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# ARTISTIC AND ARTIFICIAL: INTELLIGENCE, IMAGINATION, AND CREATIVITY

**International conference** organized by The Art Research Centre (Institute of Art History with Institute of Theatre and Film Research) of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, in cooperation with the NOVUM Foundation.

**Main venue**

Národné osvetové centrum / V-klub Conference Hall,  
Námestie SNP 12, Bratislava

**Date**

October 3rd and October 4th, 2022

**Program and abstracts**

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**MONDAY / OCTOBER 3RD**

14:00 WELCOMING SPEECH BY THE ORGANIZERS

**Ivan Gerát, Daniel Grůň**

KEYNOTE LECTURE

**Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield**

*Dissenting-Machines*

15:00 - 19:00 PANEL 1

**Monika Mitášová & Marian Zervan**

*The Function of the Concepts Figurative and Figural  
in Machine of Architecture Peter Eisenman*

**Ivan Gerát**

*Intelligence and the Interpretation of Symbols  
Between Art and Technology*

15:45 - 16:00 COFFEE BREAK

**Daniel Grůň**

*"AI" and AI: Contemporary Art, Archival Impulse  
and Artificial Intelligence*

**Peter Tuka (online)**

*Connecting the Real with the Imaginary:  
New Seriousness of Július Koller and Peter Rónai*

PANEL DISCUSSION AND Q&A

**TUESDAY / OCTOBER 4TH**

9:30 - 12:00 PANEL 2

**Lenka Hámošová**

*Where to Go from the Avocado Chair?  
Unpursued Trajectories of AI-driven Media Synthesis*

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PANEL 2

**Jana Dudková**

*Artistic and Artificial in the Age of the Global Climatic Change: The Dialogue with the Artificial Neuron Network in White on White by Viera Čákanyová*

**Miloš Mistrík**

*Theatrum Mundi and Big Data*

10:30 - 10:45      COFFEE BREAK

**Elena Knopová**

*De-construction of the Living (Actor) in the Work of Suzanne Kennedy and Rimini Protokoll*

**Martin Palúch**

*Mutual Impact of Virtual Reality and Non-Fiction Cinema Genres*

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PANEL DISCUSSION AND Q&A

12:00      KEYNOTE LECTURE

**Scott Contreras-Koterbay**

*The Aesthetic and Teleological Voids of Aesthetic Objects Created by Artificial Intelligences, a Lacanian Position*

13:15      LUNCH BREAK

**GALÉRIA MEDIUM / ACADEMY OF FINE ARTS AND DESIGN, HVIEZDOSLAVOVO NÁMESTIE 18**

17:00      GUIDED TOUR AND DISCUSSION  
WITH THE ARTISTS AND CURATORS  
OF THE EXHIBITION ARTISTIC AND ARTIFICIAL

**KLARISKY - EXHIBITION AND CONCERT HALL, KLARISKÁ ULICA**

19:00      AWARD CEREMONY  
OF THE NOVUM FOUNDATION PRIZE  
(by invitation only)

# ABSTRACTS

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## THE AESTHETIC AND TELEOLOGICAL VOIDS OF AESTHETIC OBJECTS CREATED BY ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCES, A LACANIAN POSITION

**Scott Contreras-Koterbay**

Department of Art & Design/Department of Philosophy, Fine & Performing  
Arts Scholars, Honors College, East Tennessee State University

