the objectives and principles. This is the very reason why the server continuously risks being shut down, but has held on for ten years so far.

27 Taken from the article "Letteratura chimica. Scritti di infamia e marciume postmoderno" ("Chemical Literature. Writings of post-modern infamy and rot"), by Francesco "Warbear" Macarone Palmieri, published on <www.euromovements.info/html/letteratura.htm>.

28 The FreakNet history is found on the collective's site at: <www.freaknet.org/hacklab/history>.

29   On the website of the Nodo50 collective, www.nodo50.org, we read: "Organización dedicada a la telemática antagonista ya la organización de proyectos digitales alternativos". Sindominio too, whose experience refers directly to that of the Italian ECN collective, is a place of visibility and diffusion for many Spanish collectives: <www.sindominio.net>.

30 See for example the site <www.hackingballz.com> or the initiative by Piquete Virtual (Netstrike) against the site <www.ambitoweb.com>, an important Argentinean right-wing newspaper, promoted in 2002. Information at: <www.nodo50.org/piquetevirtual>.

31 CopyDown was conceived by Oedipa_m, with whom Pinna began collaborating immediately and who keeps the site alive today.

32 A good reconstruction of that seizure is found in Maria Teresa Paoli's graduation thesis, "New Media and Independent Communications Policy. Indymedia between Hacktivism and No Global Activism", University of Siena, Faculty of Letters and Philosophy, Degree Course in Communications Sciences, academic year 2000-2001. A downloadable on-line version in Italian in pdf format is found at: <http://italy.peacelink.org/mediawatch/docs/1248-14954_tesi.pdf>.

33 This episode is narrated by Ricardo Dominguez in the "Electronic Disturbance Theatre" video produced by Candida TV and inserted in the "Reality Hacking" video collection <www.candidatv.tv>.

Art on the Net and for the Net

Net.art and Hacktivism

From the second half of the 1990s up to today, there have been three basic passages in net art practices: the mass diffusion of the Internet as a chance to make the preceding computer utopias real, the progressive identification of networking practices inside well defined communities and the use of the Internet as a reinforcement platform for everyone's own artistic work.

These passages are quite evident if we consider the difficulty in finding definitions for the practices of networking art that took shape in the second half of the 1990s and today already begin being inserted in a historical context through various curatorial or publishing initiatives.

The communities that have taken shape in the first half of the 1990s, by creating BBSes and mailing lists, start feeling the need to give themselves an appearance, recognise themselves in a definition so that the members feel they are part of a community. A process certainly accelerated by the widespread of the Internet and electronic mail, seen as a launching pad for the immediate divulgation, without filters, of one's own ideas and, above all, an effective ground of visibility for everyone. As we have already seen, on an international level mailing lists such as "Nettime" were fundamental for creating a community of artists working on the web and for the web. And in the period between 1995 and

1997 this is where projects, actions, festivals and spontaneous interconnections start up, mainly organised independently by artists and activists who have identified themselves in the term "net.art"[1].

In 1997, after Documenta X (Kassel, Germany) - the first institutional festival to internationally accredit net.art art practices - the first mailing list expressly dedicated to the 7-11 (seven-eleven) topic started up. Founded by the German artist Udo Noll, in later years it became an important ground for comparison for everything that happened in the most experimental net.art panorama, after the "Nettime" mailing list became more moderate and many artists preferred a more open and free work channel. Before 7-11, there was a more fragmented and variegated net.art scene. The 7-11 mailing list was later hosted by the Ljudmila.org server, today the media art laboratory in Ljubliana founded by the Slovenian artist Vuk Cosic, with the active collaboration of Luka Frelih[2].

