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Dislocations: Questions of War, Place, Trauma and Context in the Transmediations of Art on Public Giant Screens

The habit of searching within a word for multiple meanings, exploring its multiple facets and etymology is an hermeneutic process that I have inherited from Professor Pino Paioni at the International Center for Semiotics and Linguistics at the University of Urbino.

It is with this semiotic and linguistic approach that I had been researching the possible implications for the word dislocation to develop the underpinning concepts of the exhibition program by the same title on the Media Facade of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (Muzet) in collaboration with Kasa Gallery and part of the 12th Istanbul Bienali’s Official Parallel Program and of nonau2011 Istanbul.

The Open Work, which although mainly referencing textual work has ever since also been applied to conceptualizations and aesthetic processes in the visual arts as well. From an aesthetic and philosphical perspective Eco was codifying practices and approaches that, derived from Modernism and at times in an antagonistic relationship to it, were seeking, in a post-modernist rhizomic approach, ways to supersede structural formats in an attempt to better understand and capture the complex reality of a world in constant evolution and transformation.

Both of these definitions with their implications became part of the conceptual underpinning of this exhibition. Dislocations was conceived as a representation of the displacement in the layers of meanings and conceptualizations of the artworks as well as a displacement of the whole artwork in a different media context which could and would feed back into the artworks and their curatorial frameworks.

This approach was based on the consideration that the contemporary work of art is no longer a static object or an isolated form that is not subjected to the influence of the technological context within which it operates or to the cultural context that surrounds it.

The openness of the artwork to other influences was explained by Umberto Eco in the seminal book The Open Work, which although it is mainly referencing textual work has ever since also been applied to conceptualizations and aesthetic processes in the visual arts as well. From an aesthetic and philosphical perspective Eco was codifying practices and approaches that, derived from Modernism and at times in an antagonistic relationship to it, were seeking, in a post-modernist rhizomic approach, ways to supersede structural formats in an attempt to better understand and capture the complex reality of a world in constant evolution and transformation.

The Fluxus’ aesthetic and process based methodologies and the intermedia approach to art by Dick Higgins codified intermedia interactions in the field of art. The intermedia approach can also be considered as evolutionary, not in the framework of ‘art evolving from better to worse or vice versa’, but as reflecting the aesthetic, conceptual and technological media developments in art.

Therefore, process based and intermedia art could be considered as evolutionary if it reflects technological, aesthetic and socio-political contexts.

The evolutionary element I was interested in and that was reflected within the program of Dislocations was a multifaceted complex matrix of all of the above contexts. In the exhibition there were three main forces: the first focus area was based on the influence of context in the understanding and deciphering of the artwork by the audience; the second was in the transformation of the artwork itself, which would have to adapt to a different medium and a different technological materiality and restraints in order to take advantage of the new strengths that large screens would provide to the artwork; the third was based on the conceptual strengths underpinning the artwork, enabling it to absorb and subsume layers of socio-political meanings even if contradictory.

When talking of evolution in art it is only in the framework of the ‘evolution of art for art’s sake’ and to analyze how an artist would take advantage of a medium that did not exist when the artwork was initially conceived. This is in order to understand how the artist (or the curator) would take advantage of a different cultural context that would add layers upon layers of new meaning and understanding to the artwork and the artists’ conceptualizations.

The material and conceptual transformation of a previously created artwork, in order to respond to the material restraints and opportunities of a new technology, can be best defined as transmediation, where the technological and the conceptual elements have to be redefined in order to present a new work that is still the same work. It is a process of artistic and aesthetic translation that...
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DISLOCATION

CATALOG VOL 18 NO 2

INTRODUCTION

for the program on the Media Façade at MSU as an experiment in transmediation. The program was also part of another larger curatorial concept – the dislocation and re-allocation of artworks as part of focus foused biennials. The Dislocations show, as part of the 12th Istanbul Biennial, was at the same time linked to and disjointed from the events of the biennial in Istanbul, responding to a globalized perspective of new-media frameworks of participations under meta-umbrella events.