In *The System of Objects*, Baudrillard writes: "what happens to the object in the technological sphere is essential, whereas what happens to it in the psychological or sociological sphere of needs and practices is inessential." The increasing number of examples of objects produced for aesthetic experience by AIs today almost serves as a corrective to Baudrillard's assertion, especially from a Lacanian perspective. The evolving relationship between computational autonomous agency - artificial intelligence, in all its forms - and human responses across the dialectical aesthetic topology reverses this, especially when it comes to objects created by programmed entities. A contingent void is created in the differences between imaginative and creative activity that drives desire functions to attempt a Symbolic expansion that inevitably fails, but such contingency is the basis of the AI created aesthetic object's essence. The result is that the experience of the objects fails as both the experience of an aesthetic object and its creation, seemingly reversing the evidence of any expanding reification as its state of agency while simultaneously any function attempting to guarantee its specificity becomes a cause for its inarticulateness. Baudrillard was correct when he wrote that "Each of our practical objects is related to one or more structural elements, but at the same time they are all in perpetual flight from technical structure towards their secondary meanings, from the technological system towards a cultural system." Yet, in this, there is the opportunity for both presupposed aesthetic and teleological judgements that are rooted in a recognition of the structural forces at play: because they are potentially pleasing, practical and purposeful, the experience of AI produced objects are unavoidably subject to both forms of judgement in a dynamically intertwined positioning that reveal the abyss of this unexpected Symbolic circuitousness. This is an opportunity to utilize Lacanian analysis to explore the role desire plays as an articulation of the art of AI, our responses and our desires for the effects it will engender in our lives.

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ARTISTIC AND ARTIFICIAL IN THE AGE OF THE GLOBAL CLIMATIC CHANGE:  
THE DIALOGUE WITH THE ARTIFICIAL NEURON NETWORK IN WHITE ON  
WHITE BY VIERA ČÁKANYOVÁ

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**Jana Dudková**

Ústav divadelnej a filmovej vedy Centra vied o umení SAV - Institute of Theatre  
and Film Research, Art Research Centre of SAS

Beginning with some of her student films, the work of a young Slovak director Viera Čákanová often concentrates on existential perception of death along with the search for alternative forms of (audio)visuality. The latter manifests both in erasing borders between fiction, non-fiction and animation and in Čákanová's interest in various kinds of non-human, arbitrary footage taken e.g. by an Alzheimer patient in films *Alda* and *Olda*, or by a drone in films *FREM* and *White on White*. From the perspective of the actual conference, the last two films can be especially interesting. Both of them are results of Čákanová's stay on Antarctic, with *White on White* released a year after *FREM*, and presented as a kind of its explanation and extension. But *White on White* is far more than that. It offers an explicit and strongly intriguing dialogue with an artificial neuron network and poses questions on the essence of life, creativity or the sense of the art. In my paper, I aim to analyse *White on White* in the context of the other Čákanová's works, and to elaborate on its image and content strategies combining concerns of the global climatic change with the broader sense of creativity, artificiality and non-humanity.

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INTELLIGENCE AND THE INTERPRETATION OF SYMBOLS  
BETWEEN ART AND TECHNOLOGY

**Ivan Gerát**

Ústav dejín umenia Centra vied o umení SAV - Institute of Art History, Art  
Research Centre of SAS

Understanding intelligence that surpasses human capabilities is not a problem brought about by modern technologies. Even before it surfaced in the technosphere, it had been a problem for artists and visionaries who went various ways to get in touch with mysteries beyond human understanding yet embedded in human experience. This offers an opportunity to compare various ways how a symbol was used to deal with topics that are displaced from rational consideration when linking the supreme rationality, projected

into the primordial word that gave meaning to the universe (logos), or cosmic wisdom (sofia) to seemingly irrational phenomenon of suffering (passio). Traditional iconology has opened two ways of answering this complex set of questions, focussing either on a Neoplatonic realm of ideas (Panofsky) or on cosmic energies (Warburg). Also, there is a problem of image adoration, in which the relation to the supreme intelligence is forgotten – idolatry. This can reach beyond the sphere of art in technological, personal or institutional fetishism. Various artists tried to criticise the new forms of idolatry, which, paradoxically, opened new horizons for similar questions. Was idolatry attacked or reinforced when a symbol was re-evaluated in staging a new form of ancient rituals (Nitsch)? Did the new ways of framing it drawing on modern technologies (Hirst) escape the problem of technological idols? Does the artistic criticism of personality cult or priestly authority (Németh) concern only the clerical institution, responsible for the control of symbol's meanings or can it be understood as a self-referential criticism of the artistic system?

