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The Synergy of Artistic Approaches within the Openness of New Media

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Abstract What is the extent to which new (mass) media (aside from the negative role they play in the global colonisation of the world) open the door to new artistic experiences and how important are these experiences when it comes to multiplication and networking through modern technologies in particular?

Through the comparison of traditional arts and old media to new arts and new media, this paper searches for the essence of an artwork, the same essence of difference through different times and different technologies, with a different role of media in mediating the artwork.

The fate of art is discussed through the fateful influence of mass media on everyday life and even on the forms of artistic practices. The artistic practice is discussed as a form of free human activity that has been expanding on the limits of that which is human since prehistoric times.

Sinergija umjetničkih pristupa unutar otvorenosti novih medija

Ključne riječi umjetnost, novi mediji, multimedija. video art, instalacija, digitalne umjetnosti

Sažetak Koliko novi (mas)mediji (osim negativne uloge koju imaju u globalnom koloniziranju svijeta) otvaraju vrata novim umjetničkim iskustvima i koliko su ta iskustva bitna upravo zbog umnažanja i umrežavanja posredstvom suvremenih tehnologija?

Usporedbom odnosa tradicionalnih umjetnosti i starih medija s novim umjetnostima i novim medijima, tekst traga za biti umjetničkoga djela, onim istim različitoga kroz različita vremena uz različite tehnologije i uz različitu ulogu medija u posredovanju umjetničkog djela.

O sudbini umjetnosti govori se iz sudbonosnog utjecaja masmedija na svakodnevicu, pa i na oblike umjetničkih praksi. O umjetničkoj praksi se govori kao o onom obliku slobodne ljudske djelatnosti koja, od prapovijesti, širi granice ljudskoga.

Part One

Never before in human history have so many works of art been produced, and never before has the result been so few real experiences of art. Today, a work of art is as all-pervasive as the decisions being made by the government, culture ministries and mayors. It is out in the streets, in the shape of performance, sculpture, art intervention, music; as part of the spectacle, it is an integral part of the media universe.

This is often solely to do with beauty as (a not necessarily essential) part of the work of art. 'Art has dissolved in the aesthetic ether', notes Yves Michaud in his work *Art in a Gaseous State*.[1] Amongst others, Boris Groys writes: 'In our own era it is the mass media that dictate aesthetic norms… The general public now draws its notion of art from advertising, MTV, videos, video games and Hollywood blockbusters'.[2]

The technical reproducibility of works of art (whose effect has been announced by Benjamin) has not only brought on plurality and works with no aura, but also a loss of sensibility and a new kind of primitivism, as highlighted by Arnold Gehlen (in his work with an indicative title: *The Soul in the Age of Technology*).[3]

The internet is brimming with new ideas on new merging and reconstruction of traditional art. The democratisation of owning one's own portrait, formerly brought about by photography (as compared to painting), is infinitely small compared to the democratisation of the opportunity to make art as brought about by video, multimedia, new media, computer programs and the internet. In the words of Rob Shields, they tear down the boundaries between the real and virtual, body and technology, us and the characters we portray. The Web serves as a true social medium which connects and integrates its users. Like language – yet another medium – it 'speaks' the speaker himself, even with the speaker speaking the language.[4] Do we recognise the changes in the human being and its relationship towards art produced by the media of multiplication and mass communication?

Every age has been dominated by a certain type of art, and everyone can agree about this as a fact relatively easily. But why has a certain type of art dominated a particular age? This is something to be discussed and, by all indications, the answers will depend on the approach.

1 Yves Michaud, Umjetnost u plinovitom stanju (Zagreb, Naklada Ljevak, 2004), p. 9

2 In his text *The Museum in the Age of Mass Media*, Groys advocates museums as places of critical discourse suited to 'critically analyse and challenge the claims of the media-driven *zeitgeist*'.

3 The author believes that expanding the technical models of thinking necessarily leads towards the primitivisation of the world we live in.

4 Rob Shields, Virtualni prostori, stvarne povijesti i živuća tijela in Kulture interneta (Zagreb, Naklada Jesenski i Turk i Hrvatsko sociološko društvo, 2001), p. 34

Why was Duchamp's fountain so special and why did it leave such a deep mark in the history of art as well as in everyday life, is a question that art history, according to Danto, will not answer.[5]

The massive scale of mass media multiplication has robbed traditional art of its soul. Has it given it something in return?

Media philosophy (transcending the level of the theories of individual media) must answer the question of the relationship between the essence of art as such and the contemporary (mass) media mediation, in other words, the question of the fate of art in the age of new media, and the new media and artistic literacy.

