

Project: EXCAVATING THE FUTURE

ENCOUNTERS OF ARTISTS, SCIENTISTS, HISTORIANS, AND FUTUROLOGISTS

Virtual Man: Towards an Archeology and Future of Moving Pictures

Prague, December 4-5, 2001

Organized by: Goethe Institute Prag, Center for Contemporary Arts Prague.

As contemporary society's dependency on new communication technologies increases, we need to understand where are its roots and what the ramifications of its uses are. The changes of appearance of an image, dominant function of movement and increasing impact of various forms screen – an interface between the viewer and the image - are among the most important transformations, that the recent development of digital technology has brought to the concepts of perception.

The classical concept of the screen defined more or less stable and invariable the point of view and perspective, while the new computing apparatus started to dissolve the clear distinction between the look, the image and the object, as well as the border between the digital processes in the machine and the processes in the “wet ware” of the Mind. Technology allows applying elements of duration. Admits “animation”, to generate originally static signals, data, images, and use of sophisticated self-generating feedback, which did open the whole new territory of audiovisual forms and experiences. The image creates still a context for the reality, but abundance of technical images - since their invention 200 years ago and our extensive exposure to them caused a deep shift in our conceptualization and perception models of the world.

In his dissertation work published in Prague in 1818, natural scientist Jan Evangelista Purkyne (Purkinje) was among the first to observe that we see an object a fraction of a second later, after it disappears from our visual field. The discovery of this perceptual phenomenon, which was described in a greater detail by Peter Mark Roget in 1824 and called *persistence of vision*, has laid the foundation of many technical devices and innovative means which have turned still images into moving pictures, including cinema, television, as well as to digital audiovisual technologies that has been transforming the present world.

Electronic media increasingly influence our everyday life as they provide us with new possibilities and change the way of life and our identity. This fastest growing field necessitates its self-examination, a reflection of its historical and theoretical concepts and preconceptions, raising questions such as follows:

1. How are our ways of looking, perceiving and approaching reality changed in respect to more and more sophisticated technical apparatus, constructed to record, scan and generate or simulate images, audiovisual artificial environments and situations?

2. How does the transformation of cognitive models contribute to the evolution of electronic media and, conversely, what is the role of digital technology in cognitive science?

3. How is the rapid growth of electronic media embedded in history?

4. How do cultural traditions condition the use and development of new media on the one hand, and how does new media reconfigure these traditions and our notion of history on the other?

5. How do different timeframes of discourse; social, political and geographical determine our reflection of technology?

6. What kinds of synthesis, dialogues and models of collaboration between scientists and artists have been, and are, constructive and what are the platforms, goals and framing issues of such inter-mediations?

The conference seeks to confront the latest findings of cognitive science with the present development of electronic media and their aesthetic explorations by foregrounding self-reflectivity and historicity in these closely related and yet different fields.

The project *Virtual Man* is prepared in the recent context of the Flusser Media symposium series organized by Goethe Institute Prag between 1992 and 1999.

Organizers:

The Goethe Institute and the Center for Contemporary Arts in Prague.

Initiators: Jaroslav Andel – Art Historian, Curator, New York

Miloš Vojtěchovský - Art Historian, Curator, Prague,

Michael de la Fontaine, Program Director of Goethe Institut Prag,

Prof. Michael Bielický – Multimedia Artist.

Collaborating Institutions:

Department of Communication Studies of The Charles University Prague, The Faculty of Fine Arts of The Technical University Brno, The Academy of Fine Arts Prague, The National Museum of Technology in Prague, The National Museum Prague, The Center for Culture and Technology Budapest, The Institute for Advanced Studies at Charles University, The National Film Institute Prague, Center for Culture and Communication Budapest, Institute for Film and Sociology, Center for Old and new Media Amsterdam, and additional Czech and foreign initiatives, individuals and institutions.

Invited speakers:

Prof. Lev Manovich – Professor at the Visual Arts Department, University of California, San Diego

PhDr. Miklos Peternak – Art Historian and Director of the Center for Culture and Communication

Prof. Siegfried Zielinski – Media Historian and Director of the Mediaschule, Cologne

Prof. Friedrich Kittler – Humboldt-Universität, Berlin

Prof. Tom Gunning – Art History Department, New York University

Prof. Erkki Huthamo – Media theorist, Helsinki, Finland, Los Angeles

Prof. Christian Huebler / Knowbotic Research – Swiss-German Artist Group

Doc. Jiri Fiala – Faculty of Mathematics, Charles University, Prague

Prof. Ivan Havel – Director, Institute for Advanced Studies at Charles University

Prof. Michael Bielický - Mediaartist, Academy of Fine Arts, Prague

Carsten Holler – Scientist and Artist, Berlin

Roy Ascott. - Artist and Theorist, CAIIA Institute, UK

David Blair – Multimedia Artist and Filmmaker, Paris

Prof. Richard Kluszczyński – Art historian and Curator Warsaw, Poland

Harun Farocki - Film director and Media theorist

Prof. Michael Taussig, Columbia University, NY

Woody Vasulka - Media artist and initiator of the Santa Fe Institute for Art and Science

Bohuslav Blažek – Media theorist, Prague

Prof. Richard Jung – System Theorist, Dept. of General Systems, Academy of Science Prague

Miroslav Petříček – Philosopher, Institute for Advanced Studies at Charles University

Andrej Smirnow – Artist and Director of The Teremin Center, Moscow

Richard Kriesche – Artist and Theorist, Hochschule fuer Gestaltung, Germany

Bruce Sterling - Artist and Theorist, Paris

Goals of the Project

The project *Excavation the Future* takes an important part of the extended activities of the Center for Contemporary Art in Prague. It is a result of serious interest and long-term search for broader applications of art in the society and its interdisciplinary fields. *Excavation the Future* was set up in the framework of several projects, that FCCA organized or participated, in the recent years. Especially the first New Media Exhibition *Orbis Fictus* (1995), active participation in the series of *Flusser Media Symposia* in Prague and programs related to the Media laboratory founded by the FCCA three years ago. Organizers hope to help establish new international connections and collaborations between individuals from different professions and backgrounds, which would continue in future. The conference will be documented in small brochure and in more extended form on a website.