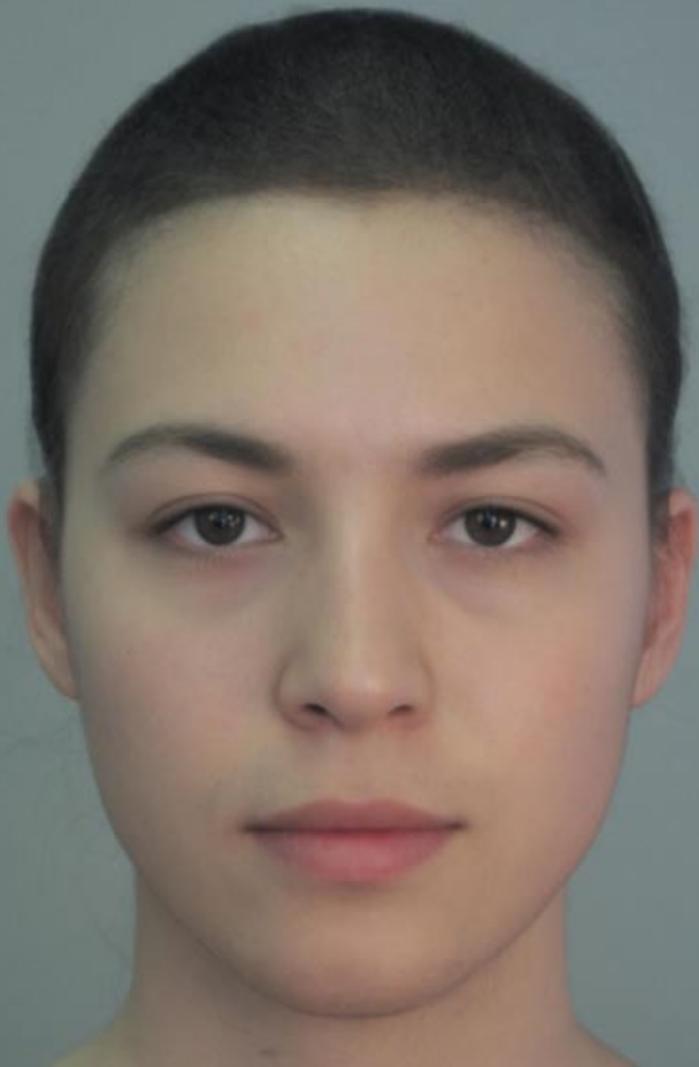


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## N-DIMENSIONAL ZOMBIES: THE POSSIBILITY OF N-MUTATION\*

**T**he general approach to identity in contemporary art originates in post-conceptual and postmodernist deconstruction of artistic identity (the notion of artist as auteur) in the seventies and eighties that, through the influence of emerging cultural studies in the nineties, was established into some kind of official pluralist platform in today's art in the age of culture in which identity is instrumentalized into the universal paradigm.

In the contemporary art and art theories, identity is predominantly addressed from psychological, gender, racial/ethnic and social/political aspects. Significantly, all these are aspects of personal identity, and, as the term persona indicates (a facade one presents to the world), the identity is perceived mainly in the public and social, that is, in cultural context. Cultural identity is highly relational, depends on social trends and relies on language that functions primarily through the process of recognition/repetition in which creativity can be easily scaled down to choice (consumerism), combinatorics or competition (as we chose, combine or compete for our identities in the society).

While this might be logical concerning the context of culture as self-aware and self-explaining environment, the other aspects of identity are obviously underrated or diminished. Moreover, it is quite questionable if the cultural aspects of identity are nearly as relevant and determining as they are usually presented, and it can be easily argued that exactly these other aspects are potentially much more important and maybe fundamental for our understanding of the world.