5 Arthur C. Danto, Preobražaj svakidašnjeg, Filozofija umjetnosti (Zagreb, Kruzak, 1997), p. 8

Part Two

It was easy for the illiterate to unite faith, hope, ritual, voice, movement, air, sky and earth through dance. The dance that dominated the preliterate age has been preserved and continues to develop as an art form even today. What is unified through dance today? What did dance become a part of? What do the changes suggest?

It is virtually impossible to reduce dance to that pertaining to dance anymore. Reducing dance to movements on stage with no influence of performance is akin to an attempt to present a film through narration.

Dance is but one of the foundations for the play of new media. The body is a participant in the illusion in which the body itself is reduced to an illusion.

Traditional forms of dance exist to be transcended, built upon, to use their innovation to open up new areas of interest in the defamiliarisation of art by human civilisation.
Indeed, a portion of artists, technicians, technologists and engineers of the beautiful call it a day with the (artistic, theoretical, practical etc.) analyses of new media possibilities (such analyses being quite similar to the analyses conducted by the avant-garde at the beginning of the 20th century). Still, a portion of artists rise above the borders of traditional auratic art, so as to employ the collaboration of all forms of traditional art and

the dimensions of the multimedia approach, and even some *new new media* (to borrow Levinson), in order to build a defamiliarisation of new dimensions.

A man of letters is much more practical than a dancer; he will not only enjoy the diversity of the dance patterns of human bodies, the different combinations of rhythms, melodies, voices, light, darkness and stage design, but he will also sing more and more. Singing will outlast a single string and a monotonous rhythm. As a form of remembering, storing, safekeeping and transmitting cultural patterns, singing will continue to exist even after culture, or rather technology, has found more efficient ways of storing information, educational messages and worldviews. Whilst singing (songing, versing, poemising), man will follow the line suggested to him by art.

The human misconception, about using the boundaries of grammar and logic to bar the openness of song as the artistic medium of unifying the man in his true being, would last 2500 years. Giving up the song in the name of mathematic-scientific palpability has given birth to a world we wish to escape from more and more often.

The art of a beautiful poetic word is older than prose. Somewhere in the rhythm, word order, rhymes and metre, the first poets tested the magic of that which was sung, as a type of speech that gave more than speech itself and which contained more than speech alone.

The apple offered to Adam by Eve is the first known (biblical) mediator between two people. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is actually language/script. The apple is a metaphor for the alphabet.

There is no knowledge without the medium of language. The fruit of the Tree of Knowledge is the awareness and the word which unlocks the man's mediated relationship towards nature and the universe.

Divine Unity is replaced by attempts to establish a new experience – mediated by language.

Today we plant virtual trees in search of non-linguistic languages and the pathways towards the immediate and non-mediated. The more impossible the task, the more essential the

pursuit of such a form of (self-)understanding and (self-)experience of the world.

The art of building houses and squares developed its self-awareness of the intricacies of those initiated in the building techniques to such an extent that the initiated would sometimes organise themselves into special communities with special codes of conduct. The art of building contained within itself not only the art of construction and knowing the rules, but also the art of spatiality, visual artistry and acoustics.

The two-dimensional portraits of kings, their retinue, rich feudal lords and landowners required large empty walls and a need to distance oneself from the rest of the world through the possession of prestigious artefacts, as well as relying on the discovery of the *camera obscura* and Dürer's drawing grid, i.e. perspective.

A painting unifies colour, light and darkness. The style of dress, ambience; the dramaturgy is reduced to an arrangement of characters, a movement, a gesture. The music is inaudible – at least when it comes to traditional paintings.

    The Renaissance's exploration of colour and light appears as a premonition of the research of playing with the light of a camera. The surrealist games of shaping verses by randomly drawing words written on pieces of paper from a hat are, according to Benjamin, a surrealist foreboding of montage, in other words, the medium of film. Even before photography, theatre used its panoramas to create an illusion that would later be developed by film. After a couple thousand years of waiting, story and storytelling were given a chance to meet a large number of individuals face-to-face, in the same or similar conditions. This sort of situation makes it possible for the novel to exist, since the novel develops on the psychological and social dimensions of such a situation in a significant way.

The development of hardware and software is parallel. A human being is the option it chooses. Art is a human ability which has found itself in the world of technical multiplication affecting both the art and the human being.
The art of new media questions multiplication (plurality). It

plays the game which was brought into the world by photography and which sets new rules for the world of today.

