

Stepping into the unknown: Interactive Arts Laboratory



<https://fdu.bg.ac.rs/en/faculty/interactive-arts-laboratory>

The Interactive Arts Laboratory core members are Jovana Karaulic, Pavle Dinulovic, Branko Sujic and Mirko Stojkovic, professors from four different departments of the Faculty of Dramatic Arts in Belgrade. Their diverse fields of expertise have contributed to a broad scope of action in the Laboratory, which ranges from virtual reality, through sound installations, to immersive theater.

Common to all their joint projects is the element of interactivity, which is present even in forms that



traditionally do not incorporate it, such as television series. Another essential aspect of the majority of the projects is the educational component, which is deeply rooted in the motivation behind the founding of the Laboratory. The idea for establishing it, emerged from a desire to explore and conquer new spaces of artistic expression through innovative experiments in this field that would later serve and be available to all of the students from the University of Arts that want to step into it and further explore this territory.

Black Forest_interactive exhibition in virtual reality; photo Branko Sujić

Assurance that such an approach is stellar came through support for the establishment of a new department at the FDA dedicated to Game Art, animation, and visual effects, as well as through various forms of collaboration with other faculties, production studios, theaters, and other arts organizations in the country and abroad.

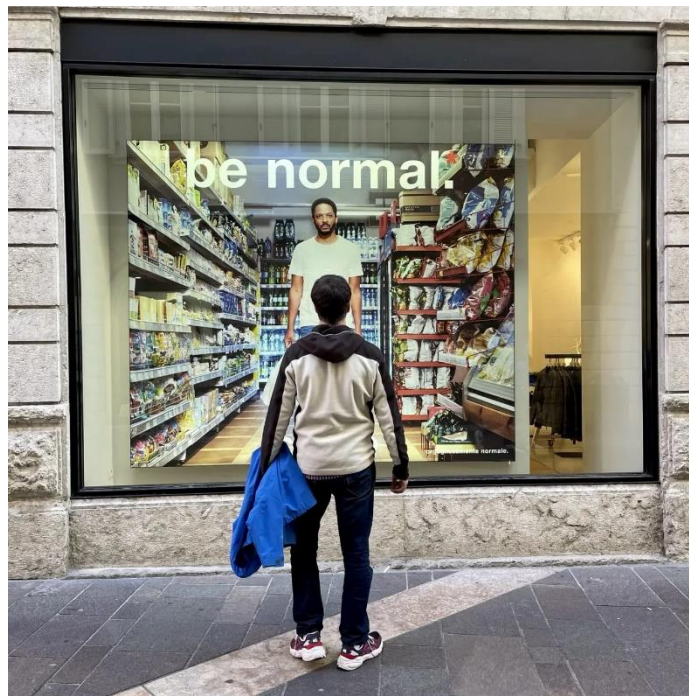
It would be one-sided to reduce the Laboratory's past success to the indisputable qualities of dozens of individuals who contributed to the implementation of its numerous projects in various ways. But, the main reason for the rapid positioning of the Interactive Arts Laboratory as one of the most significant university art hubs in Serbia dedicated to experimenting with new technologies is the admission of all these technologies, if not into everyday artistic practice, then certainly into the language we use today to talk about media or, more often, about their future.



alSham Epilogue- Belgrade; photo- Slavko Dulović

Today, it's no longer necessary to explain what virtual practices or artificial intelligence means, which extensively allows the presentation of the Laboratory's projects, since, due to their experimental nature, they are often rather complicated to recount even without describing their essential technical aspects.

Perhaps this is the place where - if not for other reason, but to illustrate with a concrete example the so far mentioned activities - we could talk about the latest project of the IA Laboratory: the immersive theatre play *alSham*, which premiered in Belgrade (Serbia), Trento (Italy), Sofia (Bulgaria) and Antwerp (Belgium).