The artworks in Dislocations were events scheduled on a weekly basis that coincided with the 12th Istanbul Biennial and that were presented in the press package of the biennial. The artworks were physically inaccessible to the audience present in Istanbul, but nevertheless present across the Internet and widely publicized.

The Media Façade of MSU in Zagreb was transformed each week during a period of five weeks into a different container. First it became a box containing and restricting women’s sense of identity, existence and upward social mobility. The idea was to create a trap through a media framework imposing a constant existential gender war reflecting women’s battles for equality (Songül Boyraz, 1967-2004). Then the façade was transformed into an enormous data crunching machine of a war field – with Charles Csuri’s Random War (1967-2011) – presenting the audience with a ‘type writer’ cascading effect of my personal Facebook friends, being killed in action, being awarded medals, being reported as missing or killed in action as well as surviving. Lev Manovich himself, in this process of transmediation, was registered in the artwork on the Media Façade as dead.

With David Cotterrell the museum became a Theatre (2008-2011). Then the façade was transformed into an enormous data crunching machine of a war field – with Charles Csuri’s Random War (1967-2011) – presenting the audience with a ‘type writer’ cascading effect of my personal Facebook friends, being killed in action, being awarded medals, being reported as missing or killed in action as well as surviving. Lev Manovich himself, in this process of transmediation, was registered in the artwork on the Media Façade as dead.

The complexity of Dislocations and its multilayered structure was both challenging and rewarding. I was able, with the support of the artists, to showcase artistic practices in which the work of the artist is no longer exhausted in the creation of the artwork itself. Even if there is a moment in which the artwork is ‘complete’, the conceptualization, engagement and re-thinking process of the curatorial practice, artistic process and audiences’ engagements continue to evolve through the process of interrogating the artwork and by revisiting the images. The audience developed a practice of viewing the Media Façade of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, in order to discover new images transforming the public exhibitions into social forms of engagement that could be consumed as ‘drive by art’, entertainment or through more complex interactions based on commentaries and deeper engagements with the images that were being displayed in the public space.

The choice of a transmediation process of already existing works for giant screens was influenced by today’s constant presence of multiple media outlets – from giant screens to iPads – that increasingly require a process of re-adaptation or media specific translation: transmediation as defined by Lev Manovich or Henry Jenkins.

The process of transmediation takes into account the media’s language specificity from the initial conception of the artwork and could be compared to the creative process of translation of poetic text or better still to the adaptation of a literary text to theater, film and tv.

Transmediation is the complex process that transcends the simple technological transfer – or re-mediation – and requires a reinvention of the text and/or the artwork. It can be described as a transposition of the text and/or the artwork and these new media based spaces have technological requirements, media language specificities and are located within a physical reality that redefines the audience’s engagement while layering new
local contextual meanings upon the artwork itself, further enriching or problematizing the artworks’ conceptual underpinnings.

The contemporary art locus – in the multi-layered interpretation of Henri Lefebvre – is a space where these technological challenges are a reflection of social conflicts and of the struggle of the artist and the curator to respond to the contradictions and demands that the new spaces – both virtual and physical – impose upon the artwork.

Dislocations with its program and its artists wanted to analyze the complexity of contemporary artistic interactions in public spaces. It also aimed to showcase the technological challenges as well as the importance of the curatorial role for art that uses contemporary technology that is based on the understanding of space and of the transmediation processes as basic tools to build an aesthetic partnership between the artist and the curator. This is a partnership that in the context of contemporary multiple technologies is similar in its methodology to historical literary partnerships between writers and translators (who often are themselves writers in the language they translate into).

Also I am grateful to Özden Şahin, who continues to support me in my multiple endeavors, and John Francenutti who patiently encourages me in my creative and curatorial processes.

The role of the curator becomes increasingly that of a creative partner in order to respond to the challenges that media and physical spaces thrust upon the artwork and its creator.

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Lanfranco Aceti

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I would like to thank for their support for the exhibition Dislocations Tihomir Milovac at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb, who co-curated this program with me, making it possible, and Bige Odar at the Istanbul Cultural and Art Foundation (iwv) for her support during the 12th Istanbul Biennial. To all the artists who so graciously gave their time and effort go my heartfelt thanks.

