

## New Media – New Networks<sup>1</sup>

If you mention the term *new media* in the presence of one of the most prominent artists of the extremely popular virtual world of Second Life, Gazira Barbelli, you will automatically activate a programme script, which will blow away your avatar to a completely different, unwanted location. The script entitled *Don't Say Tornado* is her artwork, created to draw attention to inappropriate use of some terms of traditional new media theory in the context of a completely artificial world in which the artist herself (avatar) is nothing but a set of binary data.

Although the Croatian new media art is far from being thoroughly virtual, the example of Second Life indicates the current process of redefining the new media culture in relation to the increase in the number of the Internet users, changes in the ways it is used, faster introduction of new media theory in traditional scientific fields etc. In a somewhat modified version of his early new media theory (*The Language of New Media*), Lev Manovich has raised a question whether there is any sense in talking about new media in the culture that has adopted digital production, processing and distribution of information. Therefore, he has developed eight theses for distinguishing new media from old ones, claiming that the list itself is a work in progress<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, Geert Lovink has pointed out that new media are at a critical juncture. According to him, new media are facing the mass adoption of new technologies, fast Internetisation of a non-Western world, the increase in capacity of the Internet and its new uses known as Web 2.0. They are also caught in a dilemma about whether they will be used in art institutions or they will continue consolidation of their relatively independent cultural sector based on exhibitions, festivals and conferences<sup>3</sup>.

Discursive instability has marked the new media art and culture in Croatia from its very beginnings. So far, they have been a heterogeneous cultural area where political, social and artistic clashes intertwine with coexistence and cooperation. In other words, governmental bodies for public communication have been corrected by the work of NGOs while the system of art institutions has alternated with flexible networks of individuals, projects and initiatives. This parallel *opposition* and *negotiation* among the dominant, unwilling-to-change culture and marginalized cultures based on promises of creative communication, citizens' participation in

---

<sup>1</sup> The author would like to express his gratitude to Dejan Kršić, Marcell Mars, Igor Marković, Dan Oki and Srđan Dvornik for their help with this text by providing necessary information and conversations.

<sup>2</sup> Manovich, L., *New Media from Borges to HTML* in *The New Media Reader*; edited by N. Wardrip-Fruin and N. Montfort, Cambridge Massachusetts&London, 2003: 13-25

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.argosarts.org/articles.do?id=343>

social processes and a particular form of freedom typical of cyber culture, have characterized new media in Croatia throughout 1990's<sup>4</sup>.

The history of art is usually no more than the history of artists. Such method is applied even when it comes to a selection of the new media art<sup>5</sup>. However, new media art and culture in Croatia cannot be properly presented without a description of the institutions that have participated in the implementation of new technologies in society. Those institutions can be described as networks that, in case of need and depending on circumstances, mutually integrate, connect or disintegrate, thus forming dynamic and flexible cultural space suitable for various, not only artistic activities. In that sense, the history of new media in Croatia during 1990's should include the work of governmental and non-governmental institutions that were more or less directly involved in political and cultural clashes of post-socialist society.

Since the break-up of Yugoslavia, national independence and beginning of the Patriot war, several distinguishing social networks have marked the new media art and culture in Croatia.

### **Anti-war Campaign, Zamir, Arkzin**

Chronologically speaking, the citizens' initiative "Anti-War Campaign" (1991-1995) came first. The efforts for reconstruction of disconnected phone lines among Croatia, Serbia and later Bosnia and Herzegovina developed into BBS (Bulletin Board System). BBS is computer software that enables users to connect by telephoning, to download or upload files to BBS network, read the news and exchange messages. After that, "Zamir Transnational Net" (abbr. "Zamir") was launched in Zagreb in 1992, with the initial help of the Dutch and German hackers, in order to connect citizens and peace activists across the war-torn former Yugoslavia. The realization that public media have a political aspect as well was quite a shock in Croatia, unlike in other post-socialist countries<sup>6</sup>. In the state of war, the mass media and means of communication were tightly controlled in the newly founded country. Not only there was a problem of regulation of the Internet use, which was officially introduced by connecting university academic and research network (CARnet) to foreign servers in 1992, but the use of

