Vuk Ćosić

FUCK THE SYSTSEM! AND THE ILLITERATE!
Conversation with Eva and Franco Mattes aka 0100101110101101.ORG
Hi guys.
Aksioma asked us to do this text performance so let’s do it. They are nice and who are we to refuse, right? It’s for the little brochure they are going to actually print on paper and give to visitors of your solo show next month, so I guess this describes the readers and viewers of our performance. So, fuck the illiterate, and also fuck those who are not coming to see the show. Are we feeling the same here?

The way this is going to work is that I will keep typing on my machine until I have nothing more to say or ask and then I will send you the file. You then just go and insert your reactions. They may be answers next to the sentences I finish with a question mark, or they can be just reactions, commentaries, and corrections of pompous stuff I might say here. OK? (aha, I will insert paragraph breaks after question marks so it’s easier for you).

While typing your stuff, use some other font or size or color, and we will insist with the gallery people that they fix the readability.

If you don’t mind I would like to talk to you about your work. I think it’s a good topic mainly because it’s good work, but also because it is what is expected from us by the gallery. Or maybe not. Maybe artists should not comply this
directly. Maybe we should do something entirely different and in this way subvert the sick art bureaucracy. But on the other hand, Aksioma are our friends, fellow artists who are struggling just like we are.

When we started making art we didn’t know anybody and we had nothing to loose, and we hated the sytem. This brought to some serious fun, but also to tragic consequences. Once a curator got fired and a festival canceled, all because of an online performance of ours. When that happened I felt terrible, I promised I would never mess with institutions again, because there’s real people behind them. But that feeling didn’t last long. I’m older now, and somehow part of this art systsem, but I still don’t like it.

At this moment I am a little confuzed. I would like to ask you for direction of our asinchronous text performance but by the time you will answer I will already have typed very many lines of text according to my own compass. So to ask you this question is maybe polite and fair but it’s also completely irrelevant since it will not influence anything. Yes, deffinitively forget that question about conformism of the artist that was implied above. It will be easier to type and – as a matter of fact – to exist as artists.

Whew, I pulled out of this one. Let me go back to you work now. I like your work, but you know that. That is not new to you. We met fifteen years ago and we like each others stuff ever since. Actually this is such a boring statement that I really feel sick right now. Dammit, the power of written word can sometimes be truly overwhelming. Maybe I will just go back and delete the shitty cliché about mutual adoration. Jesus. I mean really. All right, I am better now, let’s see.

I just realized we were already collaborating with you even before meeting you, actually, we were the same person: Luther Blissett, the multiple name, pretty much like Anonymous nowadays.

Anyway, we were the same person and that’s why we met in Ljubljana. In the summer of ’98 we were traveling through “east Europe”, sleeping for a month in an old station wagon. We even got reported for vagrancy near Ljubljana.
We were organizing our Darko Maver prank, and we dreamed of meeting the NSK - we are huge fans. But instead we met you.

This is probably the right time to thank you, or blame you, for what we’ve been doing ever since ‘cause that hot and sticky night you changed our lives by showing us Net Art. I was so excited I couldn’t sleep, I had been reading about Dada and Futurism and the Beat Generation and all that stuff and there I finally “met” the avant-garde, it’s like meeting Marinetti in 1908 or Johnny Rotten in 1977. We dropped everything we were doing and decided Net Art was the thing that needed to be done. Probably the biggest mistake in our life.

Your stuff makes me think of human condition. Your video collages make me think of fringe behaviour that is not fringe at all but is simply invisible. And possibly the good question here is whether you are getting the impression that people are revolted by you or by what they are finding out about themselves. Would you care to elaborate on that please? (insert approx 1000 characters here, Aksioma suggested the length of our piece, so be helpful. Or – again – feel free to simply skip the gallery expectations. Be yourself and all that…)

We’re not very creative, that’s probably why we’re not so good at making art. But what they say we are really good at is making people upset. I’d love to be able to say here that it’s because they see themselves in our works, like some kind of mirror, but most of the times they are just angry at us. Plain and simple.