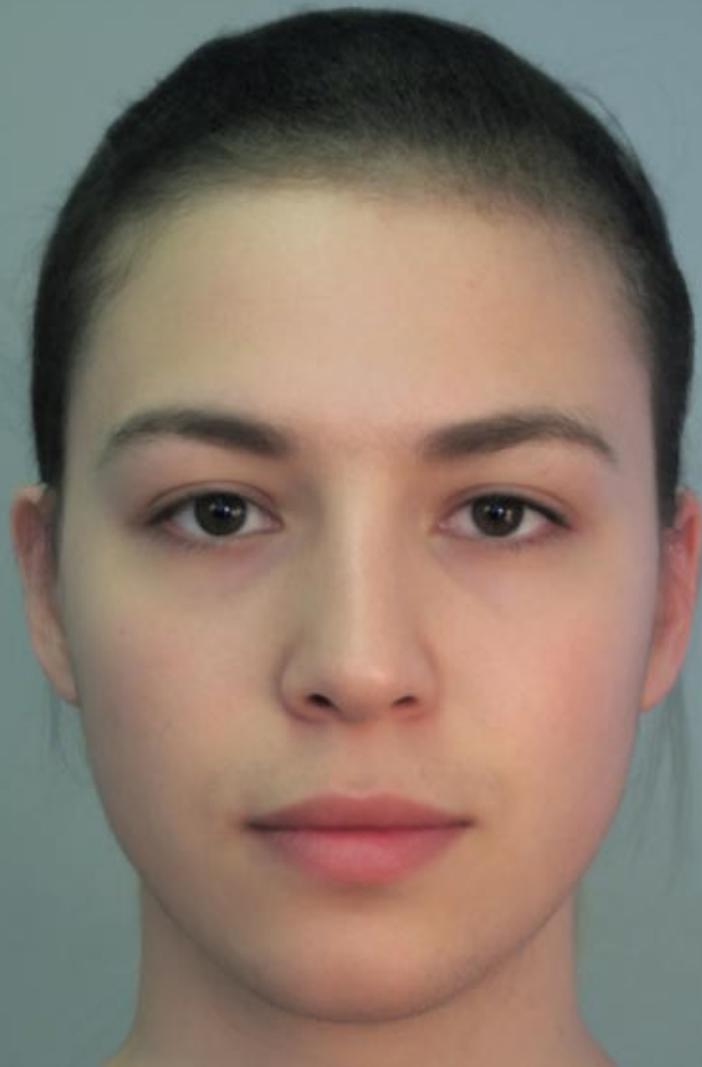
The freedom to change identity is certainly not the freedom of choice, combinatorics or competition within the given identity platform however variable it might be, but it is in understanding and changing the very causes that generate the platform [e.g., as Michel Houellebecq cynically puts it in his novel *Atomized* (*Les Particules élémentaires*, Flammarion, 1999), freedom is not in the choice between different sexualities or gender policies, but in acquiring the ability to overcome sexuality as biological status (the choice to be either sexual or asexual biologically)].

A number of artists today avoid to thematize identity in a culturally accepted or expected fashion, preferring distanced, indirect or intangible approach. With the broader theoretical and scientific insights, they are interested in exploring the material aspects of identity such as physical (identity in physics and in quantum theory) and biological (human nature and identity in genetics and evolutionary biology), while some of them pursue conceptual and operational strategies that originate in the etymological sense of the word individual = indivisible, the one that can not be shared with the others, the one that defines oneself in an abstract, non-verbal and non-communicable process of becoming and self-determination.

Dejan Grba

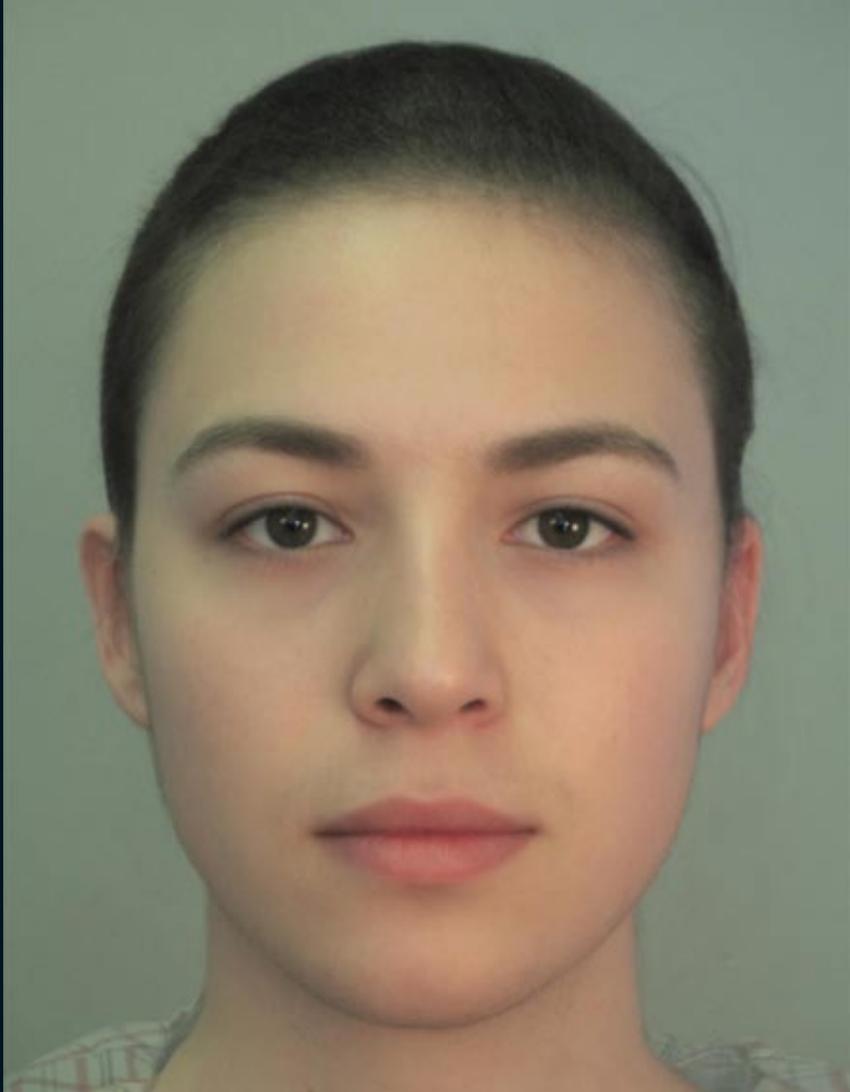
Notes:

\* Extract from a resume of the lecture *n-Dimensional Zombies: the Possibility of n-Mutation* (Some Aspects of Identity in the Contemporary Fine Arts) held at the Belgrade University of the Arts' International Summer School in Pirot, Serbia, 11 July 2006.



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## DENSITY OF SIGNS AND MINIMAL CHANGES A POSTCONCEPTUAL ZOMBIE TACTICS

In the narrower sense, the works in 2D Mutant Zombies project are created in 'digital image production', 'algorithmic art' and 'new media'. Digital 'image' is a visual configuration generated, corrected or transformed in a computer. Algorithmic art is a praxis that stems from the concept or plan, that is, from the performative algorithm within a given technological environment. New media are always these media that, being shifted from their 'original' art discipline, get problematized as a new or alternative technique. In a broader sense, the works in this project are the works of post-conceptual art. The expression post-conceptual art commonly denotes an art oriented toward procedures of media analysis, interpretation and deconstruction of popular culture, identity, everyday life, economic and political propaganda, that is, a production of ideology as an envelope of reality.

We are dealing with the art in the age of culture.

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Zombies are grey and move slowly and randomly before they perceive something that moves in their vicinity, and then start approaching it. After a while, their motion is, again, totally erratic. Humans are pink and five times quicker than zombies. When humans see a zombie they run away and panic. Panicking humans run much faster than other humans. When other humans see the panicking humans, they panic themselves. Affectation shifts from the subjective to the inter-subjective. The relation between the subjective and the inter-subjective is essential to the works in this project.

We are dealing with a production of affect for the subject and between the subjects.

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The acts (performances, actions, behaviours) of post-conceptual artists are directed toward identifying reality, action and thinking through constant verification of mental and physical existence of the artist as an organism, as a body, as an individual and as a subject. The artist is positioned between the idea (organism, body, individual, subject) and the matter (natural and social environment) thus becoming the protagonist of

the 'event' and integrating with the actuality through direct temporal and spatial development of static and dynamic images. The process itself becomes determinant because in it, the work is developed materially, technically, in its appearance and concept. The process of realization is a dynamic basis on which the work forms and evolves, on which it defines or breaks its boundaries. The work is defined as a production construct (animation of static images) and the work is created in post-production praxes of analyzing the cultural models of representation, reception and identification. The density of signs in a minimal animated form between the static and dynamic image is a potential provocation of 'meaning'. Namely, the meanings of identity are being provoked. Who is it here? How does 'it' (he/she) manage the identities? Which identity is a dominant one? How the presented identity faces the organism, the body, the individual and the subject? And what will, in the end, the subject say? I am \*\*\*!!! The identity is created through identification, and identification is performed in indication and interpellation. Indication is an act of visual manifestation and instancing of the intensity of corporeal appearance. As a viewer, I see that body as 'such' and 'such' (gender, race, ethnicity, generation, profession, etc.). The interpellation is a statement – the voice that says „I am \*\*\*!!!“. 2D Mutant Zombies project is conceptualized throughout this gap between the visual appearance and the voice that could say „I am \*\*\*!!!“

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Everything that happens on the screen is an animated affectation that effects the viewer through numerous stimuli. An information polyphony in a simple exemplary structuring of static-as-dynamic surface. A multitude in a system of minimal changes, overlays, layers, that is, in an illusion created by animation/simulation. Long ago, an artist (R.M.) wrote: „Simple forms do not necessarily imply the simple experience behind them“. Here, a high density of signs is achieved in a restricted system of visual moves, changes and layers. That is theatrical! That is a screened happening of the „narrative-minus-text“ formula. By technical procedure – animation – a high density of signs and sensual stimuli is generated on the screen. That is the unifying perception of sensual 'samples' – gestures, tones, distances, substances, lights, affectations, intensities, overlays, crystallizations – emerging on the surface of abundant externalized promises to the eye and, certainly, to the body. The body and the eye are linked in a regulatory relation.

