INTERVIEW WITH
Vuk Ćosić

by **Jeremy Hight**, online via email correspondence, July 2011

Re-Drawing Boundaries, Leonardo Electronic Almanac New Media Exhibition
Curator: Jeremy Hight
Senior Curators: Lanfranco Aceti and Christiane Paul

How do you see space and data as being related in ways that have not been fully explored?
I see room for action both in psychological and in social/civic oriented art/work: It would be good to spatially juxtapose one's personal history with the history of her ancestors or friends or lovers. We do this all the time by going to cemeteries or old neighborhoods and such. Trips and trippings down memory lanes need better tools. (I went to same high school as my granddad, and edited the same newspaper as my grandmom –fantastic, but this type of awareness could/should be made more present and more shareable as it's a great social object) I also believe that participation in politics would benefit from more mash-ups, translated in real space. Things like Fix My Street come to mind, but there's so much more.

What first brought you to art? What led you to the digital and to playing with forms and code?
My roots are in literature, then I decided that text is more than words and started inspecting what was called Expanded media. Luckily, just at that time

there came the web and all things digital just fell on me. As an archaeologist fascinated by historic avantguards I looked both at the genesis as well as the radical uses of the digital medium. The mix of these two approaches brought me to ASCII that allowed me to play with a crossroads where technology could have gone some other way. This satisfied my love for understanding the past and also the more political part of me.

What are you working on now?

Believe it or not, I am (super-slowly) starting a blog in which I want to order my memories and intuitions about art and internet and society. Oh, and I have all these shows all the time. And I work as some mean web strategist in my tiny country of Slovenia. When it comes to new art, I am playing with the idea to use that blog thing as some sort of open invitation to collaborate. I will be shooting ideas and asking people to work with me on things. Let's see if this materializes. You want to work with me on that?

What state is digital art currently in? How is this different from 10 years ago? 20?