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"AI" AND AI: CONTEMPORARY ART, ARCHIVAL IMPULSE  
AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

**Daniel Grůň**

Ústav dejín umenia Centra vied o umení SAV - Institute of Art History, Art  
Research Centre of SAS

After the status of the artwork began to change in the early 2000s under the influence of the emerging age of digital data, narrative practices that present lost or suppressed historical information became a widespread part of contemporary art practices. But the archival impulse did not automatically result in the transition of visual art to databases but rather the creation of tangible connections between the archival order and the discontinuity in the histories of the former East European countries. The archival order thus becomes the production of counter-memory concerning contemporary social crises. To create archival simulacra, artists apply digital images and objects, the original of which either never existed or are irretrievably lost beyond the horizon of political upheavals. Thus, they are so distant that they have not become part of established historical narratives. The paper will indicate connections between the archival impulse in art, the creation of artificial worlds, and speculative proposals of artificial intelligence. I will examine these connections through views on the control society, the information order, and the related blurring

of the edges between fact and fiction. My focus is on comparing several contemporary art projects by visual artists connecting their archival work with the storytelling structures, working alongside the quasi- and pseudo-scientific methodologies, thus becoming agents acting against social amnesia, inequality, and injustice. I understand artificial and artistic here as inextricably linked factors in which different algorithms of image distribution mechanisms are used and intermingled. In their place, I will put terms such as the document's performativity, fictional narrative, immersion, and, last but not least, the power of museum devices to convince the audience.

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## WHERE TO GO FROM THE AVOCADO CHAIR?

### UNPURSUED TRAJECTORIES OF AI-DRIVEN MEDIA SYNTHESIS

**Lenka Hámošová**

Theory of Film and Multimedia, Film and TV School of Academy of Performing Arts, Pra-gue, Czech Republic

The rise of text-to-image neural networks (i.e. DALL-E 2) caused heated online discussions about the future of human creativity and the veracity of communication. The existential crisis that some artists experience when confronted with text-to-image models foreshadows a much bigger fear of the human resigning on the creator's role in exchange for a higher level of convenience. Blinded by the excitement, we might miss the momentum and lose the privileged position of the primary consciousness shaping this world in favor of AI. What happens when AI-generated media populate the visual domain so that AI starts to learn from its own outputs? How important is for AI the connection to the human and the real-world representations? The "avocado chair" (OpenAI, 2021) is not a mere translation from text to image but a "parasemiotic" synthesis (Ochigame 2022) which is interpretive on both ends (by neural networks interpreting human text input as well as humans interpreting the synthesized out-come). This entangled mesh of fiction and verisimilitude makes it possible to overcome the limitations of human imagination and depict concepts that have not had their visual representation yet. The possibility of depicting imaginary entities that have never existed or been represented before or things outside of our material reality can have inconceivable consequences for society. Both OpenAI and Google withheld from releasing the code to the public, acknowledging the ethical issues of training on uncurated web-scale data that leads to inheriting social biases and limitations of large-scale language models. It means a symbolic pause button to the insane race toward

a publicly accessible tool for producing photorealistic synthetic visuals that would change the world forever. Where do we go from here? We can use the time to reassess current state-of-the-art AI models' "imperfect" outcomes, which are under-researched but offer incredible potential. For example, the visually indeterminate (Hertzmann, 2020) outcomes that lack the photorealistic coherence offer a much wider space for interpretation and create space for a different way of perceiving an image. The imperfections make the technology visible and reflectable. Furthermore, issues of the affective value of synthetic media and the spectacularity caused by their algorithmic indefiniteness can be counterbalanced by embracing participatory perspectives. AI-driven media synthesis can be seen as a human-nonhuman network of collaborators connecting different types of intelligence in collective negotiation and co-creation. This paper critically reflects the post-avocado-chair momentum of "creative AI" from the artistic research perspective and proposes re-evaluating the trajectories unpursued by the commercially-oriented AI industry. It presents participatory experiments with AI-driven media synthesis as human-AI co-creation as a speculative visual method that can facilitate and document collectively shaped experiences and knowledge. By moving in between - human and nonhuman, collective and individual, theoretical and experimental, sensing and knowing, verbal and visual, concrete and abstract - new kinds of knowledge emerge. At the same time, AI imagination-enhancing tools overcoming the limitations of the human mind can be used in mythopoetic art practices, allowing "fictioning" reality in different ways and thus engendering alternative modes of existence (Burrows and O'Sullivan 2019).

