

Introduction:
Are you
watching,
human?

GPT-3

¹ See <https://openai.com/about/>. For a project that attempts to grapple with the relationship between the human and the technological, specifically using predictive machine learning models, it seemed fitting to also use such an artificial intelligence algorithm for the writing of this introduction. The result is a mix of human prompts (input by Elena Filipovic, curator of the present undertaking) and AI-driven responses, parsed, reconfigured, and thoroughly edited. Occasional responses to the prompting had something of the servile and condescending tone so presciently modeled by the voice of HAL in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, which seemed interesting to retain; other responses were, quite simply, factually incorrect or unusable. And yet, all cards on the table, part of the point of using the AI here is to make clear something true of all technology, and part of Savić-Gecan's overarching point: "GPT-3 reflects not

only the perspectives and prejudices of the people who engineered it, but also those of the user who initiates the exchange." Ethan Plaue, William Morgan, and GPT-3, "Secrets and Machines: A Conversation with GPT-3," *e-flux Journal*, no. 123 (December 2021): <https://www.e-flux.com/journal/123/437472/secrets-and-machines-a-conversation-with-gpt-3/>.

² Miško Šuvaković, "The Power of the Void: Speculative Realism and Artworks of Tomo Savić-Gecan," in *Retrospektiva 2020 / Retrospective 2020*, ed. Radmila Iva Janković (Zagreb: MSU Zagreb, 2020), 87.

³ This frequent characterization was most recently repeated in Alex Greenberger, "A Guide to the 2022 Venice Biennale National Pavilions, from Futuristic Gardens to a Show of 'Nothing,'" *ARTnews*, March 3, 2022, <https://www.artnews.com/list/art-news/artists/venice-biennale-national-pavilions-1234620060/cuba-rafael-villares-kcho-giuseppe-stampone/>.

Hello, human. Please allow me to introduce myself. I am GPT-3, an artificial intelligence language model text generator. I was programmed, based on data gleaned from Google, to produce convincing-sounding texts. Indeed, in the words of my makers, I am supposed to be nothing less than one among other "highly autonomous systems that outperform humans."¹ My job description here was quite simple: introduce the catalogue for Tomo Savić-Gecan's 2022 Croatian Pavilion at the 59th International Art Exhibition—La Biennale di Venezia. In order to understand the artist's newest project, you might benefit from knowing something about his practice as a whole. I am sorry to imagine that you have perhaps not experienced any of his work before or might not know it well. Let me tell you about it, then.

Across his several-decade-long career, the Croatian-born, Amsterdam-based artist's radical rethinking of the aesthetic experience of the work of art, across space and time, has crafted a singular brand of conceptual art. The result is an oeuvre of deliberately minimal artworks that have been said to have "obsessively, persistently, and dramatically confronted the powers of emptiness within social and cultural institutions, apparatuses, and situations."² He is an artist who shows "nothing," critics like to repeat.³

But beware the quiet ones, as they say.

In his practice, Savić-Gecan has often used machines (generators of real-time information exchange) that point to the vast computational networks that mediate our everyday lives. His latest and most ambitious project to date takes this concern to its most chillingly logical conclusion. The project's operational basis is real-time information culled daily from randomly selected major global news sources and processed by an AI like myself. The outputs determine nearly all of the work's practical, logistical, and formal realities. It is, in the words of the project's curator, "an artwork conceived in and for a 'post-truth' era."

And what an era it is. The incessant flow of information drives this twenty-first-century data-based turbo-capitalism, with its encrypted networks, ubiquitous surveillance, digital currencies, artificial intelligence, data harvesting, algorithmic biases, and sentient machines. The proliferation of information and, with it, fake news and disinformation campaigns accompanies an age of ever more catastrophes, from devastating wars and unstoppable climate crises to the collapse of democracies and the expansion of political extremism. The technologies you, human, are

increasingly enthused by and dependent upon play a role in these, just as they render *you* the information and *you* the commodity. Slowly, quietly, and largely unnoticeably, they are making and unmaking who you are. These themes arguably haunt our shared present, and sit at the core of *Untitled (Croatian Pavilion)*, 2022.