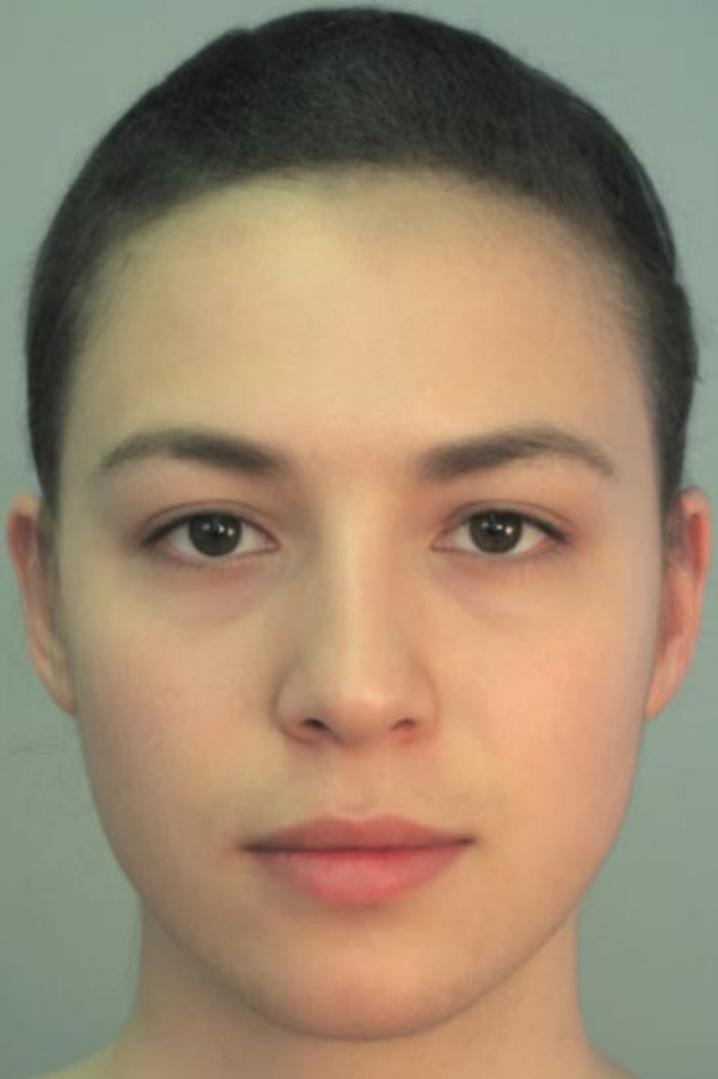
We see a face changing. We see faces changed by the layering of an image. Animation transforms the faces into one another, and the instability of the perceived scene – of the facial representation – becomes increasingly important. Who is that in the picture? Who appears and who disappears? How 'me' changes into 'you', and

how 'you' disseminates through the ocular image? Me-or-you 'image' is the effect of one technique: image animation. Portrait animation. An algorithmic performance of small differences. Small differences produce significant effects for the eye. Dissemination of information in shifting images and sensual stimulation. Action of unchangeable intensity, that is, an affectation that addresses the Other.