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References and Notes


2. An entire chapter is dedicated in Eco’s book to The Open Work in the Visual Arts, “Informal art” is open in that it proposes a wider range of interpretive possibilities, a configuration of stimuli whose substantial indeterminacy allows for a number of possible readings, a ‘constellation’ of elements that lend themselves to all sorts of interpretative relationships.” Umberto Eco, The Open Work, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 84.


4. Thomas Hare, Evolution of the Arts And Other Theories of Culture History (Ohio: The Cleveland Museum of Art, 1953).


7. “Influenced by Buckminster Fuller’s spheres, VanDerBeek had the idea for a spherical theater where people would lie down and experience movies all around them. Floating multi-images would replace straight one-dimensional film projection. From 1957 on, VanDerBeek produced film sequences for the Movie-Drome, which he started building in 1953. His intention went far beyond the building itself and moved into the surrounding biosphere, the cosmos, the brain and even extraterrestrial intelligence.” Jürgen Claus, “Stan VanDerBeek: An Early Space Art Pioneer,” in Leonardo 95, no. 5 (2012): 409.

8. “At one end of this skyline dominated by important works we observed the emergence of everyday life, the revelation of its hidden possibilities; at the opposite end everyday life reappears but in a different perspective [...] everyday life becomes less and less bearable, less and less interesting; yet the manager creates an interest in this intolerable tediousness simply by telling it...” Henri Lefebvre, Everyday Life in the Modern World, trans. Sacha Rabinowitch (London: The Athlone Press, 2000), 11.
The Rule of Emergency

The tradition of the oppressed teaches us that the state of emergency in which we live is not the exception but the rule.

When first viewing UT (HANNA) (2011) for the Media Façade of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb (MSU), there was one striking element: the piece was about a young woman trapped in an invisible box with no possibility of escape. There was an emergence happening in the video and it was an emergence in the sense of a pressing need for help as well as an emergence of things arising unexpectedly to the surface and needing to be acknowledged immediately.

The idea of transforming the museum into a trap was something that sounded exciting from a curatorial point of view. It was as if the artwork itself was trapped and could not escape. For someone like me, who has argued for a more participatory approach to curating within a museum space, that was perhaps a way to reinforce the idea that works of art are not static objects and that preservation and conservation are not the sole criteria for the display of an artwork. UT (HANNA) was something more than just a curatorial analysis of the roles of the artwork and audience within the museum space. It was an artwork about gender and media wars and the role that media play in the redefinition of women’s identities who are then obliged to fulfill the role within contemporary societies across the globe. The Media Façade became a skin, a film, a pellicle, a visualizing yet invisible material that rendered visible alienation, frustration, oppression, fear and claustrophobia. UT (HANNA) was an artwork that elicited responses on multiple levels and the idea to split the screens of the Media Façade at MSU and multiply the same video with the same person spoke of a universal condition from which all women, once reduced to human flesh, have to escape from.

Gender wars, or perhaps the war on women, embodied in the biological and cultural make up of being a female body, became one of the aspects that underpinned the artworks and their curatorial framework, while the video, in an apparently simplistic media structure, questioned the validity itself of mediated representations which over and over again reduce women to objects of observation, trapped within pre-constituted frameworks that are difficult, nearly impossible or absolutely impossible to break and overcome.

The piece was stratified and rich with multiple meanings that offered to the viewers the sense of someone screaming for help, trapped within the box of the museum, that passersby could only stare at.

The Media Façade became a giant replica of TV interactions and habituation with the multiplied faces of Hanna attempting to escape from the locked cage of the Media Façade’s visible and invisible media walls. It was like establishing an umbilical relationship between the video and the viewers passing by in the street that stood looking intently and repeatedly at the images and that saw the actor on the screen but also a real woman trapped behind the façade of screens of the museum. “I thought it was a recording of someone inside the museum, broadcasting live onto the screens…” said some of the viewers.