Going back to the origins of net.art, the "legend" publicised on "Nettime" by the Russian artist *Alexei Shulgin in March 1997,* shows that the term net.art was "found" for the first time by Vuk Cosic in an e-mail he received in December 1995 through an *anonymous remailer*, where the word "Net.Art" stood out in the text, made in undecipherable ASCII characters, referring to the fragment that made history:

(…) J8~g#|\;Net. Art{-^s1 (…)

So it's a real *ready-made*, as Alexei Shulgin writes in his e-mail sent to "Nettime". Shulgin tells how

the net itself gave Vuk Cosic a name for activity he was involved in! He immediately started to use this term. After a few months he forwarded the mysterious message to Igor Markovic, who managed to correctly decode it. The text [author's note: converted to a legible form] appeared rather controversial and a vague manifesto in which its author blamed traditional art institutions (...) and declared freedom of self-expression and independence for an artist on the Internet. The part of the text with the above mentioned fragment so strangely converted by Vuk's software was: "All this becomes possible only with emergence of the Net. Art as a notion becomes obsolete"[3].

Therefore the term net.art arises from the very guts of the net, as if a world incomprehensible for humans took light all by itself, ending its function as soon as it was converted to normality (once decoded, the text sent to Cosic doesn't look all that interesting).

This fragment of software was actually premonitory. The "golden days" of net.art were actually the second half of the 1990s, when numerous artists and activists gave life to events, works, debates on an international level, recognising themselves (and being recognised) as part of a new *Avant-garde?*. A network of projects and sparkling actions that fuelled Internet's utopian vision as a free uncontrolled means, applying "*hacking, social engineering and open source* from the digital practice; actions, ready-made, situation tactics and pranksters from the twentieth century tradition" (Lampo, 2005).

The first debates about net.art took place on the web, showing how networking was functional in sharing new aesthetics and objectives. Running through the "Nettime" on-line archive again, the first message on the list that puts the accent on the topic is shown by Pit Schultz on the 31st of May 1996, quoting Vuk Cosic with the subject line "The net.artists". Here, with reference to the 1995 works of Heath Bunting <www.irational.org>, light is shed on the nature of net.art in relationship to the first media art experiments, and it reflects on an audience not yet used to considering net.art as art[4].

Among other things, Heath Bunting was actually the first net.artist to send a message in the "Nettime" mailing list in December 1995. In that period, Heath Bunting, Vuk Cosic <www.ljudmila.org>, Olia Lialina <art.teleportacia.org>, Alexei Shulgin <www.easylife.org> and Jodi <www.jodi.org> were the first artists who worked expressly on the web recognising themselves in the "net.art" label, later involving a vaster scene, and thanks to networking done on "Nettime"[5].

In the following years, in addition to the above mentioned artists, activists and theorists, many others began experimenting on and with the web: among them Etoy <www.etoy.com>, Ubermorgen <www.ubermorgen.com>, ®TMark <www.rtmark.com>, The Yes Men <www.theyesmen.org>, Natalie Bookchin <www.calarts.edu/~bookchin>, Graham Harwood of the Mongrel Project <www.mongrelx.org>, Joan Leandre of retroYou <www.retroyou.org>, Mark Napier <www.potatoland.org>, Surveillance Camera Players <www.notbored.org/the-scp.html>, Matthew Fuller, Colin Green, Simon Pope of the collective I/O/D <www.backspace.org/iod>, Ricardo Dominguez of the Electronic Disturbance Theater <www.thing.net/~rdom/ecd/ecd.html>,

Cornelia Sollfrank <www.artwarez.org>, Amy Alexander <http://plagiarist.org>, Alexander R. Galloway <http://itserve.cc.ed.nyu.edu/galloway>, Adrian Ward <www.adeward.com>, Florian Cramer <http://cramer.plaintext.cc:70> and the Italians Jaromil <www.dyne.org>, [epidemiC] <http://epidemic.ws> and 0100101110101101.ORG (cf. Deseriis, Marano, 2003).

Hence the networking dynamics seem to have been fundamental for the net.art development, so much so that the Dutch duo Jodi, that began a real aesthetic of the programming code, created an online interactive map as artwork, showing the connections between the various servers of the net.art projects, still visible at <map.jodi.org>[6].