I admit I haven't seen much of it lately. I refused to produce new work for each iteration of the regular festivals and have gladly used the opportunity to evacuate. Right now I am missing the constant exposure to anxious and passionate co-conspirators in new media revolution and your question makes me nervous. I am mad now. If I would be looking around for valuable new work I would be searching for art about rules and about choice.
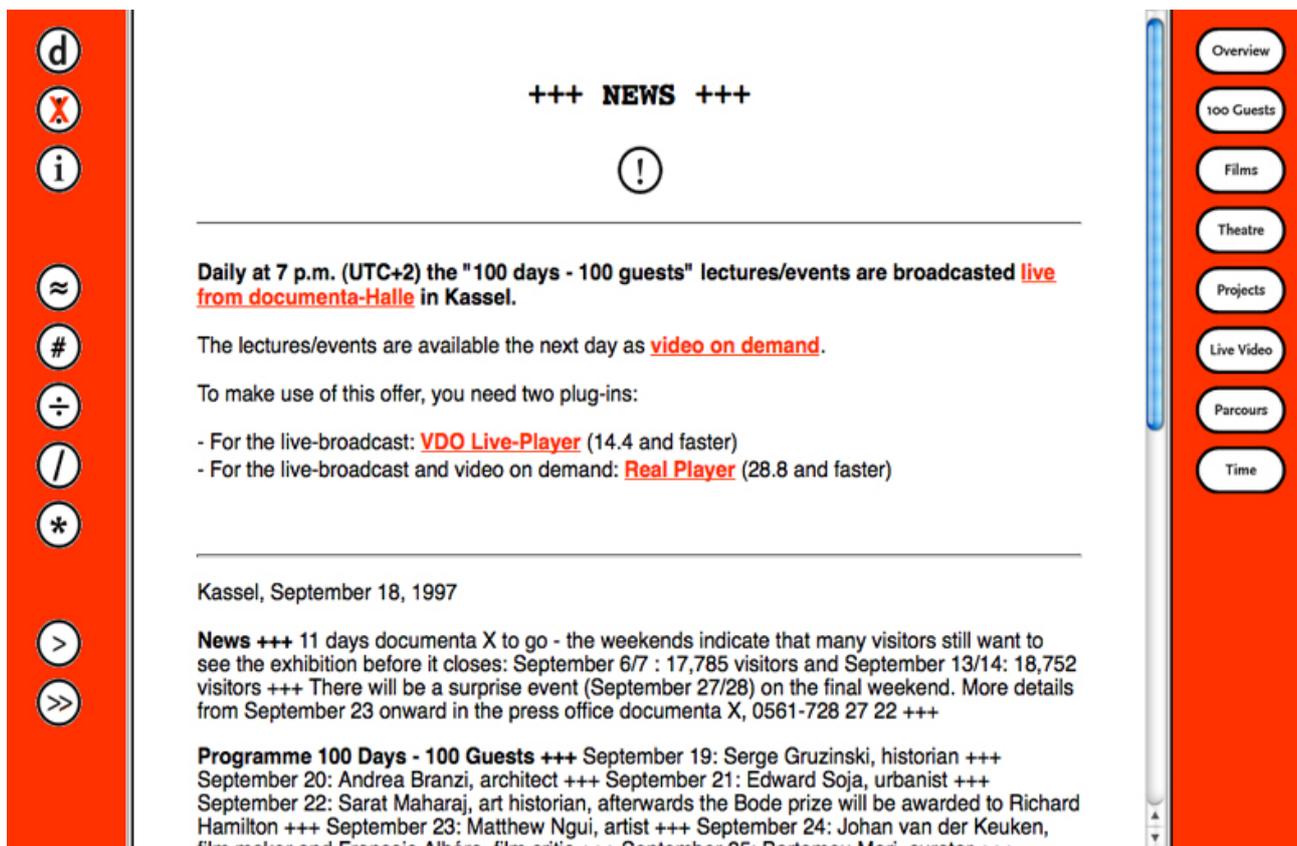
What architectures are inherent within code and coding that are still ripest for exploration in art?

All code contains both promises: it can either inhibit something important in ways humans live, work and play or it can enhance some of that. Artists are usually good at identifying this in unexpected ways, and some of the best new media art is also classifiable as code comments. My particular type of new media radicals is usually sensitive to threats to some perceived human right or other –I really hate seeing how under influence of marketing language

the humanity develops tolerance for lock-in, walled gardens and narrowing of creative sphere. I like to think about this as of irreconcilable clash between selfishness and Tikkun Olam, an ancient OS wide feature from judaism (fix the world you live in, go wikipedia this). There are people that create and fix the world, then there are those that see that can be done and create stuff to suite only them , and finally those that create nothing but just use or grab what was created. Artists fall in all these categories and I guess you can see which I prefer to others. One other angle from which I like to think of your question is the avoidance of the industry: I have seen too many friends fall in the trap of becoming testimonials for software. Our duty is to look at adjacent possible worlds (to use a concept by Steven Johnson) and thus expand human experience, everything short of that is a waste of artists brain cycles.

Is mapping changing or our understanding of its functionality and potential as well as how to read space(s)?

The map is a good interface for knowledge, and since it became interactive and participatory we are definitely going to have to learn new meanings of the word mapping. Humanity seems to be sliding into some hybrid epoch where we will be using a visual layer as main insight into more knowledge that may be conveyed as text or video or choreography or whatnot. Abundance and consequent anxiety with content overload is pushing us towards knowledge interfaces that are helpful but bring the risk of what Eli Pariser calls Filter Bubble. I like the map as interface because it makes it difficult not to notice areas that are not your immediate focus, and thus we are having a chance to keep the public sphere alive. This I believe is the main area for aligning our ethical compasses while creating new tools.

+++ NEWS +++

(!)

Daily at 7 p.m. (UTC+2) the "100 days - 100 guests" lectures/events are broadcasted <u>live from documenta-Halle</u> in Kassel.