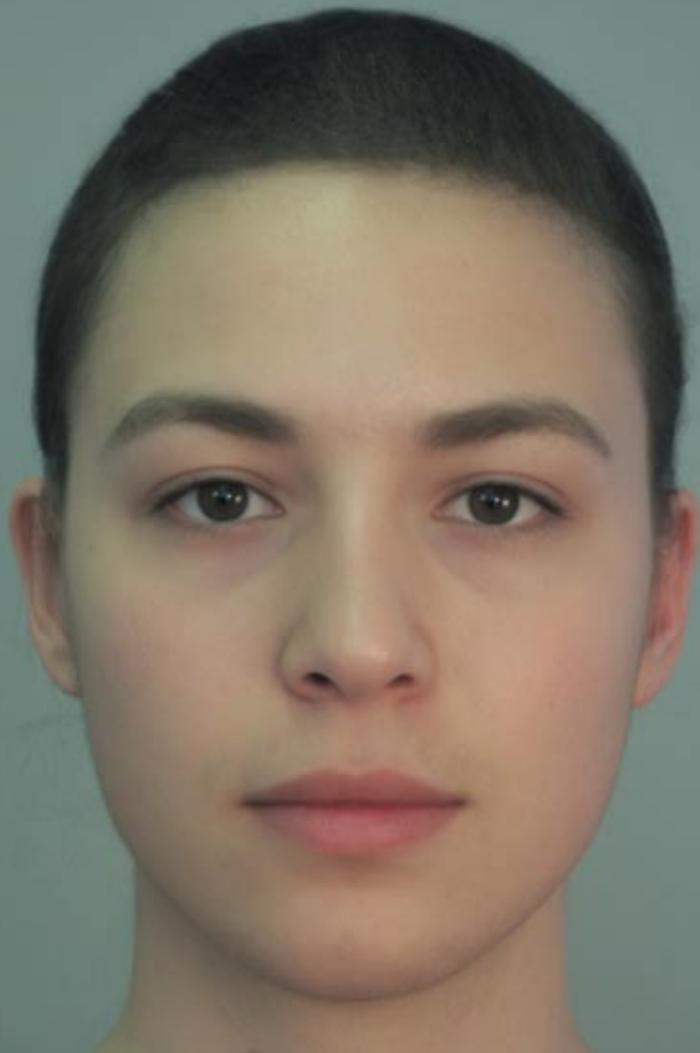
The presentation of the face is 'cold' or non-expressive. Non-expressiveness indicates the absence or latency of emotion. There is no 'visual personalization' of some particular mental state, but instead there is an alienation from 'emotion'. The continuity of photographic instance is important. The visual continuity of that particular photograph, with that particular face is important, and then the shifting between photographs, and then the interlinking of photographs into a signifying chain S1 and S2 with the promise of Sn. The signifier exists only in its relation with other signifier(s). An aspect points to another aspect. An aspect is a face in the representational system. The sign becomes the signifier, and the density of signs is the density of signifiers which anticipate the possible meanings to the subject. Every viewing of a 'screen event' informs the new meanings. Anticipation occurs. The animation is a tool for interlinking of photographs and for the discrimination between the aspect/face and the movement. An aspect is modified, mutated into movement.

There begins the allegorical zombie narrative. 2D zombie is a screen-based production and postproduction of the affective mutated/animated or layered image event with a changing face. But somewhere in its erased and suppressed layers, the word zombie has referent meanings. Zombie is a 'dead' that was brought back to life by grudge or magic (voodoo). Abstracted, a concept of zombie indicates that 'zombie' is any dead thing that is animated, that moves, that unemotionally effects the viewer's eye... Stillness provides movement. The movement is the intensity of affect. It can be the final instance of invigorating what is alienated. Or, an animated photograph is a zombie, that is, a 2D zombie because it simulates the photograph's movement/mobility on the screen. This 'dead photograph', as R.B. once wrote, now becomes as if alive in front of the living body watching the screen. And that is why this dead photograph becomes a mad photograph, a memory of human body, of you, of her, of them.

The discrimination of aspect and the relationship with the body raise the questions of uniqueness, specificity and identity. Digital morphing is 'just a technique' but it is also a performative procedure for the work that is no more manual, while still being corporeal. Technical image and living body are in an entwined system of interrelations.



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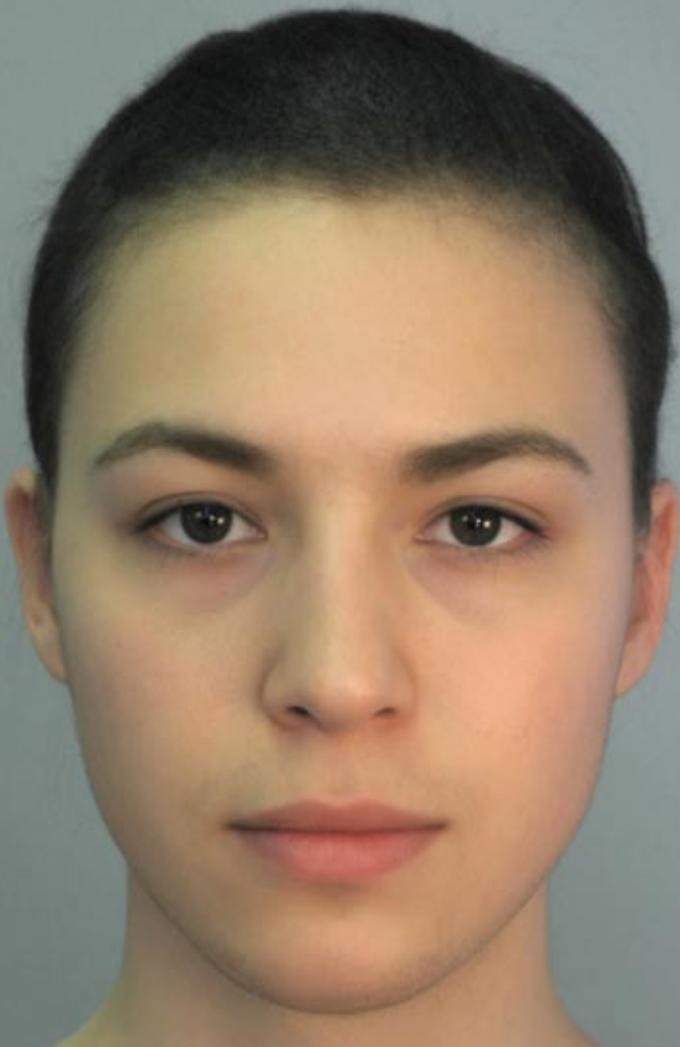
## EVOLUTIONARY BIOLOGY AND CULTURE: CAN WE ESCAPE FROM OUR BIOLOGICAL ESSENCE?