Dadaist allusions at the game of multiplication now reach a dimension of drawing some serious attention to the phenomenon of multiplying people, goods, photographs, approaches, ideologies, media and forms of manipulation. Whilst playing at multiplication, the art of new media opens up an opportunity for us to understand the process that defines us in an essential way today. 'Ours is a culture of imitation', Michaud claims, 'the medium is the message and the message is the medium.'[6]

6 Yves Michaud, Umjetnost u plinovitom stanju (Zagreb, Naklada Ljevak, 2004), p. 33

The power of media has also been confirmed by Sloterdijk through, amongst others, the following stance: 'With the media form of hero worship, we step into an affective regime of developed narcissism of the masses', to which he later added: 'Without an insight into these narco-political alliances, the spiritual massacres and media wars of the 20th century forever remain mere traditional turbulences assigned the label of 'inconceivable' by the provincial investigation.'[7]

7 Peter Sloterdijk, U istom čamcu (Beograd, Časopis Beogradski krug, 2001), pp. 144–145

Opera, as the supreme form of traditional art, comes at the end of the process of searching for the single art form that can offer the most exhaustive enjoyment to a refined soul: story, acting, music, text, dance, masks, light, set design, colours, fashion, and all in a dramaturgically conceived game and all in one place, all live and without delay. Only a new dimension could offer more art forms in one place. This dimension arrived with electrical and electronic, and later even digital forms of amalgamation within virtual worlds.

We see the world as mediated by the media. Our eye is the result of the historical progression of viewing methods, influences of various technologies, biological capabilities and the collective human memory.

Art sees the way we see the world and the way we flirt through the mediation of machines that fascinate, surprise, accustom and determine. Alongside a presentation of the world, the media also grant us (impose upon us) a framework, free of charge.

Is it a process of the dehumanisation of art through the adaptation of new artistic techniques to new media (majorly linked with the masses), to borrow Ortega y Gasset,[8] or is it to

8 Ortega y Gasset, Dehumanizacija umjetnosti (Zagreb, Litteris, 2007), p. 21

do with setting art free of the materialism so closely linked to the usefulness, pricing and the financial managing of artistic values?

Words draw us into a simulacrum wherein we can understand ourselves and otherness within the framework of language.

By understanding the linguistic being of what we have been given, what is posited to us, the art of words plays and tries to say (akin to Hamlet's actors) more than has been written.

Words are shadows in the same way colours, tones and 3D interactive bodies, activated by movement or touch, are all shadows.

Every language moves between two basic poles: precision and metaphor.

Nuances between these two poles tell us of the extent to which a text is a police record, NASA report, literary or poetic text.

Radio quickly offered the unification of story, acting and music. Film added image, and image developed film. Television turned into film and radio without the artistic dimension. Artworks in the media of radio and television, if they even occur, are mere incidents. Social rules dictate that there be talk of the artistic on radio and television, but this also comes under a form of speech with no art itself.

In 1985, Zagreb witnessed the so-called wordless demonstrations. A group of some thirty students walked around the city centre (accompanied by the police) with banners that said nothing. The speakers at the main square simply waved their arms about. Everything went according to the government's wishes, peacefully and with no incidents.

But the provocative, artistic, critical and uncompromising part followed that very evening, when Radio 101 used its show Intervencija 85 to allow its listeners to spend four hours 'guessing' what or whom those people had protested against.

Citizens realised they got a chance to speak, so they spoke. The only thing that the authorities could do was to cancel the show, but only the next day.

What once were networks of people is nowadays displayed in the forms of technological templates of connecting people. In a similar way, opera's unification of art is taken over by a

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different, technical dimension today. The multimedia play with digital shapes has opened up a new field of potential collaboration between certain arts, artistic forms, artists, and more and more amateurs, deeply immersed in new technology. A new synergy was therefore only possible in the dimension of new technology.

The reflection of art could manage relatively well as long as the whole thing was 'live' and in one place. When the requirements of Aristotle's *Poetics* were abandoned, the reflection found itself at a crossroads: how would it continue to interpret the authenticity of an artwork, art, audience, communication channels, experience, and reproducibility? The science of beauty and the human experience of beauty all of a sudden found itself facing the issues unimaginable at the time of shaping the aesthetics as a discipline.

New media have expanded the space for the search for new artistic scripts and the new artistic potentials of human beings. The practice of artistic intentions now enters areas it had not occupied until recently. Artists build unexpected, non-standard and surprising combinations of practices and scripts into their performances.

It is as if Plato's shadow play were experiencing its rebirth, a birth contemplated by Sloterdijk, a birth that will restore us people as the spirit's medium, in a spiritual, corporeal, artistic and intellectual sense.