---

<sup>4</sup> The author borrows the terms *opposition and negotiation* from Stuart Hall's cultural theory. Hall Stuart (2006): "Coding/ Decoding", in Duda, D. (ed.): *Politika teroije. Zbornik rasprava iz kulturalnih studijas*. Zagreb, Dispute: 127-139

<sup>5</sup> For example, see Rachel Green's *Internet Art* (Thames&Hudson, 2004) or Darko Fritz's presentation of history of the Croatian media art on <http://www.culturenet.hr/v1/english/panorama.asp?id=39>

<sup>6</sup> For Janos Sugar's correspondence with Gaert Lovink about typical post-socialist experience of (inter) media artist, see <http://con.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint74/2/14>

“old” media (TV, radio, newspapers) was also reduced. Under such circumstances, the non-governmental organization “Anti-War Campaign” with initial funds of “Open Society” launched two media: fanzine/ newspapers “Arkzin” in 1991 and BBS system in 1992<sup>7</sup>.

At first, “Arkzin” was a strictly political fanzine but after a while, editorial board widened the interest and included international members and topics<sup>8</sup>. It gradually changed from the political fanzine and political fortnightly to a hybrid magazine in which politics, culture, theory and art met, crossed and overlapped in a way that Croatian media scene had not been used to. Its hybrid quality was especially manifested in the field of new media, which has been continually recorded since 1995<sup>9</sup>. It is important to say that “Arkzin” was for a long time the only magazine that systematically recorded events on the international scene of new media by their extensive definition, later adopted by Australian Cultural Council, which included the culture of DJ’s, VJ’s, electronic music created and distributed via computers, urban club culture etc<sup>10</sup>.

In the art world context, “Arkzin” was connected with the international new media art scene on one hand and with the avant-garde art tradition on the other. In the first case, one of the editorial board members, Igor Marković participated in the meeting that took place in Trieste in 1996, where the “net art” pioneers drew up principles of their activities and started a closer cooperation with new media festival “Next 5 Minutes” and other events on the Dutch culture scene<sup>11</sup>. Following the example of De Certeau’s definition of citizens’ *tactics* as opposed to state’s *strategy*, the Dutch theoreticians Geert Lovink and David Garcia formulated a peculiar media theory, known as “tactical media” in 1997. Promoting this theory in the conditions of new media being implemented into Croatian society, affected by war, economic transition and deficit of democratic institutions, “Arkzin” constantly pointed out the public and art media’s political dimension<sup>12</sup>.

---

<sup>7</sup> In 1995, Zamir's network had 2000 members. Among others, Erich Bachman writes on the establishing the BBS system on <http://balkansnet.org/MF-draft/MFF/zana-pr.htm>

<sup>8</sup> Until 1998, Arkzin's editor-in-chief was Vesna Janković. However, the board found it important to establish the institution of collective, non-hierarchical editorship in which all the participants were equally included. Other members of editorial board were graphic designers Dejan Kršić, Dean Dragosavac Rutta, Blaženko Karešin, journalists, publicists and theoreticians Igor Marković, Boris Buden, Boris Mikulić, Boris Trupčević, Geert Lovink and others.

<sup>9</sup> “Arkzin” wrote about the Dutch group “Agentur Bilwet”, cyber feminism theory, work of Slovenian net-clubs “Ljudmila” and “Kiberpipa”, festivals such as “Next 5 Minutes”, “Ars Electronica”, Venice Biennale, art groups and artists such as Critical Art Ensemble, 01.org, Stelarc and Ivan Marušić Klif. Furthermore, translations of texts written by theoreticians such as Geert Lovink, Andreas Broeckmann, Hakim Bey, Richard Dawkins, Peter Weibel, Mark Dery, Mark Terkessidis were published.