In the Freedom video piece you go around a very awfull shooting game and ask those kind people not to kill you because you are an artist. I was of course very amused by the idea, it reminded me of writers and painters that were killed in WWII, and actually it reminded me of my poet friend Milan who was killed in Dubrovnik in 91 and of my photographer friend Pavo who ended the same way. Do you get this kind of emotional blackmail often? Do people attack you as soulless bastards who seek easy PR effects on the backs of other people’s suffering and shit like that? This would be to be expected, right? I wouldn’t say that myself. I find your Freedom piece excellent E-X-A-C-T-L-Y because it reminded me of meaningless deaths of friends. It reminded
me of the sick species I belong to, and also of the artist sub-species that is pretty much the softest target in our civilisation (except for other few billion people). Made me think you know and for me that is what art achieves and should keep achieving. You agree here? I know you do so I don’t care what you are going to type now.

Freedom is a good example of artist’s expectations being turned down. During the performance I begged other players not to kill me, ’cause I want to make this performance, but I get brutally killed and abused over and over, I didn’t even manage to engage some meaningful conversation. The actual performance doesn’t even begin, it’s a complete failure. Galleries and museums are safe places, they’re like fish tanks, isolated from the real world and protected from outsiders. However stupid is the thing you do, in a museum nobody would ever stand up and insult you, even if I’m sure half the people there think you’re retarded. So doing art in online videogames is also a way to deal with a non-art audience and get “sincere” reactions. Which most of the times means insults, but hey, we try...
And that No Fun thing – the Chatroulette thing with suicide – also works if you ask me. The flavour of indifference you get here is real special and usually we don’t get to see it in such destilled format. We see it in the streets and offices here and there, but somehow far apart and apparently we have developed this tolerance for it in such a diluted form. The portrait of collective indifference you have served us is seriously intolerable and I am grateful for that. Hereby I most officially and historically congratulate you in public, as part of this text performance, on the strength of No Fun in making us aware of human condition. End of formal statement. You got statement?
No Fun has never been described in such a straight way, thanks.

Let’s see. Oh, My generation, sure. Now that’s also some scary piece of crap. I am afraid to think of how much footage you actually went through to make the edit. Damn. I am curious to hear what people are feeling. First should be nausea, but seriously I expect that this piece – even though it looks and sounds violent – is the least problematic. Actually I expect that people are seeing it as fun (and thus behave like the Chatroulette kids in No Fun). Hmm. Is that what you were thinking about? Is that how you work? I like the implications...

We’ve done several performances in online videogames, and what you see of the participants is usually just their online alter ego. This piece shows who’s behind the screen, the kind of people we deal with everyday but never get to see.
Then, in this inventory there’s the Plan C. At the moment of waiting this here text it is still not quite sure in which way is the project going to be presented in the gallery. I expect video or pix, because it would be hard to obtain all the necessary permits. And it is in these permits that I see the point of the work. In the reaction of the state bureaucracy to your project. Or I am missing something? Eeh.

We’ve been very lucky at getting permits for Plan C’s carnival ride in the UK. I think it’s because people think we’re joking. It’s constructed with metal coming from Chernobyl but people think it’s a prank. We tell everybody where the ride comes from before they get close to it, I do check the metal with Geiger counters in front of the audience, and still people believe it’s a prank. They’re waiting for some kind of claim from us stating that’s all a joke, but there won’t be any. It’s a fake prank, we’re getting away with it because
people, and the authorities, think we’re lying...

By the way, we’re just a part of Plan C, a weird mix of extremely different characters. The project involves Ryan C. Doyle and Steve Valdez, who built the radioactive ride, DIY artists Todd Chandler and Jeff Stark, who shot the documentary “Let Them believe”, and gonzo photographer Tod Seelie.

Look guys, I now really have to run from this computer, I am supposed to participate in a conference about internet startups at the other side of town in 10 minutes. I saw the first part yesterday and it was real scary, you should see how young people pitch their online businesses to investors. You should feel THAT moral compass and will to fight for the public good.
Dammit, I wanted to talk to you about identity, about your relation with Slovenia, even about net.art...

Have to go, please count on hugs when we meet. I might be away for the opening – bummer – but should come to town the next day. So I would say that we can already arrange a date at around 11AM, how about that?

Deal

Vuk, your friend (and you don’t have many)
Eva and Franco Mattes aka 0100101110101101.ORG
Fuck the System
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Photo: Janez Janša
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