Which area is currently attempting to unite all or almost all artistic efforts? Can we observe an increase in interest for particular art forms or a decrease in interest for others to find signs of a rule that would point to a tendency, direction or route? New media are evidently the new easel, the new stage and the new unwritten book. But new media are replaced by even newer ones. We have now entered the area of a multidirectional communication of the plethora of platforms where separate or hybrid artworks, or various combinations, are prepared. Have we found ourselves facing a new dimension in the search for unification: the unification that will result from a confrontation of collective upgrades and supplementing the new kind of art which can only exist on the Web? After the geeks and hackers of the Internet age, are we about to meet

the artists of web multimedia, who do not reason within the dimension of the old traditional art, nor in the dimension of the multimedia enabled by technology, but on the horizon of online artism? Their path has been opened by the people who created the World Wide Web.

Man has long since entered his own work, his image. Technology provided him with the image as a process including the artist embedded in the framework of the painting, amongst the shapes and colours.

What could be made of different arts assembled into a single artistic act? In the dimension of traditional art, this was supposed to be an act that would simultaneously speak in words, song, painting, acting, set design, sculpture, dramaturgy, the harmonic and melodic line and music.

It was an act that employed all artistic practices, in other words all media of artistic expression. The limit of such an act was the ability or inability for everything to occur at the same place and at the same time. This limitation spoke of the traditional art's immersion in life, its reality.

Even the next level, the level of multimedia artistic works, employs secondary orality, pictoriality, plasticity etc. It is only the creative approaches that remain the same whilst attaining new possibilities. The work still has its viewer, which is to say its main agent. The dimension of *new media art*, in large part, abandons the area of connectivity and the identity of the artist and artwork. The accumulation of artistic energies is at work here, in forms that often lead to an unfamiliar dimension. It is an interactive search for/creation of new artistic worlds with the use of pre-prepared or semi-prepared materials which will always create a new whole anew.

Art and technology offer us the God particle in the liberation of the masses – new media art, which will soon employ a larger number of people than existed on the face of the planet in the times of ancient Greece.

At the beginnings of traditional art, there existed the unification of different artistic techniques and different arts, and, as a rule, in the same artistic handwriting. Next, there was

a technological unification of multimedia files which often belonged to different artists. Finally, we have reached the stage of different artworks comprised of different segments of work, different artists and different practices dislocated around the virtual worlds on the Web.

Explosions of colour, shapes, effects and tones take place before our eyes; there is a play of light and shadow never before seen, an unimaginable vibrancy and insatiable exploration of the new areas to realise human imagination.

That which is in itself the potential – the power and ability of an artwork, the power of creativity, the emancipatory dimension of art; that artistic portion of human life, which exists as unreleased energy in an artwork – still cannot compete with the manipulatory dimensions of any of the existing forms of perpetuating the capitalist production of value surplus, which will always keep establishing the kinds of relationships that are the precondition of new divisions, but also the preservation of the existing conditions.

In the same way the European spirit is not only represented by Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Hegel, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Marx, Goethe, Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Michelangelo, da Vinci and other great thinkers, artists and scientists (but also by the ubiquitous banking and corporate spirit of the European empire), that which is beautiful and worthy of artistic practices isn't fit to hold a candle to the destructive force of the use of beauty and the other dimensions of art by the mass media corporations whose goal is not bringing life closer to the artistic, but concealing the production of value surplus with the use of techniques, works, approaches and images of the art itself.

Photography was the first museum without walls. Today, new media help the artistic act to spread into unexpected places. If the fragile and fleeting snowmen can serve as a backdrop for an artistic play of light, then the fate of the world is to be an artwork. Of course, this fate might not be realised since the global corporation players are hard at work pilfering art and its inclusion in the world of value surplus production.

Mass media are the means of production. Mass media are the means of production of false consciousness. Aside from

profit, these means of production also produce worldviews and ideologies, and they establish relationships which allow for further creation of profit. Reducing the media to the level of information carriers does an ill service to the mind, reasoning and the position of modern proletarians (every oppressed being).

The question of discourse is one of the key questions of the time ahead of us. We can view the discourse through Foucault's eyes, as a form of play (writing, reading, exchange)[9], but it is a game of destiny which opens a door for us towards transcending the level of the pragmatic and the utilitarian.

Speech identified with negative energy can only cause new whirlpools of negative energy. Being right can often cause more distress than knowing one is in the wrong. The distribution system of negative energy can produce entire galaxies of new misunderstandings with the speed of light. In this sense, that which transcends the negative and the particular is the discourse, and what contains the transcendable is art.

Octavio Paz's insight is seemingly banal: 'All arts, especially painting and sculpture, seeing as forms signify things, can be kept, sold and transformed into items of financial speculation.'[10]

Art also walks along some other paths.