**T**he most important characteristics that make our species (*Homo sapiens*) different from other animal species are connected with the functioning of our brains. Humans have extraordinary cognitive ability; they can understand processes in nature and see causal connections between different events. They have ability to think about their own actions, to analyze behavior of other persons and to anticipate consequences of various activities and events. They also have the language. However, considering other biological traits, humans are not very different from millions of other species. Actually, humans cannot do many things that other organisms can. Comparative and phylogenetic studies in evolutionary biology convinced us that our anthropocentric position in philosophy of life hardly has any support in biology. Our brain size, its morphology and mental capacity are the products of millions years of evolution and present our adaptation to the ever changing world. Studying various kinds of behavior of other Primates (our closest relatives, such as chimpanzees) and their social groups we can find many similarities because their mental ability is also high compared with other animal organisms. But, humans evolved something really different – morality. Evolution of ethics through “social instincts”, altruistic behavior and “moral sense” has been described by Darwin more than 100 years ago. Once we evolved morality we’ve lost possibility to blame our animal essence and animal instincts for cruel behaviors, such as war, murder, rape, violence, etc.

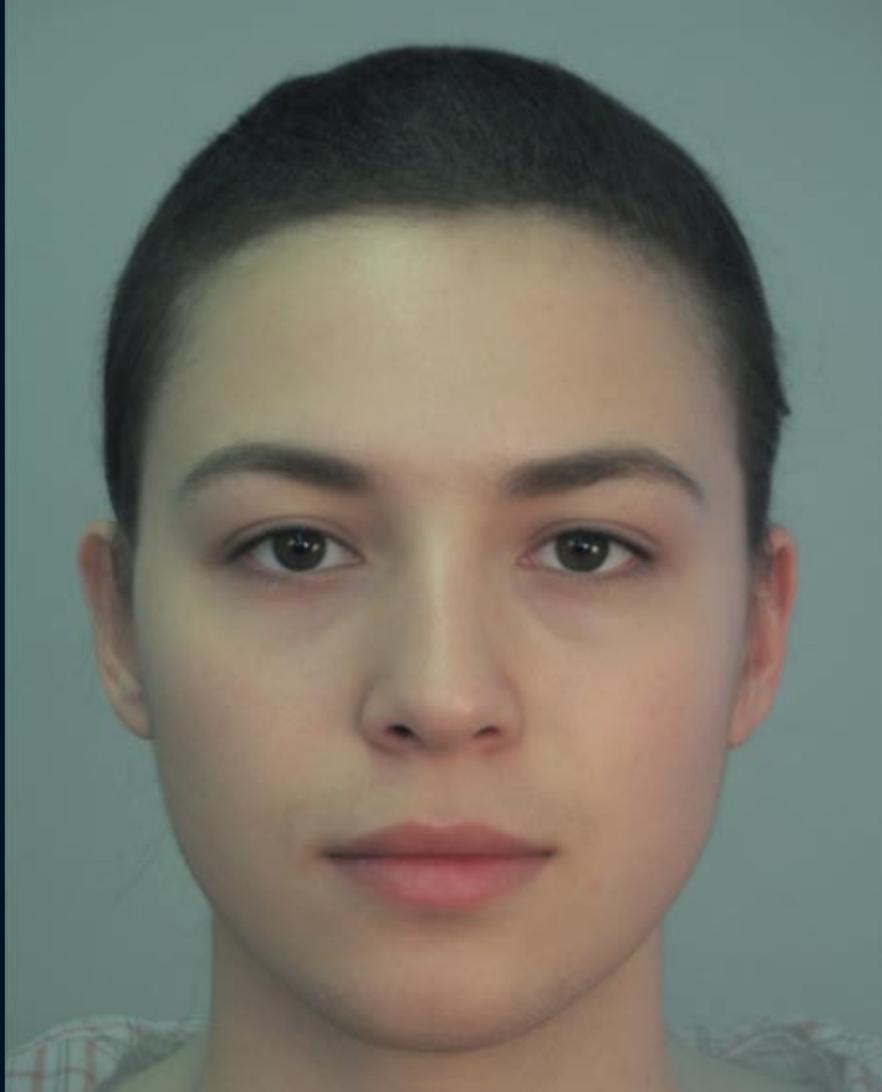
From biological point of view, sexual behaviour of humans and some monkey species is extremely interesting. Most animal species have sex only at the time of estrus (female ovulation) and only for reproduction – producing offspring. Everything in evolution is about transmission of genes to the next generation. So, the role of sex should be clearly conceptive (making babies). However, in *Homo sapiens* as well as in many

