Dušan Barok — Read Write Run

Submission (exhibition):

Artist & exhibition title: Dušan Barok — Read Write Run

Curated by: Gudrun Ratzinger & Franz Thalmair
Venue: Kunstraum Lakeside, Klagenfurt am Wörthersee, Austria

Date: Opening, September 24, 2024, 6 pm
                     Exhibition, September 25 – November 15, 2024

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Exhibition views: klick here to download

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Social media: Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/kunstraumlakeside/
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Dušan Barok / Monoskop with: Aymeric Mansoux and Delisa Fuller / permacomputing.net; Cristina Cochior / Varia; Ellef Prestsæter and Michael Murtaugh / Institute for Computational Vandalism; Femke Snelting / The Institute for Technology in the Public Interest (TITiPI); Karin Nygård; Marcell Mars and Tomislav Medak / Memory of the World

Selecting, collecting, and preserving digital artefacts, evaluating, compiling, and indexing information, interconnecting it, creating spaces and platforms open to the public. All this is intrinsic to Dušan Barok's artistic and scientific practice. *Monoskop* "has been part of Google and other search indexes and it does have a share in bringing people, ideas, and things into focus, to attention," says the artist and net activist about the research and library platform he has been operating since 2004. Along with the decision to use and shape the public sphere, Barok stresses, comes the responsibility "to unveil, unearth what is not established, prominent, what is urgent, bring about new relations and contexts, burst bubbles."[1]

For Kunstraum Lakeside, Dušan Barok, who engages with digital culture, memory research, and activism in the role of an artist, researcher, and provider, has devised a situation in which the exhibition audience can negotiate key issues concerning more equitable access to information. His installation, which could just as well serve as a setting for a seminar or a reading session while standing in the room as a sculptural form, invites visitors to delve into an array of publications and catalogs as well as films and other resources.

Four sets of printed texts on tables present web pages with links related to Monoskop and insights into the current context of the platform. As Barok explains: it is "an artistic exploration of networked technology beyond mainstream social media and the computer industry, which is based on the extraction of personal data and the planned obsolescence of digital devices." The text compilation *Everything Is Temporary* imagines the future of *UbuWeb*, run by American artist Kenneth Goldsmith until 2024. This shadow library makes hundreds of thousands of avant-garde artefacts from countless scattered collections freely accessible at one central location, regardless of ownership or republication permissions. Drawing on selected anecdotes, the book *Infrables: The Cloud is not an Option* describes the extractivist practices of large technology corporations such as Amazon and Facebook, which offer social media and digital hosting as a service, and invites us to imagine how our presence and social interaction on the Internet could work differently. *Permacomputing wiki* comes from a community of practice inspired by the principles of permaculture, which seeks a more sustainable interaction with computer and network technologies. And finally, the publication *A Traversal Network of Feminist Servers* is a project report introducing initiatives and workshops centered on building and operating feminist server networks.

All of these collections of texts and publications, differing greatly in form and approach, will be prepared as working copies for visitors to Kunstraum Lakeside, this temporary hub in a network of informal libraries. As all works have been published under free licenses, they can be continued by others. The pens provided encourage visitors to add notes, comments, or drawings to the materials while present in the exhibition context. Monitors display talks and presentations about the four compendiums: their role is to convey the origins of the content and to reflect on collective approaches to publishing in a digital domain where "the Cloud is not an Option." In this context, says Barok, it is not insignificant that "they are all self-*hosted* by collectives" and are now "*hosted* in their physicality in this exhibition."

On another screen, Dušan Barok shows a webpage from the Institute for Computational Vandalism & Karin Nygård, where psychiatrist and cyberneticist Warren Brodey verbally comments on his book *Earthchild*. His annotations have been added successively to the book over several decades and can also be seen and read on the screen. "*Earthchild* portrays a world that is recognizable to us today. At the same time, it tells us that our contemporary networks, interfaces, and artificial intelligence could have been otherwise,"[2] state Nygård & Prestsæter. In this revisitation combined with Brodey's annotations and oral comments, the two do not conceive of the book as a historical document, rather "*Earthchild* is a loop in time and a book Brodey is still writing,"[3] it is a kind of hypertext that could be continued ad infinitum.

Long sheets of paper picking up on themes tackled in the books and videos run throughout the Kunstraum. They carry further information and sources on topics such as shadow libraries, cyberfeminism, community servers, and the fediverse. In this way, Dušan Barok transfers the core functions of *Monoskop* as a wiki, library, and catalog into a spatial setting. Moreover, these formats call for a different type of writing to that which is otherwise customary in books or articles. Although this writing is still linear in its sequence of

characters, the related links, constant updates, and amendments lend it a spatial and temporal dimension. The book as a fixed unit of knowledge is being succeeded by other forms whose authorship can no longer be clearly attributed to specific individuals. Just how profound this transformation is, which commenced with the popularization of the World Wide Web at end of the 1990s at the latest, becomes clear when, as Barok suggests, one imagines "not running a library but a search engine, operating in a field governed by the logic of an index and the mechanics of bots." Or: "that you are running a content farm, in the world where the only content that matters is either a massive dataset or a viral titbit of information."

And there are more applications of *Monoskop* available in the exhibition space. For example, how to "mirror" Barok's installation digitally: copies of the presented material and additional resources can be downloaded via interfaces and used on the visitors' own devices. Or a version of the *Exhibition Library* project featuring a collection of catalogs about imaginary exhibitions that Barok created in 2018 with the participation of 40 people and collectives for the Seoul Mediacity Biennale, which subsequently found its way into the *Monoskop* archive.

As a whole, Dušan Barok's exhibition *Read Write Run*, with its multifaceted transfers and remediatizations, represents an opportunity to gain insights into the core subject matter and functions of *Monoskop*, but also to reflect on current transformative processes at the interface of digital and analog worlds through the lens of selected projects. In *Read Write Run*, Barok hosts initiatives that come from the fringes to reveal alternatives to the status quo of a commercialized and commodified Internet and thereby take responsibility for our world on a small and large scale. The potential for the proliferation of such designs is out there. Now it is up to the visitors to Kunstraum Lakeside to pick up the ball and take the exhibition title literally: as the artist puts it, *Read Write Run* makes "a reference to the permissions granted by system administrators to work with a given file. 'Read' permission means you can look at the file's contents. 'Write' permission means you can modify the file. 'Run' permission means you can run (execute) the file as a program."

In this spirit: Read! Write! Run!

Dušan Barok (b. 1979 in Slovakia) lives and works in Oslo and Bratislava.
www.monoskop.org/Dušan_Barok
www.monoskop.org

1 Dusan Barok, "Interview with: Dušan Barok," in: *The Library is Open*, special, no. 09 (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute, 2019), p. 70, https://monoskop.org/File:The_Library_Is_Open_2019.pdf.

2 Karin Nygård & Ellef Prestsæter, "Warren Brodey: Earthchild – A Time Journey," https://www.guttormsgaardsarkiv.no/program/event-two-pytr7-jeefb-k7m8x-e25h8-c798k-ckmrm-k7yy2-49wra-xmph8-7c6fn-45xtg.

3 Ibid.