<sup>10</sup> Lovink, G., “New Media Art & Science”, 2005, 30<sup>th</sup> May 2007 <http://laudanum.net/geert/files/1129753681/>

<sup>11</sup> Green, Rachel “Internet Art”, London: Thames&Hudson, 2004: 54

<sup>12</sup> [http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol\\_2/garcia-lovinktext.html](http://subsol.c3.hu/subsol_2/garcia-lovinktext.html)

As said above, “Arkzin” also referred to avant-garde art tradition that always questioned the dominant social, political and art climate in Central and Eastern Europe<sup>13</sup>. When it came to “Arkzin”, it challenged the establishment in several fields: in the field of politics (state of war, autocrat regime, economic privatization), in the field of culture (new ways of communication, new lifestyles, subculture etc.) and in the field of arts (art institutions’ bureaucratic system as opposed to the freedom of the Internet etc.). In many aspects, “Arkzin” was a successor of “Zenit”<sup>14</sup>. It accepted new technologies based on digital data processing (computer, the Internet); made space for new media as alternative productional and distributive tools (web pages, net art); re-introduced the neglected media objects in the context of art and culture practices (fanzine, posters, leaflets); treated artistic and discursive practices of theory, philosophy, sociology on equal terms; reinterpreted high culture - pop culture relations (rave subculture, pornography); promoted team work (journalists published texts under collective or individual pseudonyms); worked hard on internationalisation of art and culture (on-line and off-line networking, new media festivals reports, interviews with foreign artists, theoreticians, activists); opposed and even Dadaistically made fun of dominant culture.

In the 1992-1995 period, there were two ways of accessing the Internet: either with the help of academic and research network for those who actively participated in scientific institutes and faculties or with the help of Zamir’s BBS network that, based on fragile telephone lines, was insufficient even for activists<sup>15</sup>. For these reasons, the basic activities of “Arkzin” were criticism of state’s attitude towards new media and fight for free access to the Internet. However, the government did not have any media politics, only restrictions caused by war so that media activism of “Arkzin”, similar to avant-garde art, sometimes reminded of Cervantes’s Don Quixote tilting at windmills<sup>16</sup>.

The concept of “tactical media”, promoted by “Arkzin” throughout the 1990’s, reveals a considerable influence of the Dutch culture on new media culture in Croatia. There are several reasons for this: a constant interest of the Dutch activists, artists and theoreticians in Croatia, residence and education of Croatian journalists, artists and theoreticians in the Netherlands

---

<sup>13</sup> Šuvaković, M., “Estetika apstraktnog slikarstva, Beograd: Narodna knjiga/ Alfa, 1998: 18

<sup>14</sup> “Zenit” was an avant-garde magazine, at first published in Zagreb (1921-1923) and later in Beograd (1923-1926). Ljubomir Micić, whose intention was to introduce social and artistic principles of avant-garde period into Croatia and Serbia, launched it. Although pushed to the margins, “Zenit” enriched the Croatian art with many avant-garde features, in particular constructivism, futurism and Dadaism.

<sup>15</sup> The commercial access to the Internet was extremely expensive when it first started in 1995. In the mean time, the national operator was sold to Deutsche Telekom.

<sup>16</sup> Igor Marković informed me about the surprising passivity of state institutions when it came to implementation of the Internet, claiming that governmental reaction to non-governmental organizations’ criticism was ill-defined and chaotic, rather than preconceived and organized.

and interpretation of media theory, made by the Dutch theoreticians gathered around “Adilkno” project, which Croatian intellectuals gladly accepted<sup>17</sup>.

Seen from the new media perspective, “Arkzin” design was closely related to design of its web sites and designer Blaženko Karešin Karo, but the attention should be given to off-line edition as well. The innovation of publications’ design lied in creative application of new media in the area of old media/ graphic design. Any changes in page layout were possible only with the help of computer technology. Being aware of new expressiveness resulting from new media used in graphic design, publication designers listed hardware components, software tools, font types next to the usual impressum information. It was quite common to design a page layout as interface (using characteristic Macintosh and Windows fonts, conversational windows, falling menus, e-mail models etc.) or timeline imitating aesthetics of hypertext. The publication’s illustrator Blaženko Karešin used software and the Internet iconic quite often.