UT (HANNA) as an artwork elicited multiple relationships and frameworks of engagement. The abolition of distance between the viewer and the video generated a pathos of distance. The relationship between the viewer as an impotent spectator and the character in the video as an impotent actor questioned the validity of the mediated representation in which both viewers and actors became victims and spectators of each other, executioners of each other’s mediated existential condition.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

2. The artwork is also known as Untitled Hanna.
SÖNÜL BOYRAZ, UT (HANNA) (2011). MEDIA FACADE OF THE MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART, ZAGREB. PHOTO BY TOMISLAV ŠMIDER.
SONGÜL BOYRAZ

SONGÜL BOYRAZ, UT (HANNA) (2011)

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SONGÜL BOYRAZ


SONGÜL BOYRAZ


PHOTO BY TOMISLAV ŠMIDEK
Notes on the Author

Lanfranco Aceti works as an academic, artist and curator. He is Visiting Professor at Goldsmiths College, Department of Art and Computing, London; teaches Contemporary Art and Digital Culture at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Sabanci University, Istanbul; and is Editor in Chief of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac (the MIT Press, Leonardo journal and iCAT). He is the Gallery Director at Koza Gallery in Istanbul and worked as the Artistic Director and Conference Chair for iCAT 2010 Istanbul. He has a Ph.D. from Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, University of the Arts London. His work has been published in Leonardo, Routeledge and Art Inquiry and his interdisciplinary research focuses on the intersection between digital arts, visual culture and new media technologies. Lanfranco Aceti is specialized in contemporary art, inter-semiotic translations between classic media and new media, contemporary digital hybridization processes, Avant-garde film and new media studies and their practice-based applications in the field of fine arts.

He has worked as an Honorary Lecturer at the Department of Computer Science, Virtual Reality Environments at University College London. He has exhibited works at the Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) in London and done digital interventions at TATE Modern, The Venice Biennale, MoMA, Neue Nationalgalerie, the iCat and the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

Previously an Honorary Research Fellow at the Slade School of Fine Art, Dr. Aceti has also worked as an Honorary Research Fellow at the Slade School of Fine Art, London. His work has been published in Leonardo, Routeledge and Art Inquiry and his interdisciplinary research focuses on the intersection between digital arts, visual culture and new media technologies.

Notes on the Artists

Sorin Stanciu studied Sculpture at Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, Istanbul and Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. In many of her works she deals with the human body and its fragmentation. Closely connected with the space created by the medium (video and photography) the concentration on the pars pro toto without any accessories and deception is able to tell in detail about the brutality and tragedy inherent in everyday situations.

Jeff Conkey is a media artist and painter specializing in 3D content development and interactive interface design. His recent projects include media production and technical systems for the u.S. Pavilion, Venice Biennale of Architecture, pilot asset creation for Bark Bark Studios, and time-based construction animations for building information modeling. His work has been exhibited nationally including the Atlanta Biennale and the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago. He attended The Rhode Island School of Design and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from the University of New York at Purchase.

David Cotterrell is an installation artist working across varied media including video, audio, interactive media, artificial intelligence, device control and hybrid technology. His work exhibits political, social and behavioral analyses of the environments and contexts, which he and his work inhabit. David is Professor of Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University, has been a consultant to strategic masterplans, cultural and public art policy for urban regeneration, healthcare and growth areas.

Carlos Cruz is best known for pioneering the field of computer graphics, computer animation and digital fine art, creating the first computer art in 1956. Between 1971 and 1987, while a senior professor at the Ohio State University, Charles Cruz founded the Computer Graphics Research Group, the Ohio Super Computer Graphics Project, and the Advanced Computing Center for Art and Design.

Mathias Fuchs has pioneered in the field of artistic use of games and is a leading theorician on Game Art and Games Studies. He is an artist, musician, media critic and currently Senior Lecturer at the University of Salford. Since 2011 he holds a visiting Professorship at the University of Potdam. During the last 3 decades he presented sound- and media-installations. Since 2004 Mathias Fuchs’ work focuses on Creative Games for Museums, Urban Planning and Theatre Performances.

Mathias Fuchs studied computer science in Erlangen and Vienna University of Technology, and composition in Universität für Musik und darstellende Kunst Wien, Vienna and in US, Finland and Stockholm.