other Primate species, sexual activities are very frequent, unrelated to estrus and mostly non-procreative (does not result in babies). If this kind of sexual behaviour was maintained in our evolutionary lineage, it must have had conferred some benefits. Otherwise, it would have been eliminated by natural selection as time and energy consuming behaviour. Since promiscuity is correlated with complex social organization in Primate species, this kind of sexual behavior must have had very important roles in social interactions. As a source of pleasure, sex can be considered as a major concern of human life and underlies much of social relations. At this presentation, several hypotheses about biological and cultural evolution of sex roles will be discussed. Evolution of any characteristic can be explained only if it has inherited components. These inherited components can be biological (genes) or, in case of humans and other socially organized primates, cultural. Beside genes, culture can be very powerful and consistent way of transferring traits between generations. Here we consider culture in a very wide sense as any kind of social interaction between individuals, learning, education, society structure, customs, art, etc.

Even more interesting aspect of sexual behaviour in humans and other monkey species is homosexual behavior (HB). From evolutionary point of view, we could expect HB to be eliminated from our ethology as maladaptive; HB cannot be conceptive (there is no possibility for transferring genes to the next generation). On the other hand, large amount of biological, sociological and anthropological data suggest that HB is very common both within and among various human societies. According to these data, HB should be considered as one segment of great variety in human sexuality and emotions; not as abnormality or distinct class of sexual behavior. Most hypotheses about evolution and maintenance of HB, which we are going to discuss, consider homosexual emotions as a very important factor for long-term supportive bonds in a society, similar to heterosexual relationships but with some additional aspects. This had very important consequences for both individual and community survival, and, consequently, for reproductive success. Although we cannot explain HB with any single factor (it could be genes, hormones, childhood experience, adult experience and social context), we will discuss the role of HB in biological and cultural evolution of our species. Although most of these topics are considered to be in the domain of humanities (e.g. sociology, psychology, cultural anthropology, etc.), there is a lot of room for life sciences to scientifically explain complex patterns of human behaviour and ethics.



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## About (conceptual overview)

Participating artists created static images through animation process.

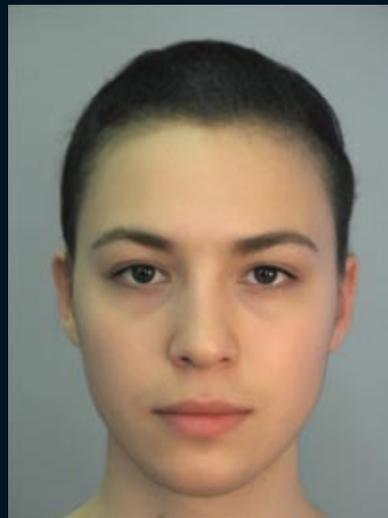
All participating artists initially agreed upon their selection of four models (persons) on location. Under the same set conditions (digital camera, tripod, background, lightning, etc.), each artist made his/her own photographic portraits of the models. Each artist made his/her combination of two pairs out of four portraits and then morphed the two photographs of each selected pair, using the intermediary frames rendered in these two morphs to create a final morph whose intermediary frame was printed (digital laser photograph, matt paper, 30x40cm).

This methodology can be defined as the algorithmic art of small differences. It explores the eventuality of individual artistic differences (“specificity”, “character” or “identity”) that are expressed through creative effort within a precisely defined and limited formal system.

Using digital morphing technique which, being fully defined by calculations of pixel locations and colour values, implies that the artists are primarily “impersonal” manipulators, they create hybrid portraits with distinctive qualities of personality and character open to identification, while the mapping of abstract image elements becomes a neutral indication of complex social processes and cultural policies in generating, designing, interpretation and distribution of identities.

Such distanced, “cool”, “non-expressive” or “un-emotional” conceptual approach, together with procedural augmentation of technological aspect, can be identified as strategy of ambivalence similar to e.g. Kraftwerk or NSK/Laibach. It may also be perceived as a discreet critique of certain “expressive”, aggressive, sometimes offensive and basically either naïve or cynical strategies in the so called “body politics” art.