On the other hand, designers created the web site by making old media the content of new media. They kept a traditional role of illustration as a dominant visual message; unlike publication, they simplified the web page layout, stressing hyperlink with the font size or simple colour change; they emphasized the “length” of web pages offering the option of long scrolls etc. The traditionality of web sites’ design was moderated with the use of hyperlinks, animated GIFs etc.<sup>18</sup>

In the context of only a few Croatian users of the Internet i.e. predominantly journalism/ television culture, these design methods were extremely important. They were tactical because they easily switched from one medium to another, combined old and new, and articulated quick and radical social changes that were part of every day life in Croatia of the 1990’s.

### **Multimedial Institute, Net-Club Mama**

During the depressed 1990’s, “Arkzin” was a sole example when it came to media coverage of the issues that were a matter of Central and Eastern Europe governmental and

---

<sup>17</sup> “Adilkno” or “Organization for improving illegal knowledge” (“Agentur Bilwet” in German) is informal group of intellectuals, researchers and theoreticians who started to work in Amsterdam in 1983. They have published several books such as: “Cracking the Movement”, “Squatting beyond the Media” (1990) about subculture of squats in Amsterdam; “The Data Dandy” (1994), a collection of essays on cyber culture; “Media Archive” (1992) about repositioning mass media in relation to socialist project downfall (Croatian edition was published in 1998). Their theory was influenced by The French post structuralism, pop culture, media art and Marxist theory.

<sup>18</sup> It is still possible to see “Arkzin” web page on <http://mediafilter.org/MFF/AZbi1.html>

non-governmental institutions' interest. The examples of Hungary, Latvia and Slovenia can serve for the comparison purposes: Budapest Fine Art Academy opened Department of Media Art in 1991, and several years later, in 1996, Centre for Culture and Communication (C3) was founded by Open Society Institute to support media artists. E-Lab was founded in Riga in 1996 and club "Ljudmila" in Ljubljana started to work one year earlier. On the other hand, a major part of the new media art and culture in Croatia promoted redactional policy of "Arkzin", a part of the wider citizens' campaign that was going on at the time.

The first two, exclusively multimedial cultural spaces in Croatia were Multimedial Institute (Mi2), opened in 1999, and Net Club Mama opened in 2000<sup>19</sup>. Like in many other post-socialist countries, The Open Society Institute financially supported the foundation of these institutions.

On one side, activities of Multimedial Institute and Net Club Mama have been a continuation of "Zamir" and "Arkzin", and on the other side, they have been a specific adaptation of the new media art and culture to post-war society, determined by neo-liberal ideology and consumerism. The similarities between two models of NGO's cultural activism (Anti-war Campaign and "Arkzin" as opposed to Multimedial Institute and Mama) are the wide area of fight for civil society's standards, right to approach channels of public communication at reasonable prices, freedom of minorities' cultural forms etc. As far as the art area is concerned, Multimedial Institute and the Club have been the only constant public gathering places for artists, theoreticians, curators, hackers, programmers, critics and activists interested in various forms of media art. In addition to this, Multimedial Institute was one of the rare production centres for all the forms of new media art. By organizing various activities (lectures, presentations, publishing, exhibitions, festivals) it has shifted the public attention to the increasing importance of the Internet in everyday life, promoting various forms of net art, and supporting the idea of free software and need for reinterpretation of author's rights in the context of digital production and distribution of cultural assets.

Due to Multimedial Institute's activity, a new model of cultural practice replaced a paradigmatic space of "Arkzin" redaction, functioning at three levels: at the level of organization of cultural festivals, including exhibitions, lectures, workshops, conferences; at the level of maintaining mailing lists and at the level of socializing in the club on daily basis<sup>20</sup>.

---

<sup>19</sup> Some of the founders were Nenad Romić a.k.a. Marcell Mars, Teodor Celakoski, Vedran Gulin, Tomislav Medak, Željko Blaće, Petar Milat, Boris Buden and others.

<sup>20</sup> A newspaper redaction had an important role in the society of former Yugoslavia due to a particular model called "socialism with human face". The turbulent 1990's kept a part of that symbolism. Among the most relevant "Arkzin" predecessors were youth magazines "Polet" and "Studentski list".