Danielle Roney is an artist working with hybridization, immersive environments and interactive media architecture in the context of global identity structures. She attended the University of Georgia in sculpture and digital media and has held studios in Los Angeles and Beijing. Roney is currently working with transnational spatial narratives and the migrant human condition through interactive architectural facades.

SONGOL Boyraz studied Sculpture at Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, Istanbul and Academy of fine Arts Vienna. In many of her works she deals with the human body and its fragmentation. Closely connected with the space created by the medium (video and photography) the concentration on the pars pro toto without any accessories and deception is able to tell in detail about the brutality and tragedy inherent in everyday situations.

AnShu is a media artist and painter specializing in 3D content development and interactive interface design. His recent projects include media production and technical systems for the u.S. Pavilion, Venice Biennale of Architecture, pilot asset creation for Bark Bark Studios, and time-based construction animations for building information modeling. His work has been exhibited nationally including the Atlanta Biennale and the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago. He attended The Rhode Island School of Design and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from the University of New York at Purchase.

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Dislocations, an art program of Re-contextualization and Transformation, seeks the reification of Jennings, Boyraz, Cotterrell, Csuri, Fuchs and Gallagher in
12 Eylül–16 Ekim 2011

Dislocations presents artworks that are engaged by acts of war and de-contextualized elements that are force.

For its world premiere Dislocations will also introduce re-interpretations, misinterpretations and unrelated globalized stereotypes. Dislocations presents artworks that are inspired by or reference acts of war and dislocated realities that we live in.

About Songül Boyraz

Songül Boyraz studied Fine Arts at Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts, Istanbul and Academy of Fine Arts Vienna. In many of her works she deals with the human body and its representation. ChurchgetConfigured as a set for a film and invented photography—the construction on the paste paper miniatures, an accentuated and deceptive, is able to seduce about the beauty and mystery inherent in surrealist experiences.

About Danielle Roney

Danielle Roney is an artist working with hybridization, compressed environments and interactive media. She attended the University of Oregon as sculpture and digital media and has held residencies at Los Angeles and Beijing. Roney is currently working with international spatial narratives and the emergent human condition through interactive environmental spaces.

About Mathias Fuchs

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About Chuck Csuri

Chuck Csuri is known for pioneering the fields of computer graphics, computer animation and digital fine art, creating the first computer art in 1961. Between 1965 and 2011, while a senior professor at the University of Illinois Chicago, he founded the Chicago Center for Computer Graphics Research Group, the U.S. Supercomputer Graphics Project, and the Artswork Computing Center for Art and Design.

About Jeff Conefry

Jeff Conefry specializes in new media and groups presenting in film, theatre and performance and creates immersive environments and interactive systems for the U.S. Federal, British and Japanese Governments, and main composites for Rock Tank Studios, and team based construction environments for building interoperability models. His work has been presented at the Venice Biennale for Architecture, the Smithsonian, and the Museum of Contemporary Photography. Chicago. He attended The Rhine Island School of Design and holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Painting from the University of New York at Purchase.

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David Cotterrell is a media artist and painter specializing in 3D content development and interactive interface technology. His work explores political, social and behavioral analysis of the environment and context, which is the basis for the work exhibited in David’s Portfolio of Fine Art at Marlborough Oynoven. Cotterrell has a love for alternative art and design technology, and has created an art policy for urban environments, Buchanan and global areas.

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ILEA2011 ISTANBUL
Dislocations

The program, initiated by Serial Colonial, Luminaflora and Thirteen Million, is in collaboration with and supported by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Istanbul, Baroda, Health Europa and New City.

For its second year, Dislocations will also introduce their work to the world at large. Reader’s digest, the new translated and re-worked print publication by the digital pioneer Chris Cox, inspired by a 2009 printed edition by the same label.

The program’s themes are interrelated: the control and control of control, control of the control. Dislocations presents programs and events inspired by or reference acts of war and the dislocated bodies of the past.

ILEA2011 Turkish and international artists present: Dislocations’ visual program at the Istanbul Biennial, with performances and installations, which turns the perspectives of New Babylon Garden (Carnegie, Chishui, Mathias Pitsch and Delia Goffe).

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Geometrics of the Sublime

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