The lectures/events are available the next day as <u>video on demand</u>.

To make use of this offer, you need two plug-ins:

- For the live-broadcast: **<u>VDO Live-Player</u>** (14.4 and faster)
- For the live-broadcast and video on demand: **<u>Real Player</u>** (28.8 and faster)

Kassel, September 18, 1997

News +++ 11 days documenta X to go - the weekends indicate that many visitors still want to see the exhibition before it closes: September 6/7 : 17,785 visitors and September 13/14: 18,752 visitors +++ There will be a surprise event (September 27/28) on the final weekend. More details from September 23 onward in the press office documenta X, 0561-728 27 22 +++

Programme 100 Days - 100 Guests +++ September 19: Serge Gruzinski, historian +++ September 20: Andrea Branzi, architect +++ September 21: Edward Soja, urbanist +++ September 22: Sarat Maharaj, art historian, afterwards the Bode prize will be awarded to Richard Hamilton +++ September 23: Matthew Ngui, artist +++ September 24: Johan van der Keuken, film maker and François Albéra, film critic +++ September 25: Bartomeu Marí, curator +++

Overview
100 Guests
Films
Theatre
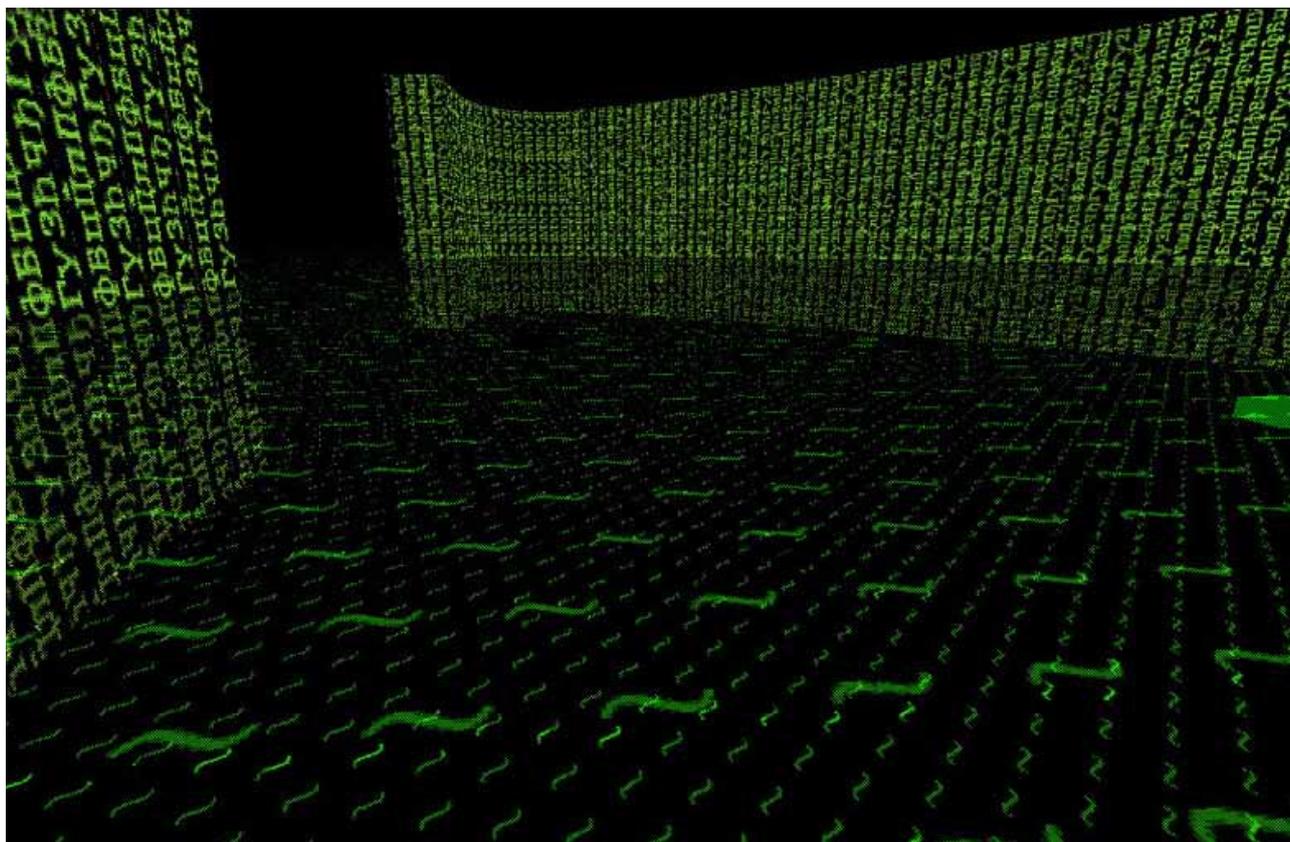Projects
Live Video
Parcours
Time