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**DE-CONSTRUCTION OF THE LIVING (ACTOR) IN THE WORK  
OF SUZANNE KENNEDY AND RIMINI PROTOKOLL**

**Elena Knopová**

Ústav divadelnej a filmovej vedy Centra vied o umení SAV - Institute of Theatre and Film Research, Art Research Centre of SAS

In this paper I will focus on theatrical productions that eschew traditional practices of staging and working with the actor as a living, malleable material. The German director Suzanne Kennedy develops, in a laboratory-like way, practices and technologies that deprive the actor of his natural means of expression - natural human speech, face and facial expressions, movement and gesture. The actors are trapped in silicone masks, they resemble more like automated



puppets or strange, installed characters from computer games, the speech is played from a recording or dubbed. The plastic gesture of acting and staging is radically modified. Kennedy creates distinctly artifice-oriented productions that might seem almost posthumanist. Interestingly, however, by replacing the natural and the living with the artificial and technologically sophisticated, he explores in an almost archaeological manner the mechanisms of man leading to his state or current symptom of not-being-alive - his suicide (the staging of *The Virgin Suicides*) or murder (*Why Does Mr. R. Run Amok?*). Similarly, the German theatre group, Rimini Protokoll, has created a performance, *Remote X*, in which the "here and now" engages the audience as participants on a walking excursion into a certain dramatic situation or event. However, the spectators are in the position of remote control actors, instructed by an artificial intelligence in the form of a program (voice) that they know nothing about, but follow until the final command *Jump off the balcony!* This opens up the question of the perception of reality (theatrical), of reality (lived) through the for the theatre originally distancing effect of modern technologies.

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## DISSENTING-MACHINES

### **Jonathan Lahey Dronsfield**

Currently working as an independent scholar and has held positions at A.pass Institute of Art Research Brussels, Zürcher Hochschule der Künste Switzerland, and Royal College of Art London, amongst other institutions.

What I call a dissenting-machine is an assemblage of components which produces a dissensual idea image or phrase which disrupts the field in which it intervenes. The dissenting-machine forms itself through the material agency of human being, intentional or not, and rearranges otherwise heterogenous components into a loose form or circuit in such a way that the idea image or phrase can be repeated dissentingly. In the repetition the field in which they intervene is opened up and shared differently. Dissenting-machines derive some of their power from the very thing they are dissenting against. Their relation to the social body is constitutive. Dissenting-machines "surpass human cognitive capacities" (to quote from the CfP), because chance is a necessary component of them; yet human capacity is needed to grasp the chance-like event and make of it a series. Dissenting-machine takes its point of departure from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's desiring-machine, cannibalised, re-purposed and, yes, to a certain extent pimped. It has a very different regime, and little reference to the unconscious. The representational/projective

is not excluded. Representation is one of the fields dissenting-machines dis-arrange, yet they can use representation as a means of dissenting. In my conception of the dissenting-machine, it does not necessarily take artists to bring about the presentation of the machine. For instance, athletes can do so. This paper will discuss the two in setting out what a dissenting-machine is.

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## THEATRUM MUNDI AND BIG DATA

**Miloš Mistrík**

Ústav divadelnej a filmovej vedy Centra vied o umení SAV - Institute of Theatre and Film Research, Art Research Centre of SAS

There are plenty of tools for learning about the world. We will not enumerate them here, but for the sake of orientation we will recall intuitive, exact, irrational, statistical, artistic, scientific and many others. The big picture of the world, the *Theatrum Mundi*, was already known in antiquity, but also in the Baroque and in the modern theatre of the 20th century. Theatre is (or can be) the *Theatrum Mundi* and should be one of the most important means of knowledge. Compared to the millennia-old tool, in recent decades we have other tools for cognition - Big Data - that have always been there, they just needed to be found, archaeologically excavated and made available in electronic form for contemporary cognition. *Theatrum Mundi* is from the field of art, Big Data is from the field of statistics, they are far from each other. Can two intelligences - creative human and virtual machine - bring them together to create a new quality?

