



DemoKino – Virtual Biopolitical Agora

Edited by Ivana Ivković and Davide Grassi

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Welcome to today's voting session, a note from the editors

This textual and pictorial reader is more than just documentation of an art project. It combines contributions by theorists and a photocomic created by **Dejan Dragosavac Ruta** from the original project's texts and visuals to reflect on the proposition of **Davide Grassi's** *DemoKino – Virtual Biopolitical Agora*. *DemoKino – Virtual Biopolitical Agora* is an anti-entertainment interactive movie that develops according to the audience members' vote. Inspired in part by the "pianisti" scandal in the Italian Parliament when a number of senators were filmed voting for their absent colleagues via the electronic voting system, *DemoKino* is a virtual parliament which, through filmic parables, following one protagonist's rethinking of the ethical dilemmas placed before us, provides the spectators-come-voters/participants with the opportunity to decide on issues that are, paradoxically, becoming the essence of modern politics: the questions of life – abortion, cloning, therapeutic cloning, water privatization, copyleft, euthanasia, genetically modified organisms, same sex marriage.

After *DemoKino* was published in a number of formats – as web-based streaming, as live film presentation, on television with televoting provided, as a DVD that may be rented from a local shop and as a radio broadcast, no medium seemed left out. This reader was initiated not with an idea to reformat the artistic project to print form, or to approach it solely from a critical or analytical perspective, but with an idea to contextualize, to reframe the wider cultural and political environment *DemoKino* appears in, providing a theoretical, artistic and social context. To ask: who is the one who performs? The lone protagonist of the film or the spectator who becomes engaged in a strategy of making visible, even obvious, not just the button pushing of the Italian senators, but the deceptive liberty of the spectator to freely navigate through the film interactively, as a member of a virtual democratic body.

Bojana Kunst examines the moment “when the issue of life enters the political arena and modern politics becomes biopolitics [and] the democratic decision reaches an impasse: in the political arena laws are being debated on issues that can actually tolerate no decisions and any kind of majority rule is problematic in itself, any political regulation a publicly legitimated act of violence.”

Aldo Milohnić discusses the limitations of political representation by analyzing the structure of *DemoKino* as a virtual agora and a kind of exercise in direct democracy, thus questioning the power of argument vs. the power of representation. Voloshinov / Bakhtin's notion of dialogism offers a productive conceptual framework for such a theoretical operation.

Italy being only a symptom of what happens when we push to an extreme the media manipulation of "televised democracy" realized by Silvio Berlusconi. Procedural failure of

political representation and subsequent critical reflection may lead one to ask if democracy has been reduced to formal ceremony.

When reading *Paradoxes of Democracy* by **Antonio Caronia**, the author of the original *Demokino* screenplay and texts arguing the issues, we can ponder if, in an environment where new information and communication technologies allow everyone to be directly connected in real time, the authoritarian imposition of democratic decision-making through the representational democracy of the parliamentary system should impregnate contemporary daily life or should the transformations of the production and circulation of knowledge due to the advent of digital technologies result in possible new political forms, in social transformation?

Petar Milat's contribution draws on biopolitical theory and rethinks Agamben's notion of *disbanda* to address "community", its bonds and burdens, the presumptions and praxis of "communing", the life in the state of Empire.

And yet, how much of our sublime-subversion image is just a pose? Is the copy of Empire under our arm, read and reread, bookmarked and underlined, quoted from on appropriate occasions, just acceptance of a certain lifestyle? Is the political subject reducible to an identity, "sociological scenario of political action"? Using the analogy to metapolitical structure of road movies, **Leonardo Kovačević** investigates the topology of political subjectivization: "political subjectivization stands for the impossible identification, identification with those who do not have a firm place in society; the setting up of a polemical stage between what we are, what we remember about ourselves and what we could or should become, where we should head to without leaving a trail for possible return behind us."

Marina Gržinić is critical of today's art institutions and art projects produced in the capitalist first world, their unbearable abstraction and the need of the capitalist engine to possess new forms of production and expressions of creativity. The emergence of political art in Slovenia in the 1980s was shortly followed by its kidnapping, being taken hostage by the communist political party then in power and released only when it was already symbolically dead. The evacuation of resistance from creativity is closely followed by a full sensualization of the capitalist processes of abstraction, a sensualization of emptiness.

Tomislav Medak reflects on the immanence of the notion of democracy's corruption to democracy itself, on the inner workings of its inability to create procedural limits on decision making power as a consequence of the singularities of life constantly finding their way into the midst of its parliamentary procedural set up, on democracy as tainted by media as a true voice of democracy, on democracy's power to pass decisions on what it cannot decide upon, ultimately on the democracy understood not as an assembly, but positively as a disassembly.

This textual and pictorial reader would not be complete without making the full round back to an interview with Davide Grassi conducted by **Domenico Quaranta**.

About the editors of the book:

Davide Grassi is a media artist, performer and producer of Italian origins working and living in Ljubljana, Slovenia since 1995. His artistic work has a strong social connotation and is characterized by an inter-media approach.

Grassi is the author of numerous videos, performances, installations, documentaries and media projects. Among them *I Need Money to Be an Artist* (1996), *Brainscore – Incorporeal Communication* (with Darij Kreuh, 2000), *Problemmarket.com – the Problem Stock Exchange*

(with Igor Štromajer, 2001), machinaZOIS – Your Electromechanical Patron! (2003) and DemoKino – Virtual Biopolitical Agora (2003-06).

He is co-founder (1999) and member of Collective BAST (www.aksioma.org/bast) as well as of the open research platform for interventions in public spaces SilentCell Network (2003 – www.silentcellnetwork.org).

Grassi is the co-founder (2002) and artistic director of Aksioma – Institute for Contemporary Arts (www.aksioma.org), a non-profit cultural organization based in Ljubljana, which is interested in producing, presenting and distributing projects that take advantage of new technologies and protocols in order to investigate and discuss the structures of modern society.

He collaborates internationally with several artists, museums, institutions, foundations, galleries and festivals. As artist-in-residence he lectures and leads workshops at universities and contemporary art institutes.

Ivana Ivković studies at the Department of Dramaturgy at the Academy of Drama Arts in Zagreb. She is a member of the editorial board of Frakcija Magazine for Performing Arts and also collaborates with the 3rd Program of Croatian Radio, with several publications, with the Center for Drama Art and works as the general coordinator of Zagreb – Cultural Kapital of Europe 3000, a project jointly organized by Zagreb's eight independent cultural organizations from the fields of performing arts, new media, visual arts, architecture and theory. She collaborates as a dramaturge with two Zagreb-based independent companies – oour (dance productions: orangecut (2004), To be Confirmed (2005)) and BADco. (productions: Deleted Messages, Fleshdance (2004), research project ...2005...shared space in 2005).

About the book:

<http://www.aksioma.org/demokino/book.html> and www.maska.si

The site of the project:

www.aksioma.org/demokino

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