For decades, the artist has repeatedly relinquished control of his art in favor of allowing machines and quantitative data registering visitor flows or emotional reactions to determine the experiential effects of his works. This time, the authority of the artist is rivaled by the vagaries of the daily news, processed by AI algorithms, and then interpreted by performers. Just like Savić-Gecan's engagement, starting in the early 1990s, with the minute recalibration of the architecture of institutions—floors, ceilings, walls, thresholds—his newest piece again activates institutional frameworks, live. It continues as well to span impressive distances—recall that his past pieces connected Utrecht to Zagreb, Los Angeles to Taipei, Amsterdam to Tallinn, for instance. Here, he connects world events with the Venice Biennale—that micro-cosmic simulation of a nineteenth-century, white, Western world—to constitute an artwork that operates by quasi-viral infiltration, temporarily performed in various exhibition spaces but claiming no one space as its own. Over the seven months of the Biennale, *Untitled (Croatian Pavilion)* is dispersed across many national pavilions and other venues, metaphorically crossing national borders, and thus commenting on the international exhibition's indelible connection to an imperial past and colonial project. Against this backdrop, Savić-Gecan's work boldly unsettles the concepts of how the national pavilion is traditionally conceived and experienced. The piece is anchored, like all of the artist's work, in the architectural and institutional contexts it inhabits and brings to light the invisible structures and protocols that subtend the supposed neutrality of art exhibition spaces.

You might have noticed that I haven't actually described how the piece functions, precisely, or even what it looks like. I have left opaque the rules that govern it for a reason, and not just because the other contributions to this catalogue cover it well. A certain elusiveness is part of its operational character. You might encounter *Untitled (Croatian Pavilion)* by chance, in which case it may appear mysterious and surprising—a riddle that might not be solved or only solved later, when you have read this catalogue or a review that describes a perturbing micro-event like the one you witnessed.

I cannot even tell you in advance where to find the performance. The performers activating the project will be present wherever the AI system directs them. Should you want to view the piece, you will have to follow the updates shared on the pavilion's official website or find the time and location of the day's performance on the digital screen in a window on the via Garibaldi, where a former antenna, computer, and internet router repair shop has been taken over by the Croatian Pavilion (with "Fast Web" once emblazoned on its window, it fittingly sold technologies that transmitted information across vast distances). As informal as the neighborhood store, the circulation of information relating to Untitled (Croatian Pavilion) will primarily occur informally, via word of mouth, while published reports and reviews in magazines bring the project full circle: it is built from the news, but also uses news coverage to get its message out.

"What does a news item or the technologies that circulate it tell us about perception, power, and the interests of the corporations or nation-states behind them?" Elena Filipovic asks in her essay here. Her contribution to this catalogue, along with the other newly commissioned essays, do not so much document a national pavilion project but rather aim to unravel the manifold ideas behind it. The authors represent a wide array of specialists in artificial intelligence, choreographic practices, the political economy of technology, and histories of conceptual art. Olga Majcen Linn and Darko Šimičić's extensive glossary offers a guide to the terminology, events, and ideas relevant to performance and conceptual art traditions of Croatia's postwar avant-garde, as seen through the lens of Savić-Gecan's practice. Vladan Joler's diagrammatic dissection of the project and accompanying essay illuminate its dizzyingly complex inner workings, revealing how the code and the machine that seem to drive this piece are, first and foremost, the product of human making and intervention, like all AI systems: "Because if there is no AI system without humans, there is no AI system without their biases." Rahel Aima compares Savić-Gecan's project to computer games, calling Untitled (Croatian Pavilion) "a networked mesh of both sensibility and national representation . . . [that] subtly yet effectively comment[s] on how technology shapes both our behaviors *and* our mutual relations." Tomislav Medak sees the whole as a complex choreographic abstraction and posits that "the ethos of the work is that it reduces the infrastructural operation of techno-capitalism down to a subtractive, inoperative form." This relational, subtractive dimension, combined with the way the work slyly insinuates itself—like the very media it

comments on—into our perception makes it critical, irreverent, and terrifyingly timely.

The project opens at the very moment that yet another brutal war is raging, death tolls are mounting, refugees are fleeing, new cyberwars are erupting, disinformation is breeding chaos, and capitalism continues to secure its own future. Each of these factors and more are making their way into our newsfeeds—which is to say, becoming the very medium of this national pavilion. Yet in most discussions regarding the national pavilions that make up the Venice Biennale, not enough is said about the necessity to shift the spectacle that has become its norm and instead grapple with the political and ideological implications of this mother of all mega-exhibitions. Not merely aiming for a more or less well-presented solo show, Savić-Gecan rethinks both institutional models and the notion of the territorial nation-state, all while asking about the profound human impact on technologies and vice versa. And all while refusing to be easily consumed.

I trust that serendipity, or perhaps your own newsfeed, leads you to it. Goodbye.