In the period 2000-2005, Multimedial Institute organized exhibitions and festivals dedicated to net art (“I Am Still Alive”, 2000), free software, media art and networking (“Becoming Digital”, 2001/2003; “ASU2 – Art Servers Unlimited”, 2001; “Critical Update – New Media Culture Week 2002”; “Next5Minutes”, 2003; “Sloboda stvaralaštvu”, 2005 etc.). The most relevant new media organizations, artists and theoreticians from Europe, North America, Australia and India were presented there. Just as “Arkzin” did in 1990’s, Multimedial Institute has used “old” and “new” media for its activities: inside the “laboratory” it has been developing and maintaining “TamTam” software based on the Wiki technology, as well as translating and publishing books on philosophy, free software movement, sociology, politics and new media theory<sup>21</sup>. In occasional cooperation with Multimedial Institute, other NGOs have been formed that have also dedicated a part of their activities to new media art. Among these, the independent curators team “Kontejner” presented mostly works of the Croatian, Slovenian, Serbian and American artists<sup>22</sup> at festivals “Device Art” and “Touch Me” in the period 2004-2006; the independent curators team “WHW” organized a typical new media event “Project: Broadcasting” in 2001<sup>23</sup>. Another important characteristic of Multimedial Institute is its principled openness towards hackers, one of the social layers who have been helping to build a contemporary Internet culture.

Due to various forms of teamwork, free software programmers staying in Zagreb, art workshops and socializing in the club, the gap between humanistic (artistic) and technical culture on Zagreb new media scene has been considerably narrowed.

Besides already mentioned Blaženko Karešin, the artists who have been more less influenced by the new media culture of “Arkzin” and Multimedial Institute are Ivan Marušić Klif (<https://boo.mi2.hr/~klif/>), Darko Fritz (<http://darkofritz.net/>), Ana Hušman (<http://anahusman.net>), Andreja Kulunčić (<http://www.andreja.org/>), Lina Kovačević (<http://www.linakovacevic.net/>), and Nenad Romić a.k.a. Marcell Mars (<http://ki.ber.kom.uni.st>)<sup>24</sup>. A large majority of their artistic activities belong to post-

<sup>21</sup> The following translations should be mentioned here: Lawrence Lessig's “Code and Other Laws of Cyberspace”, McKenzie Wark’s “A Hacker Manifesto”, Marina Gržinić’s “Estetika kibersvijeta i učinci derealizacije”, Michael Hardt & Tony Negri’s “Empire” etc.

<sup>22</sup> These artists were presented: Vuk Ćosić, Luka Frelj, Ivan Marušić Klif, Magdalena Pederin, Dubravko Kuhta, Berislav Šimičić, Sašo Sedlaček, William Linn, Ines Krasić, Nika Oblak, Primož Novak and others.

<sup>23</sup> “Project: Broadcasting” was dedicated to Nikola Tesla. It was taking place for almost a year at different locations in Zagreb and was broadcasted on national radio. It consisted of exhibitions, lectures, discussions, performances, concerts etc.

<sup>24</sup> One of the artists whose work has not been covered by any of the three new media networks is Igor Zlobec. In 2000, he started the web site “Zlobecsport”. It soon transformed from a web page with a purpose of presenting off-line works to a typical net artwork. Another artist should be mentioned here, Antun Božičević, whose interactive sound ambient “Važno je sudjelovati” was exhibited in Osijek in 2004. A year earlier, Maja Kalogjera organized the international exhibition “Ground of My Studio” in the GRADEC Gallery with the works of Ruth Catlow, Agricola de Cologne, Marc Garret, Maya Kalogera, Jess Loseby, Eryk Salvaggio, Teo Spiller

conceptual, socially critical art practice. Generally speaking, the same can be said for their work what Manovich, analyzing the works of Alexei Shulgin and Dmitry Prigov, said about the Russian art scene. He said that due to a peculiar historical experience, the Eastern European artists were always more careful and distrustful to utopian promises of new technologies than the Western ones, and preferred black-humoured and dystopian aspects of new media, rather than long-term social and artistic projects<sup>25</sup>.

### **Cathedral, Media Scape**

Any serious overview of new media art in Croatia would be incomplete without the institutions and artists that have perceived new media primarily as an artistic device used to point out or change existing art procedures. In the context of Manovich's description of new media, this network and its members see new media as a new representational machine rather than a new social and artistic practice resulting from their use<sup>26</sup>.