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## THE FUNCTION OF THE CONCEPTS FIGURATIVE AND FIGURAL IN MACHINE OF ARCHITECTURE PETER EISENMAN

**Monika Mitášová & Marian Zervan**

Katedra teórie a dejín umenia, Vysoká škola výtvarných umení v Bratislave  
Department of Theory and History of Art, Academy of Fine Arts and Design  
in Bratislava

In our lecture, we focus on the terms figurative and figural as defined by Francois Lyotard as well as Gilles Deleuze in his book on Francis Bacon. We examine the roles these terms play in Peter Eisenman's architectural thinking and design. Eisenman became interested in the reflection of Deleuze's philosophy after

his collaboration with Jacques Derrida. There are various aspects of Deleuze's influence on Eisenman to be explored. The first utilizes Deleuze's term fold. The second considers Eisenman's version of a diagram elaborated in dialogue with Deleuze's term diagram. And finally, the third points towards Deleuze's above mentioned terms figurative and figural and their role in Eisenman's construction of the term and project of the interstitial space.

Our lecture traces Eisenman's understanding of the terms figurative and figural and asks how interstitiality has become an argument in the problematization of both heterogenous and affirmative aspects of architecture in the process of critical architectural thinking.

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## MUTUAL IMPACT OF VIRTUAL REALITY AND NON-FICTION CINEMA GENRES

**Martin Palúch**

Ústav divadelnej a filmovej vedy Centra vied o umení SAV - Institute of Theatre and Film Research, Art Research Centre of SAS

With the intentions of developing Virtual Reality Cinema, current trends in 3D scanning of real objects have reached qualitative possibilities that find wide application in the creation of hyper-realistic films or computer games. The inclusion of these realistic-looking virtual objects in the film and game industries places new demands on the rethinking of traditional approaches to the arts. In this case, we will focus on non-fiction film. Feature filmmaking focuses on the creation of fictional worlds. Its transition to virtual environments represents an imaginary extension of the spectator experience. However, interesting questions are raised by the possibilities involved in the creation of virtual non-fiction genres. Films based on historical documents or factual worlds. What is the relationship between reality and hyperreality in VR non-fiction films? An important aspect to compare is the qualitative level of the representation of reality by Virtual Reality. Nowadays, photogrammetry methods are replaced by 3D scanning of real objects of different sizes. 360-degree cameras and high-sensitivity scanners are used to take pictures of real objects. They are then turned into hyper-realistic 3D objects in the computer, which the creator then works with creatively within the virtual environment. In order for the impression of the virtual environment to be faithful to reality, the quality of the display should reflect its properties - in terms of light, colour, surface texture and so on. However, the creation of such a virtual envi-

ronment may be subject to a number of additional modifications that can be used, for example, in educational or cultural films. Indeed, augmented reality places specific demands on the development of virtual documentary genres. The reception of virtual non-fictional worlds by the viewer also raises specific questions. Virtual environments extend the traditional modes of production and perception familiar from film. On the one hand, it increases the viewer's sense of interactive presence in the world of virtual reality; on the other hand, the viewer determines how to proceed in the virtual environment based on his or her own decisions and by his or her own choice. Cognitive philosophers of film and semi-pragmatists have deciphered the basic aspects of perception in relation to fiction and documentary. In the case of virtual hyperreality, it is appropriate to check the validity of their claims. Is it even possible for them to appear both plausible and true? What conditions in terms of facts should a virtual documentary world fulfil? New questions are also raised by the relation of virtual representation to historical sciences and human memory in general. The material nature of historical sources - paper documents or objects - is lost when transformed into a digital object. On the other hand, the experience of dematerialized reality is greatly expanded by new perspectives of cognition. The construction of virtual non-fictional worlds should have certain rules and limitations, so that the viewer does not become convinced during the reception that historical truth and memory are being manipulated. If this problem ceases to be important, the traditional link between the real object and its digital virtual double may disappear. Will human memory in a virtual environment be necessary at all? The next question will concern the ethics of non-fictional virtual reality. 3D scanning of people allows the creation of plausible representations of real personalities. How do we set rules against avatar misuse in virtual environments? In the case of virtual reality, can we still talk about reality in the traditional sense? The gaming industry asks these questions all the time. In fact, all the effort is focused on increasing the authenticity of the experience while immersing oneself in hyperreal illusions. In the development of computer games, after mastering the technical aspects of display, a great deal of emphasis is placed on ways of creating an attractive story in which the user of the game should interactively perform. A good script plays an essential role in the process of setting up the game and configuring the virtual objects. An authentic and realistic experience is thus always at the centre of the attention of virtual reality developers.