What is an ass doing at a supermarket? It stubbornly comes to a place where it cannot realise its basic needs.

The ass at the supermarket testifies to man's role in the world of the modern division of labour: man is either part of a production line destined for the shelves or he is as lost as the artist's ass. Man is either a compliant conformist or he turns into a metaphor of stubbornness.

We are all on a road, all of us transient, vulnerable and unique. We have awakened to the fact that 'being on the road' is more important than the goal itself. We now know that it is vital to be on the path of art, to be on the artistic path.

What of the relationship between a particular artistic act on one of the billion internet paths in relation to the real relationships of the global colonisation of the world's human beings with the use of mass media pluralities?
Which art managed to put reality into question, when and to

9 Michel Foucault, Poredak diskursa (Loznica, Karpos, 1977), p. 37

10 Octavio Paz, Drugi glas, pjesništvo i kraj stoljeća (Zagreb, NZMH, 1996), p. 98

what extent? Has the energy of Dadaists, surrealists, futurists, expressionists and others who used to gather in the real spaces of cafés, theatres and streets now finally received the channels of communication it had yearned after?

To what extent is the programme framework of a work of art defined by the programme (BILWET and Manovich)?

How is the avant-garde of new media art different to the art of the early 20th century, in a situation where the pictorial, visual and aural components of an artwork are reduced to computer data, binary operations and bit-codes?[11]

11 Stefan Heidenreich, Novi mediji in Znanost o slici (ed: KlausSachs-Hombach) (Zagreb, Antibarbarus, 2006), p. 290

Openness towards viewer intervention is a new dimension of art that has caught on with the new media. That which was only suspected and announced by traditional art (e.g. elimination of distance between the performers and viewers at the theatre) is now developed by the new media to the level of particularity and recognition.

I want my voice to belong to an interactive artwork to the same extent I want the world to become an interactive artwork.

Traditional arts continue to live in old, valuable and beautiful houses (which are mostly artworks of architecture in themselves). There is mostly no-one in these houses (aside from on the rare occasion of an exhibition opening day). (The Three-year Study)

Basing art in sensuous cognition is a failure of the 19th century philosophy that remains to this day (especially when it comes to visual arts, dance, and especially the art forms that use new media techniques and technology).

Beauty, slogan, the golden ratio, static and moving photography, distributivity and networking – these are the foundations of the new world. They are also contained within the new media and the new forms of media art.

The future of man is to be not only the medium of the spirit, but also the medium of his own personality, worldviews and abilities. Becoming a medium is the fate of man in the age of mass media seduction. The future of art is to awaken the man's

creative dimension throughout each new technology and all forms of interpenetration of the old and the new.

The visitors of galleries, theatres, literary manifestations and so on are mere travellers following the rules of Aristotle's *Poetics*.

The age of new media questions these visitors in the same way it questions traditional art. It freezes the frame around theorists and artists with the viewers in the gallery and makes an object of them.

Today, all traditional arts are mere contents for the new media dimensions of art.

Art is the medium of human creation and, only indirectly and far from being the most important thing, a form of cognition.

Traditional art is slowly dying off in galleries and museums, with an occasional attempt at reviving itself. This only proves that life itself should become artistic.

New media arts are the seed-plots of creative approaches used in production, entertainment, interior and exterior design, science, and even war.

The shift from traditional arts towards video art, installation, digital art and interactive forms of artwork production is art's answer to the age of plurality.

If war is 'the father of all and king of all', then art is a court jester whose absence makes all that ruling futile.

Painting, tattooing, piercing and modification of one's own body have always been a form of speech – communication with the powers of this world or the beyond. Transient artistic interventions on a transient body.

Art in passing. An eternity of art which is at its strongest when it is born and disappears like life in its transient forms, when it yearns for the moment.

Paradoxically, to become human, the pretender to the position of a human being must first become open to art, become a person open to anything new, different and creative, to play, dance, research and leave traces. The history of humans rising to stand upright is a history of artistic advancement in man

(initially hidden in the mythical, ritual, religious and artisanal). As we began, so we are to go further.

To borrow Albert Manuel and his attempt at bringing us closer to Borges' way of thinking: 'He enjoyed imagining a universe where magazines and books weren't necessary, because a man was as good as any magazine or book, any story or verse. In this universe (eventually described under the title *The Utopia of a Tired Man*), every man was an artist and thus art was no longer necessary: there were no more galleries, libraries, museums; the names of individuals and countries had disappeared, everything was strangely anonymous.'[12]

12 Alberto Manguel, S Borgesom (Zagreb, Prometej, 2004), p. 55

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