This network was best presented by the exhibition/ project "Katedrala" (1988) and a series of exhibitions, lectures, presentations and symposiums held under the name Media Scape (<http://www.mediascape.info/indexnovigrad.htm>) in Zagreb from 1993 until 1999<sup>27</sup>. "Katedrala" was a team project carried out by artists Darko Fritz, Stanko Juzbašić, Boris Bakal, Ivan Marušić Kilf and a programmer Goran Premec. It was conceived as a multimedial interactive gallery ambient, created and controlled by computers, various electronic devices, screens and other new media objects and it was dedicated to the major modernist artists<sup>28</sup>.

The focus of the artists joined in this project was the two Manovich's new media paradigms: database and algorithm. Both refer to the medium of art production (image, sound, text) and the possibility of its control. Since one medium is often "translated" into another, these artists' works were usually multimedial and the process of remediation is performed through different and complex interactive protocols. The ambient installations prevailed and with the help of modern technology, it was possible for the visitors to participate in realization of an artwork. Due to their potential to generate and save a great amount of data and to

---

and Jody Zellen.

<sup>25</sup> Manovich, L., "Behind the Screen Russian New Media" from *Convergence* 15 May 2007  
<http://con.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/4/2/10>

<sup>26</sup> Manovich 2003: 16

<sup>27</sup> Media Scape was an international manifestation, founded by Heiko Daxl, Ingeborg Fullep, Bojan Baletić and Malcolm LeGreece.

<sup>28</sup> "Katedrala" was dedicated to Vasilij Kandinsky, Modest Mussorgsky, Marcel Duchamp and Joseph Beuys. For further information see <http://members.chello.nl/fritzd/projects/katedrala/text.html>



interact, CD ROM, closed circuit, video and television installations were favourite new media genres among the artists gathered around this network.

Once more, the artists Darko Fritz and Ivan Marušić Klif should be mentioned because their works can be interpreted in both contexts. Due to their tendency to work with out-of-date technology (telex machines, old instruments, LP records, gramophone etc.) and democratic, amateur do-it-yourself culture, they fit in the context of Multimedial Institute network, while due to their inclination to multimedial, interactive and gallery-situated works they fit in the context of Media Scape network<sup>29</sup>. Within the framework of the latter, we can also interpret the works of Sandro Đukić, Magdalena Pederin, interactive video installations of Dalibor Martinis, Dan Oki, Simon Bogojević Narath, Sandra Sterle, Kristina Leko and others.

### **UMAS – Department of Visual Communication Design, International Festival of New Film**

The third network is located in the town of Split, thus being the only network of artists, theoreticians, curators and audience existing out of Zagreb. Some of the participants of this network have already been mentioned in the contexts of “Katedrala” and “Media Scape” but the true meaning of this network lies in the area of art education. In 1997, Academy of Fine Arts in Split opened Department of Visual Communication Design, which became the first high education programme in Croatia dedicated to the new media education<sup>30</sup>. Department of Visual Communication Design, and later Department of Film and Video, offered basic insights into the new media arts, whether digital film and video, photography or web design<sup>31</sup>. In other words, the Department’s programme was based on the process of reinterpretation of the established art forms from the new media perspective, the process that Manovich called meta-media and Janos Sugar inter-media process<sup>32</sup>.

---

<sup>29</sup> The term “network computer” is used here to point out the cultural practices neglected in the theory of “early new media”, determined by popularization of the Internet and its introduction in the world of mass media, increase of the wireless Internet access, new forms of artistic on-line networking based on Web 2.0, influence of open source, i.e. Creative Commons’ cultural and artistic movement etc. In short, the term is a temporary methodological construction created for the purposes of this historic countdown, in accordance with Manovich’s differentiation between new media and cyber culture. For further information, see Manovich 2003, 16 and “The Language of New Media” of the same author.

<sup>30</sup> Some of the founders were Ivo Deković, Tomislav Lerotić, Vlado Zrnić, Gorki Žuvela, Mirko Petrić, Slobodan Jokić a.k.a. Dan Oki and others.