As Marco Deseriis and Giuseppe Marano write, speaking of the net.art network,

the construction of networks and shared contexts doesn't take place only in virtual space, it passes mainly through a dense succession of "physical events": meetings, exhibitions and festivals, that allow the various souls of net.culture to share ongoing experiences, and to deepen personal contacts and construct social moments. The events function as "accumulators and accelerators" for the initiatives that are sorted out on a translocal scale. (...) The chain among various cultural ambiences is produced concretely through festivals and meetings, where the net.artists meet and share their knowledge with hackers, political activists, cultural workers and others (*ivi*, p. 200).

Connections that involve artists, programmers and critics, carrying forward works and practices that live on the net and are created for the net, as the legendary debate on "Nettime" witnesses, where the concept of net.art (art as a net flow and process) is in contrast with *art on the net* (art exhibited on the net, but which does not exploit its intrinsic components, using it only as a showcase for works that already exist in real life)[7].

An intense networking activity that does not exhaust itself just on the Internet, causing the artist Vuk Cosic to declare:

I go to the conferences. In fact, net.art is this: an artistic practice that has much to do with the web. You come to the conference, you meet a hundred and more foreign people. This is a net. (...) When you're having fun, it's as if you were creative and you're producing something. When you have a good argument, when you're stimulated to create new subjects, new ideas, for me this is creativity, and therefore it is art[8].

There are numerous festivals and opportunities for sharing that over the years have involved international artists active in net.art and media art[9]. The spirit that gives life to the 1995-2005 period is well described in the catalogue of the *Connessioni Leggendarie* exhibit (2005) by Luca Lampo of the [epidemiC] group:

The net.art scene was not produced by strategies or money, but by people with special enthusiasm and attention to momentous change. People who, to discredit a legend, move and meet in the physical as well as the virtual world. Homes and hospitality, parties and dinners, trains and planes towards cities where someone, out of nowhere, invented a festival, a rendezvous... thousands of kilometres to present their own mailing list, a fake site, a small program or an idea, or maybe just to be there; being there was quite enough to be respected, no matter what for. Artist, author, promoter, editor, nuisance, were often the same person in different places (p. 17)[10].

A form of networking that is very similar to the one described in the preceding chapter on Hackmeetings. Yet it is singular how the live, flourishing network of Italian artists and activists whose origin and development we have told, seldom had anything directly to do with the net.art network. Many of the net practices made in Italy have remained mostly unknown on the international scene, except for a few instances. Among these, Jaromil, [epidemiC] and 0100101110101101.ORG, who from the very beginning got in touch with the other net.artists and today are usually considered part of the net.art phenomenon.

Marco Deseriis and Giuseppe Marano try to answer this question:

For us, net.art is above all a connector, a neuron, a syntagm among the billions of inert objects that make up the Web. It is the opportunity to turn the banal surfing experience into a narration where the characters and authors continually redesign the pathways we walk on. This is another reason why the 'Italian scene' stays in second place. Beyond the doubtful existence (and need) of a true national scene, the characteristics of the groups and the Italian practices closest to net.art lend themselves to little contamination. Added to the persistent techno-linguistic gap is the peculiarity of Italian movements, ever directed to an expansion of the inclusion and participation mechanisms, to the detriment of the speed of execution and interference (2003, pp. 10-11).

Actually, as the practices described here show, an Italian scene has certainly existed and has produced fertile connections and numerous projects. Such a scene, particularly the more politically oriented one, has never been defined with the term "net.art" and acted mainly on a national level. The reason was not just a linguistic problem, even though this was undoubtedly an obstacle (note that many sites of the groups described here are only in Italian). The determining factor was a different manner of perceiving its artistic work, often directly connected to the movement practices (with all the derived benefits and problems).

As Tommaso Tozzi, Stefano Sansavini, Ferry Byte and Arturo Di Corinto wrote in 2000:

The history of underground digital culture in Italy is also a history of Italian media art. This means that to speak of art we must not be forced to speak of acts that present themselves as art, otherwise we end up in confusion that seems latent in the way the "net.art" label is used. If for example one of the characteristics of net art is to operate collectively, to build relationships, etc., describing those counterculture practices that spread this collective attitude is the same as describing artistic works[11].