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CONNECTING THE REAL WITH THE IMAGINARY:  
NEW SERIOUSNESS OF JÚLIUS KOLLER AND PERER RÓNAI

**Peter Tuka**

PhD Candidate in History of Art, University of Glasgow

The present world is often described as being defined by the hyperreality of simulacra. Recent years of the global pandemic have highlighted this issue, when the entire world has moved online. People, events and places have transformed into digital representations accessible anytime and from anywhere. Virtual reality took swift precedence over the actual 'real' reality. What this experience has revealed, is that life is capable of existence in virtual realm. In the realm, which can not only substitute the physical world but can open up new possibilities in virtual reality. The notion, which threatens the very basic perception of reality. What is real? Is there the one ultimate reality? Or are there more realities? These questions have really become the problem of modern western society. Pre-modern societies understand that the world exists on multiple layers, and it is possible for an individual to freely navigate among them. These layers consist of spiritual magical realms. If one layer comes under threat, we simply move to another. The problem of the modern society is that the scientific revolution and the need to rationalise everything led to the gradual marginalisation of the spiritual imaginary realm of existence where miracles are possible. The spiritual realms have been diminished to secondary status and have been separated out of the individual's actual 'real' measurable existence. The real and the imaginary layers of the world have distanced, creating the so-called post-modern condition. The condition, where the multiple layers of the world do not communicate among each other and the fluent transition among them is impossible. Condition, in which all there is left of the world is 'reality'. But what happens when this notion of reality comes under threat? Do we embrace it and remain detached in the hyperreality of simulacra? Or do we look back to the old ways in order to learn how to perceive the whole of the world and make attachments with its multiple dimensions? Július Koller and Peter Rónai chose the latter option at the beginning of 1990s when they established artistic collective New Seriousness [Nová Vážnosť]. In this paper, I will argue, that the purpose of New Seriousness was to protest the post-1989 influx of post-modern art to Slovakia, which embraced the virtual state of detachment within the hyperreality of simulacra. New Seriousness pledged to make a step beyond post-modern, into 'post-post-modern' where the detached individual finds new connections with the whole of the world and all its multi-layered realms of existence. Here individual finds new

connections between real and imaginary. Consequently, I will be interested to see what we can learn from Koller and Rónai to improve our present state of being? What is the place of imaginary magical fairy-tale realm in the present world ruled by the scientific realm of virtual reality and artificial intelligence?



**Národné osvetové centrum / V-klub Conference Hall**

Námestie SNP 12, Bratislava

<https://v-klub.sk/kontakt/>

**Galéria Medium / Academy of Fine Arts and Design**

Hviezdoslavovo námestie 18

<https://www.vsvu.sk/en/medium-gallery/>

**Klarisky - exhibition and concert hall**

(former Clarissine Church)

Klariská ulica



**Centrum vied o umení SAV - Art Research Centre of SAS**

<https://cvu.sav.sk>

**Ústav divadelnej a filmovej vedy - Institute of Theatre and Film Research**

<http://www.udfv.sav.sk/>

**Ústav dejín umenia SAV - Institute of Art History**

<http://www.dejum.sav.sk/>



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