<sup>31</sup> Himbele, Ž. and Štefančić, K. “Protiv pedagoške atrofiranosti (interview with Slobodan Jokić a.k.a. Dan Oki), “Zarez”, 25 September 2003 <http://www.zarez.hr/113/temabroja4.htm> (15 June 2007)

<sup>32</sup> Lovink, G. “Intermedia: The Dirty Digital Bauhaus, an e-mail Exchange with Janos Sugar” from “Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies”, 5 March 2007 <http://laudanum.net/geert/files/1006074852/index.shtml?1182511765>. In Sugar’s conception “inter-media” stands for “inter-disciplinary” plus “media”.

A year earlier, International Festival of New Film had been established in Split, which has also been presenting new media art since 1997. The international jury has chosen and awarded new media artworks. Due to the Festival's programme and activities of Department of Visual Communication Design together with Department of Film and Video, a number of new media artists and theoreticians, such as Lev Manovich, Geert Lovink, Tamas Banovich, Nan Hoover, David Blair, Gisela Domschke and others, have presented their work in Split.

### **Strategies and Tactics**

The media art in Croatia has had a long tradition. The earliest use of computers in art happened in 1969 when the electronic engineer and explorer Vladimir Bonačić began to collaborate with the art movement *Nove tendencije*. Throughout 1970's, when *Nove tendencije* stopped to exist and a decade of domination of conceptual, performing and activist art practices started, art referred to technologies in several ways. In the area of video art, particularly in the works of Dalibor Martinis and Sanja Iveković, convergence of consuming electronics (portable cameras, TV set etc.) and art was happening in two ways. First, on the experimental level because the artists in almost gestalt-like manner tested characteristics of new medium and second, on the level where new media were seen as a platform for criticizing "society of spectacle".

According to this rough classification of the media art, each of the two new-media models in Croatia during 1990's belonged to a different side of the tradition. "Katedrala" and "Media Scape" belonged to the side that facing the modernist dilemma – pure art or social activism – chose the autonomous art field in which experimenting with technology, with the purpose of broadening freedom of artistic expression, had more prominent role with the ending of 20<sup>th</sup> century. "Arkzin" and "Multimedial Institute" followed the line, which in a constant reminding of determinedness of every material, including art practice, saw the new media not only as a group of new technical protocols but also as a chance for new transgression of art, politics, high and popular culture etc.

The sharp sensibility of "Arkzin" to the issue of media freedom is one of the most important factors in an attempt to differentiate these two new media paradigms. Another important factor is a political potential of popular culture, which is exactly what "Arkzin" was doing, according to some texts written by a long member of editorial board and designer of "Arkzin" Dejan Kršić. He claims that a true critical, corrective opposition to a bureaucratic socialist system of the late 1970's and 1980's was a particular practice of youth, usually popular culture that degraded with the introduction of parliamentary democratisation, since they

lost the initial focus of interest, their *raison d'être*<sup>33</sup>. It seems that the new media in Croatia of the 1990's should be seen as a revitalization of alternative, opposing potentials of pop culture that stood against a grey background of war, economic transition, autocrat government and xenophobia.

## Epilogue

The first generation of artists formally educated in media art at Split and Zagreb Fine Art Academies was presented at the exhibition "Re:sources: New Media and Young Croatian Artists" at the Galženica Gallery in 2003. Only one of around 20 presented works did not belong to video or animation art<sup>34</sup>.

It can only be speculated about a real popularity of film and video art among young Croatian artists. It seems there has been a long and respectable tradition of experimental film, video and animation, which has also determined the new media art in Croatia<sup>35</sup>. Still, Geert Lovink suggested in one of his essays on history of new media that the art tradition has always looked down on the Internet and "network computer" as devices for art practice<sup>36</sup>.

Using definitions introduced in Croatian art history by Ljubo Karaman in the 1950's, Igor Marković thinks the inability of so-called peripheral and provincial communities to creatively assimilate influences of topological, not geographical centre, is responsible for the omnipresent aversion to net art in Croatia. According to his interpretation, advertising aspects as well as traditional aspects of photography and video characterize Croatian artists' works on the Internet<sup>37</sup>.