Particularly, the implied indifference in these works may cause the sense of “alienation” or “estrangement” in the observer and encourage him/her to evade the conventional (ideologically manipulated) associations for the concepts of sympathy, friendliness and affection, and to intimately reconsider the values behind these basic terms of human relations. [ Dejan GRBA ]



**Project coordinator**

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# Dejan Grba

*Year of birth:*

1967.

*Current status:*

Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Fine Arts and Senior Lecturer at the Department for Digital Art, Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies of University of the Arts, Belgrade.

*Slected exhibitions:*

2006. a=a', Rex Cultural Centre, Belgrade.

2006. a, Dom omladine Gallery, Belgrade.

2006. Sense of Pressure, Atelier als Supermedium - Artists Space for Contemporary Art, The Hague.

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## Artists

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# Adrian Parvulescu

*Year of birth:*

1985.

*Current status:*

2th year student at the University of Fine Arts, Photo-Video Department, Bucharest

*Selected exhibitions:*

2006. AdPrint festival Brasov, Romania , group exhibition

ido4500@gmail.com

# Ana Krstić

*Year of birth:*

1978.

*Current status:*

4th year student at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Belgrade, sculpture department

*Selected exhibitions:*

2006. Meaning of Greatness (curated by Sarah Pierce), Project Arts Center, Dublin

2006. Tracing gender , OZONE gallery, Belgrade

2006. Test Pieces and Blend in Moments (curated by Sarah Pierce) Student's Cultural Center, Belgrade

ana\_r\_krstic@yahoo.com umetnostzaprodaju@yahoo.com

# Bojana Rajević

*Year of birth:*

1981.

*Current status:*

5th year student at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Belgrade, sculpture department

*Selected exhibitions:*

2005. Driller/Triller-Shizomania/Transformance, (with Nenad Racković), OZONE Gallery, Belgrade, Serbia

2006. Test Pieces, (curated by Sarah Pierce), Students` Cultural Center, Belgrade, Serbia

2006. The Meaning of Greatness, (curated by Sarah Pierce), Project Gallery, Dublin, Ireland

rajevich@yubc.net

# Cristina Ardelean

*Year of birth:*

1986.

*Current status:*

2nd year student at the University of Arts Bucharest, photo-video department

*Selected exhibitions:*

2006. AdPrint Festival (Brasov) - group exhibition

cristina.ardelean@gmail.com

# Eva Artinger

*Year of birth:*

1982.

*Current status:*

1st year Student of the Master Program Digital Media University of Applied Science Hagenberg, graduated as a Bachelor of Science in 2006

*Selected exhibitions:*

2006. Non Stop Video Weekend, Konsthärsuset, Stockholm, Sweden  
(curated by Geska Helena Andersson)

2006. Alkantara Festival, Lisbon, Portugal (curated by Geska Helena Andersson)

<http://www.eva-arteringer.de> [eva.arteringer@web.de](mailto:eva.arteringer@web.de)

# Evelin Stermitz

*Year of birth:*

1972.

*Current status:*

Postgraduate student at the Academy of Fine Arts Ljubljana, Slovenia

*Selected exhibitions:*

2006. Cyberfem. Feminisms on the electronic landscape. (curated by Ana Martínez-Collado), Espai d'art contemporani de Castelló (EACC), Castelló, Spain

2006. F\_SPACE (curated by Mélanie Perrier and Edith Foissy), Trianon, Paris, France

2006. FILE electronic language international festival, Sao Paulo, Brazil

<http://es.mur.at> [es@mur.at](mailto:es@mur.at)

# Nevena Nikolić

*Year of birth:*

1979.

*Current status:*

Postgraduated studies at University of Arts, Belgrade, digital art department

*Selected exhibitions:*

2004. International Graphic Art Biennial III, Spain

2005. Exhibition of Graphic Art, Galerija Grafički kolektiv, Serbia

2006. IV International Graphic Art Biennial, Italia

nevenan@bitsyu.net

# Sanja Ždrnja

*Year of birth:*

1979.

*Current status:*

First year of Specialistic Studies ( Faculty of Fine Arts in Belgrade; sculpture department) and doctoral studies ( Interdisciplinary Postgraduate Studies of University of Arts in Belgrade; digital art department )

*Selected exhibitions:*

2007. 'Self act', drawings and photographs, gallery of The Faculty of Fine Arts, Belgrade

2006. SNBA (salon de la societe nationale des beaux-arts), Carrousel du Louvre, Paris

2006. 'Sartfest' - international student art festival, Museum of Contemporary Arts, Novi Sad

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