO FLESH

Micro Flesh features five projects in which microbiology of the human body is explored in various ways: 37°C (2001/03), Micro cosm (2002/06), In-Time (2005/07), Unique (2006), Hair (2005/07). The processual incubative installations presented as interfaces between art and science include living micro organisms, skin and hair cells. With biotechnological procedures of fragmentation and reconstruction of body, the artist manipulates living material, effecting a re-examination of the notion of living and altering the understanding of the human organism, which is undergoing profound change through tissue engineering and other microbiological procedures. Using scientific tools and methods in the sphere of art the actual social and political questions regarding biotech discourse are being discussed. The project presented at Ars Electronica is Unique, which involves the cultivation of micro cultures donated by observers.