Nowadays, the access to the Internet in Croatia is completely opened to the market of the corporative capital. After more than a decade of monopoly, T-Com had to allow the access to so-called last mile in 2006. Despite this, Croatian citizens are still paying one of the most expensive tariffs for the Internet access in Europe.

It is still impossible to find out, within a reasonable period, the number of the Internet users in Croatia for the years 1996 and 2006. In addition, the Modern Gallery, the institution

---

<sup>33</sup> Kršić, D. "Alter/native" in "Communication Front 2000 Book", 18 April 2006  
<http://cfront.org/cf00book/en/dejan-alternative-en.html>

<sup>34</sup> It was Dunja Sablić's graduation work - CD ROM "Vila Velebita".

<sup>35</sup> The hybrid area where film, video and "traditional" art of the early 1970's overlap can be presented by GEF (Genre Film Festival), the work by Vladimir Petek and FAVIT (Film, audiovizualna istraživanja, televizija), Dalibor Martinis and Sanja Iveković's work, experimental films of Ladislav Galeta, Tomislav Gotovac and others.

<sup>36</sup> Lovink, Geert: "New Media, Art and Science", 2005 30 May 2007  
<http://laudanum.net/geert/files/1129753681/>

<sup>37</sup> Marković, Igor: "Periphery vs. Province" from "Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies", 2 April 2007 <http://con.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/4/2/31>

dedicated to the presentation of Croatian modern art, still does not have a web site. On the other side, a recent survey has shown that Croatia has the third-largest number of Fire fox users, following Finland and Slovenia. In addition, Multimedial Institute's activity of promoting Creative Commons licence is one of the most prominent in the region while slow but persistent lobbying for the governmental use of the free software is still going on. Finally, new media are becoming the only media in Croatia, too.

(May 2007)

Klaudio Štefančić

(translation: Anita Kojundžić)

### **Literature:**

Castells, Manuel (2003): *The Internet Galaxy. Reflections on Internet, Business, and Society*, Zagreb, Jesenski&Turk

Fritz, Darko: "Media Art". *Culturenet.hr*  
<http://www.culturenet.hr/v1/english/panorama.asp?id=39> (15 June 2007)

Green, Rachel (2004): *Internet Art*. London, Thames&Hudson

Hall, Stuart (2006) "Coding/ Decoding" in Duda, D.; (ed.): *Politika teorije. Zbornik rasprava iz kulturalnih studija*. Zagreb: Dispute: 127-139

Himbele, Željka and Štefančić, Klaudio "Protiv pedagoške atrofiranosti (intervju sa Slobodanom Jokićem a.k.a Danom Okijem)", *Zarez*, 25 September 2003  
<http://www.zarez.hr/113/temabroja4.htm> (15 June 2007)

Kršić, Dejan (2000): "Alter/native". *Communication Front Book*  
<http://www.cfront.org/cf00book/en/dejan-alternative-en.html> (15 June 2007)

Lovink, Geert (1998): "Intermedia: The Dirty Digital Bauhaus, an e-mail exchange with János Sugár" from *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*  
<http://con.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/4/2/14> (15 June 2007)

Lovink, Geert (2003): *Dark Fiber*. Cambridge – Massachusetts & London, MIT Press

Lovink, Geert (2005): "New Media, Art and Science. Explorations beyond the Official Discourse"  
<http://laudanum.net/geert/files/1129753681/> (15 June 2007)

Manovich, Lev (1998): "Behind the Screen Russian New Media" from *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*  
<http://con.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/4/2/10> (15 June 2007)

Manovich, Lev (2001): *The Language of New Media*, Cambridge – Massachusetts & London, MIT Press

Manovich, Lev (2003) “New Media from Borges to HTML” in Wardrip-Fruin, N. and Montfort, N. (ed.): *The New Media Reader*. Cambridge-Massachusetts & London: MIT Press: 13-25

Marković, Igor (1998): “Periphery vs. Province “in *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies*  
<http://con.sagepub.com/cgi/reprint/4/2/31> (15 June 2007)

Šuvaković, Miško (1998): *Estetika apstraktnog slikarstva*, Beograd: Narodna knjiga/Alfa