It appears understandable because, according to this vision embraced by various artists and activists in Italy, net art practices and mainly the networking dynamics were first defined as hacker art and later spread to the concept of hacktivism. Using these definitions, the direct reference to the medium is abandoned, giving greater importance to the collective dynamics of political-activist orientation that can occur on the Internet, as well as through other media. But then even the net.art practices don't take place solely on-line, as we have seen; yet in the definition of "net.art" there is explicit reference to the Internet.

Concerning the definition of hacktivism, Tozzi and Di Corinto write:

The term hacktivism comes from combining the words hacking and activism. *Hacking* is putting into practice a particular attitude towards information machines that presumes the study of computers to improve operation – through cooperation and free exchange of information between programmers – and sharing the knowledge that comes from it in order to give everyone unlimited access to knowledge. *Activism* in a strict sense is the American term indicating the means of organisation and political propaganda of the

grassroots movements, and in particular indicates the forms of direct action such as sit-ins, demonstrations, picketing, boycotting goods and consumption, squatting buildings and streets, self-management of spaces and self-production of goods and services (Di Corinto, Tozzi, 2002, p. 13).

The term hacktivism has been widely accepted in Italy since the 1990s (following the political cyberpunk tradition) and includes those activist and artistic practices in favour of freedom of expression and communication, in particular but not limited to the web. Outside Italy there is not a long tradition of the term hacktivism, and many hackers - for example the present members of the CCC in Berlin - do not recognise hacking as making politics and much less creating art. But in the context of American activism, another cyber-activist and artist, Ricardo Dominguez of the Electronic Disturbance Theatre (EDT), refers directly to the same term, as well as to the Netstrike practice, to describe his actions supporting the Zapatista cause. The idea of hacktivism as a networking practice is particularly recognised in Italy, above all by the presence of a vast network of movement that includes artists, hackers and digital activists, alive since the 1980s.

Therefore the term net.art seems little "used" in the 1990s by Italian "movement" artists, but the definition is not unknown, because many artists and theorists are enrolled in the international lists such as Nettime, even though not participating actively in the discussions (and here the linguistic limit returns), and because some of the independent magazines, as we have already described, publicise in Italy what happens across the border. An example is the fact that, during the 1990s and 2000s, the artist Giacomo Verde expressly uses the term "net-art" to define his more recent works on the web. This happens, in particular, for the *Qwertyu* project:

Qwertyu is the first seven letters on the PC keyboard, it could be the work of an ancient language, it makes us wonder what it means, thus opening up to many feasible answers. Qwertyu is a net-art work: a meeting place among the web's immateriality, the lightness of poetry, the materiality of architecture and the transience of sound; an encounter between their various specifics in a context 'mined' by the fear of the "information bomb" that at each step will blast the concepts of material, space, time and place (<www.qwertyu.net/qwertyu/>)[12].

Removing the "." (from net.art to net art) the borders are less defined and in Italy the practice is attributed to projects and works that are not necessarily part of the net.art international network. Evidence of this phenomenon from the end of the 1990s is the workshop for young theorists and artists <.net art>: <Anywhere><Everywhere> described previously, organised in April 1999 in Modena by the critic Mariacristina Cremaschi (it is not by chance that the workshop is called .net art and not net.art).

In the early 2000s, due a little to the influence of international practices, which were nearly at their peak, due a little to the reawakening of the academic environments oblivious of the phenomenon, a second wave of young theorists and editors began to use the term net art to define media art practices. There is distribution in Italy of the international works that have become "historical" and the Italian works by emerging artists who see themselves in the term net.art and who gravitate mainly in institutional environments, outside the movement circuits[13].