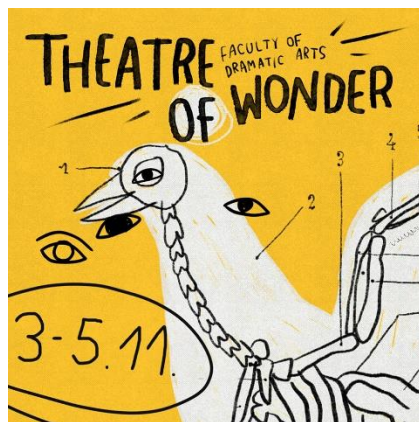


Different plays were performed in each of the mentioned cities: these plays are linked by a shared name, as well as by the main actor, director, and writer. But each time they were directed, acted, and even written differently, following the idea of a nano-spectacle, a form that emerged in the IA Laboratory. This distinctive form of immersive theatre is tailor-made for solely one spectator participating in it. Such a radical individual experience was created in a territory whose most extreme ends are framed on the one hand by the theoretical reflections of Antonin Artaud, i.e. his theater of cruelty, and on the other by nano-targeting on social networks, to which we are all exposed every day, and whose implementation is controlled by the artificial intelligence.

alSham proba- Trento Italija

Young audiences, formed in a solipsistic new age, can only sustain their attention if they get what they want. Carried out to the end, this indicates that all consumers of media content, including theatre audiences, will shortly consume exclusively what was created for them. And if that's the case - then why shouldn't we design theater plays that are created only for those who will watch them?

Several different companies, perhaps the most famous of which is Elon Musk's Neuralink, are currently working on an interface that would speed up communication between artificial intelligence and humans through electrodes implanted in the human brain. Once the bottleneck is resolved, it will be achievable to generate content in real time that will always, without compromise, meet the expectations of viewers. Artificial intelligence will be accountable for this assignment. It will read the thoughts, thus, the wishes of the viewers, and then create a complete mimetic experience according to them, which will have a more authentic and cathartic effect on the individual who is exposed to it than anything that any artist has created in history and for one reason only: because it was made just for the person exposed to it.



ToW 21- design Andreja Lepir, *

This is not the premise of a science fiction novel: all the elements needed to conduct such a performance already exist today. In the last six months, papers have been published that have indicated that artificial intelligence is already able to, on the basis of short prompts (written instructs), create not only images but also videos, as well as to guess what people imagined just by examining data collected by functional magnetic resonance imaging of human brain. Through the already mentioned brain electrodes, Neuralink controls the wishes of pigs in their laboratories, which are - weirdly enough - named after famous German poets.

An analog variation of that complex procedure is the nano spectacle, and that format is the foundation of all the previous theater productions created within the Interactive Arts Laboratory. Therefore, "alSham" would be an example of an average Laboratory project, only emphasized by chance since it was produced the latest. If this text appeared a little earlier, what would have been explained here is the art-science project "Life, the Universe and Everything Else", created before "alSham", in which solar radiation is being transformed into a performative sound installation during a live interpretation. Another step earlier would have brought us to the "Black Forest", an interactive exhibition in virtual reality, and so on, all the way back to the beginning of the Laboratory's work. And when we talk about the future and the following steps, we'll have to wait and see their destination, but one thing is certain, like all the previous ones, it will lead to some unknown and so far unexplored territory.



Black Forest_interactive exhibition in virtual reality; photo Branko Sujić



alSham Epilog- Trento Italy; photo- Arditodesio

Mirko Stojković (Belgrade, 1971) is a screenwriter, director, and game designer. His area of expertise is media and new technologies that are either related to media or will be related to them in the future. He graduated and received his doctorate from the Faculty of Dramatic Arts, University of Arts in Belgrade. Mirko possesses twenty-five years of professional experience during which he has written, directed, or designed video and pervasive games, television series, commercials, documentaries, and immersive theater performances in Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Hungary, Great Britain, and the USA. The areas that have been the subject of his research in the last few years are transmediality and virtual reality. He is a member of IETM and Screenwriting Research Network, founder of the Laboratory of Interactive Arts, and teaches several subjects at all levels of study at the Department of Dramaturgy at the FDA as a full professor.

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