Documenta done, 1997, Vuk Cosic. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

Documenta done (1997)

Slovenian-based Net artist Vuk Cosic shocked the art world when he created a complete copy of a Web site of Documenta, a major international art show held every four years in the German village of Kassel. The "theft," announced only hours before the closing of the official Web site of Documenta X, was officially denounced as an infringement of material copyright. The organizers of Documenta had planned to close the Web site and sell the pages as a CD-ROM.
Gregor Muir, Leonardo, Volume 35, Number 5, October 2002, p. 508
http://www.ljudmila.org/~vuk/dx/

ASCII Unreal, 1998, Vuk Cosic. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

ASCII Unreal (1998)

For his level of "Unreal", Vuk Cosic removed all the concrete elements of the three-dimensional space, replacing them with surfaces consisting of letters of the Cyrillic alphabet. The work, created for the "Synreal" exhibition of the Viennese T0 media art project, thus demonstrates the absurdity of the perfectionism with which three-dimensional reality is represented in most first-person shooter games. At the same time, it confronts current high-end computer graphics with the history of computer screen display: until the nineteen-nineties, standard computers had an interface limited to green letters on a black background. As a member of the ASCII Art Ensemble (together with Walter van der Cruijsen and Luka Frelih) he developed works at the end of the nineteen-nineties that transformed moving and stationary images into wastelands of letters (ASCII is the standard computer character set). Thereby they transported into the art scene a practice of hacking that dated from a time when computers did not as yet have graphical interfaces, linking these with a tradition of scripts and visual or "concrete" poetry that dates back to antiquity.

