

# ..... Hotel Pompino

## VGTV—A reactor for new media .....

Since 1986, Van Gogh TV has continuously proposed visions about how to use mass media technology to approach the viewer in an artistic way. Radio, television, interactive television, online multi-user systems and specific multimedia techniques have been utilized for their ideas. VGTV is responsible for creating significant interactive communication projects for television and later for Internet. Since 1986, VGTV has been a flexible collective, shrinking and expanding, an international association of artists, technicians and programmers. Working between high-tech prototypes and off-the-shelf consumer products.

Retrospective—VGTV's Pompino project 1990 was a cocktail between blood, sperm, sweat and tears of the real world and the "01—push buttons on and off" of the virtual world, it was a personalized, privatized and emotionalized composition on and around TV. For the duration of the project all participants were in an ongoing "broadcast", 24h around the clock, condensed in the studio amplified by AIR time. Untouchable and abstract because of its virtuality—(sometimes technicians fought with actors during the broadcast and have that this was already on AIR). A contradiction to the common understanding of television.



In the late 80s, VGTV's Mike Hentz and Karel Dudesek met with Peter Weibel (still artistic director of ARS at the time) and discussed "HOTEL POMPINO," the VGTV television project in which everyone involved would spend the entire time living and working together in a container city and filming would go on permanently. Initially the proposal didn't elicit much of a response. It was a second meeting attended by VGTV member Benjamin Heidersberger, Ars staffers and Hannes Leopoldseder, head of the ORF's Upper Austria studio, that led to the breakthrough and the signing of a contract by VGTV, ORF, SRG, ZDF and 3sat.

Benjamin Heidersberger was responsible for all the technical innovations that went into the *Pompino* project and later *Piazza Virtuale*. He was the only one who, parallel to the artistic ideas, could think in terms of and achieve mastery over the technical context—or at least give the impression that the project would be a cakewalk.

With the signing of this contract, VGTV headed off into uncharted tele-VISIONARY territory. No one knew how this undertaking would actually turn out or whether the concept was even doable. Here, all due respect to studio head Hannes Leopoldseder, who had the courage to become involved in this risky venture. Nowadays, proceeding in this fashion would be unthinkable on the part of either commercial networks or public broadcasting outlets.

It was the first ever VR set produced in TV history, with interactive TV features, through all an interactive Cyber TV 15 years ago.

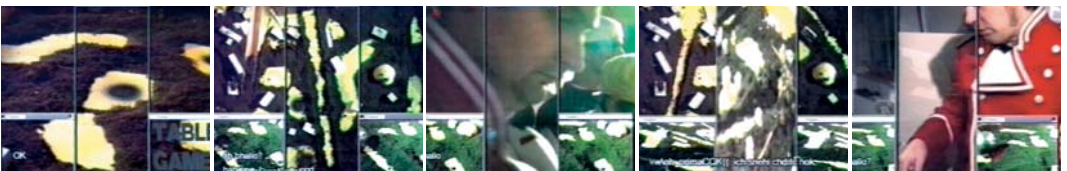
It was an ongoing show with a fluid transition before and after the AIR TIME. *Hotel Pompino* went on for almost 24 hours, 5 days live switching stages from real to virtual live accessibly for public to get an inside view of this pre Ant Sister of Big Brother. I am still convinced that someone stole the idea from us and turned it into far worse commercial format. Endemol is an ugly, disgusting undertaking which basically should be put in front of the Court of Justice to be prosecuted for crime against humanity.



*Hotel Pompino* was a TV format based on the idea that the candidates and the insiders would all reside as guests in a real as well as virtual hotel and get involved in different situations and tasks that are thought up by the Pompinos, the hotel staff, or by the viewers. The Pompinos could help the candidates or they could also lead them astray. A jury awarded points for completed tasks. The grand prize consisted of the profit from the broadcast time: the winner could do whatever he/she wanted with this particular time slot.

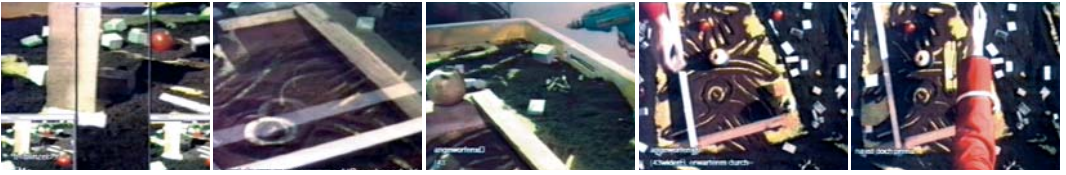


It was invented long before industry's Reality formats went on air. The difference is that Pompino was live and real, crazy and poetic, intelligent and stupid, critical, confronting and attacking the society, and at the same time a self-reflective living organism. Pompino never betrayed the audience, like saying "we love you", that's why it was loved and hated by the public ... it was a alternative to the daily stupidity of entertainment & information.



The pilot episodes for Linz were tested in a number of different preliminary projects in Amsterdam and on the Hamburg cable network. The interaction with the virtual sets was tested out and optimized in a big bluebox.

In Linz, the original idea of accommodating *Hotel Pompino* in a container city was rejected by the producers as unfeasible due to budgetary constraints. Instead, the O.K—Offenes Kulturhaus—then still under construction—was chosen as the broadcast and production



location. A group of about 90 people then gathered in Linz to start work on the first Reality TV Show. The entire technical infrastructure was set up in the O.K gym: director's console, bluebox as virtual stage, and the set consisting of various backdrops (surreal hotel room furnishings) as reality stage. *Hotel Pompino's* TV format was the first of its kind anywhere in the world: 4 independent screen levels with individually scalable windows, 100% live performance, virtual set technology controllable from the bluebox by means of camera tracking that brought in the corresponding digital spaces.

Innovations can be accomplished only by persistently rejecting established production forms, by ignoring the technical obsession with spotlessness prevalent in commercial broadcasting, and by pursuing projects in which a few of those involved do indeed have an inkling about what might come out of them but most of the participants actually don't know where things are headed.

Every nosedive of a dislodged viewer into the collective tele-void was a contribution to individual purification accompanied by desperate appeals for orientation: "Hello, hello is anybody there?"

A round dance full of ambivalence. What was good could be bad at the same time, and what was recognized as bad was, in turn, good according to others.



Not only 15 years ago Hotel PoMplno also 25 years ago Ars EleKtroniKa— Its also 50 yEars of two Pompinos and one 47 years CTO old Pompino. The SotosPeak 4th virtuaL Van Pompino still has to rehAbiliTate himself in order to get into PompinO heaven after having donned his corruption sandals (is there a rehabilitation program yes nO maybe?) YES, but Don't forget the Pomplnos, aha the Pomplnos could lie to the candidates Too, so waS that actualLy legit-imate, or what do you think?

