

# **From digital identity to architecture of the nanoworld.**

## **Remarks on the art of Victoria Vesna**

Ryszard W. Kluszczyński

Victoria Vesna belongs to the elite, though dynamically growing, international milieu of artists who shape one of the most interesting and progressive trends in the contemporary art. Within this trend, connections between art and science are built and explored, which is of vital significance for the contemporary world. Works created in that space enter integral relationships with many fields of science, raising issues that have rarely been the core of artistic experiments so far. Artists who are active in this field thus join the group of scientists who develop valuable knowledge concerning the reality and its various faces. This way, works of art become a part of intellectual discourse within which the most important contemporary issues are discussed and various scenarios of the future are designed and analyzed. The shape of these works, belonging to different variants of the above-mentioned trend such as BioArt, transgenic art or robotic art, reflects the complexity of the contemporary world, becoming an instrument for analysis and problematization of this world. Installations created by Victoria Vesna belong to the most daring and recognizable manifestations of this trend.

Vesna's artistic work has continued since the early 1980s. It was quite early – in the first half of the 1990s – that the constantly growing domination of issues displaying her interest in polymorphous and multidimensional areas of connection between various fields of social activity and reality, was exposed. Initially, the complexity of works was manifested primarily at the level of multicultural relations. In subsequent years, her transmedia works have become increasingly complex in terms of material, construction and technology, providing images of the equally complex reality. This is when the basic place in Vesna's art instrumentarium got to be occupied by digital information and

communication techniques. As a direct result of their application, the first phase of the progressing hybridization process which has become incredibly vital (if not the most vital) for her art, was dominated by the technically conditioned convergence of the real world of matter and the virtual world of digital beings. In the works such as *Bodies@INCorporated* (1993) and *Virtual Concrete* (1995) created at that time through application of the archive strategy that offered the audience a chance to contribute to its content, the artist focused on relations between corporality and their digital representation entangled in the problem of identity. Works which were developed at that time combine physical and material space of the gallery with virtual world of the Internet. They were created with cooperation of many groups of participants, which proves multidimensional range of these works in time and their ability to attract groups of participants. They are of interactive and telematic character, enabling audience-participants to experience transgressive impressions, emotions that accompany crossing of the lines and sensation of simultaneous presence in various spaces, the real and the virtual ones.

Replacing of real bodies by their digital duplicates and development of digital identities are not only elements of the process leading to Augmented Reality in Victoria Vesna's art. New hybrid spaces emerge, including information space and new forms of community and communication as well as cultural participation appear. These are also the key aspects of other socio-technological-cultural processes which are of Vesna's interest, for instance, developing systems of control and supervision over both individual units and collective bodies. Installation entitled *Another Day in Paradise* (1993) is an example of that. In the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a significant transformation took place in this respect – the structure of control embodied in the image of panoptic society in which supervision is conducted through optical means was transformed into the structure of post-panoptic society in which optical means are replaced with computer ones and our information lookalikes or avatars are subject to supervision. In Vesna's art, this transformation is pictured in an interesting way, through a comparative reference of *Another Day in Paradise* to her other work, *Cell Ghosts* (2001) which was created almost 10 years later.

This whole complex of issues concerned with digitalization of human bodies and identities is invariably present in the works of Victoria Vesna, always assuming new artistic forms and bringing out new problematic aspects. Works such as *Datamining Bodies* (2001-2 / 2004) or *Mood Swings* (2006) can be mentioned as examples. Next to them, new motifs from the field of genetics appear as in *Quantum Tunneling* (2008). The multicultural paradigm returns, overlapping with the scientific paradigm (*Nanomandala*, 2004). The last example points to the trend of nanoart which is most characteristic of Vesna's art these days.

This trend has been developing in her works since 2000. As Victoria Vesna herself emphasizes, the crucial element for its development was cooperation with James Gimzewski (which started in 2001) – an outstanding expert in nanoscience. This cooperation resulted in, among other things, a number of joint projects: *Cell Ghosts*, *Nanomandala* or *Quantum Tunneling* which have already been mentioned, as well as *Sinapse* (2001), *Zero@wavefunction* (2002), *Nano* (2004), and *Blue Morph* (2007–).

Cooperation between the new technology art and nanoscience seems to be growing out of mutual proximity of both fields. The vision of reality offered by nanoscience does not refer to the conflict metaphor, is not based on the opposition of nature and culture and it does resign from opposition of solid objects and empty spaces. In turn, it offers a dynamic environment of interconnected energy fields, unlimited field of networks of elementary components organized in various ways. Thus, it perfectly corresponds with the program of new-media participation art which refers to the idea of dispersed authorship; through interaction, it combines all components of the artistic field into one dynamic system of references, unstable and always ready for transformations. By combining new cognitive perspective with the program of digital art, nanoart is becoming a kind of initiation, introduction into the new order of world representation which is described as *cosmopedia* by Pierre Lévy. As Erik Davis proves, this world is governed by tendencies heading towards transmutative integration which is taking place at the foundations of the new communication order.

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