http://www.ljudmila.org/~vuk/ascii/unreal/

ASCII video link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8nr9A8Tq9GQ
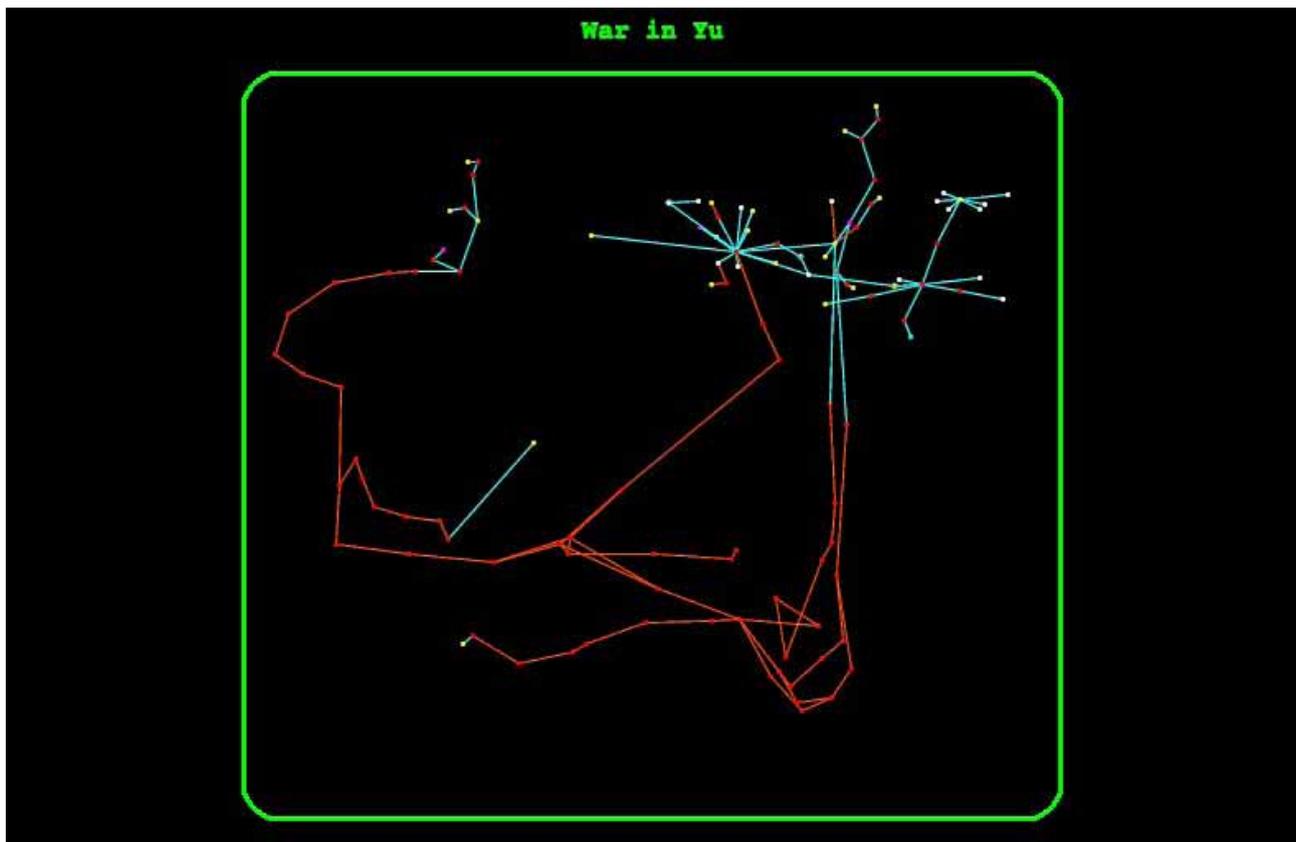
Warmap / exYu, 1999, Vuk Cosic. All images and video material are the copyright of the artist and cannot be used or altered in any way without the express consent of the artist

Warmap / exYu (1999)

The animation is visualising the changes in Yugoslav internet infrastructure between May 1st and 10th 1999 according to the routing data gathered by Bill Cheswick from Bell Labs and Hal Burch from CMU.

http://www.ljudmila.org/~vuk/warmov/

Artist's statement

For all my life I have been attracted to unorthodox creation and usage of writing. Every attempt to explore the space beyond text in lines, or between two pages in the same leaf, or between the letter and the paper that hold's it was much more meaningful then the most skillfully described night dress in French nineteenth century novel or then an existential crisis in the soul of a more recent literary hero.

Today we are increasingly describing the world through the metaphor of an ecosystem and I dare claim that net art was a serious pioneering investigation of this direction.

Bio

Vuk Ćosić co-founded of Ljudmila– a digital media lab for artists in Slovenia and of the ASCII Art Ensemble, Nettime, Syndicate, 7-11, and Ljubljana Digital Media Lab. Pioneer in net art and new media art as well as hacktivism. Well known for running ASCII (American Standard Code for Information Interchange) variants of iconic film scenes thus transforming code, image and pixel into a collision and immediate commentary. Exhibitions include Venice Biennial; MIT Medialab and many other museums and festivals internationally.