The use of the term net art (without a dot) moves the field of use towards less politicised settings, which after many years of net criticism "invent the wheel", but surely are worthy of spreading a series of media art practices in the more traditional circuits of art, known until then only by a close circle of people. We must also say that most of the Italian artists who worked in the 1980s and 1990s with a computer and the web have intentionally kept away from the "art system", proposing a no-copyright artistic vision in opposition to the market dynamics and the normal power mechanisms that often influence certain artistic circles.

This kind of separation was a factor that allowed the development of spontaneous creative projects that were strongly precursory because animated by actual utopias, but it was also the cause of the lack of recognition of work by various artists. It also could have been that the artists themselves never wanted to circumscribe it in particular artistic currents, experiencing it as a form of rebellion to the hierarchic and client dynamics, as well as political opposition.

In November 2002, the art critic Francesco Galluzzi and the artist Claudio Parrini, during the "Making Art on the Web" (Pistoletto Foundation, Biella) convention, gave a critical vision of the net art matter, starting from the networking dynamics of the 1980s, passing through mass Internet diffusion in the 1990s and consequently reflecting on the dynamics of net art at the beginning of the 2000s. Referring to the situation of the 1990s, with the diffusion of the Internet model of communication, they write:

The Internet myth spreads like a new frontier of total communication, horizontal and global, capable of guaranteeing everyone a moment of glory, or at least visibility and exiting anonymity. Appearing on the Internet (whatever this means) creates an illusion of dizzy amplification of the effects of participation in a television talk show. Thus a curious phenomenon of artist site proliferation takes place, which does not tackle the problems put forth by computer technology. Amateur artists and sculptors hope to be lucky – intended as the chance that an influential critic, struck by their work (never before encountered in a gallery or museum) while surfing the web, becomes the master of their luck. Or more modestly, that at least someone looks at their work. They establish themselves again (vanguard of the new economy!) in the telematic world of deterritorialisation and desubjectivation, the models of individuality and authoriality. With a difference that is not slight. Network territory is still unexplored, web life is experimental, lawless. It is not yet regulated by hierarchisation models (Galluzzi, Parrini, 2002).

Continuing, Francesco Galluzzi and Claudio Parrini describe the situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century, during the new economy boom. Even though not excluding the innovative and shattering component of Community projects such as the development of Linux, Gnutella and Freenet, they point out the emergence of more and more individual works on the web, which consist in direct sales and on-line auctions of their works. We quote a long citation, still indicative of our present, though after the collapse of the new economy:

The Internet has become an instrument among others, even if it preserves (especially for artists) a certain suggestion, though it seems linked to its "neophiliac" character rather than to the social potentials that web practice could set off. Even the "traditionalist" artists (the term must be intended in relation to the manners of participation in the art system, it is not a judgement of evaluation about work quality) plan on-line operations, yet they generally propose again, on a new support, the problems and attitudes already present in offline art. For example, many artists propose exhibition videos, which doesn't mean this makes them video artists. Therefore the web stops being a problematic "place", and is simply a new kind of "place". For the web, as for video, the impelling force of the "specific of the means" (to use a definition borrowed from cinema critics of the 1970s) is used up, to the extent that many discourses about net art compared to the present "state of the art" run the risk of appearing anachronistic and tautological. (...) The origin of conventional artist sites, and the logic of portals such as the indexing of search engines on parameters functional to the

logics of the new economy, as a first effect deprived the horizontality and heterogeneity that characterised the early periods of popularising art on the Internet. Paradoxically (but maybe not too much), the new economy of art achieved the effect of forcing a system of relations and values on web life, which finds its legitimation, its discipline outside the web – that in this sense becomes a mere container (*ibidem*).

As Galluzzi and Parrini write, on the one hand there is sharing of material through files, the peer-to-peer philosophy, peer-to-peer exchange, both of them essential prerogatives of networking and hacker ethics; on the other hand many individual artists display their works on the Internet, selling them to whoever makes the best offer. At present, in my opinion, it is no longer possible to make art and activism without confronting certain market dynamics. The secret may be in finding new strategies to bend these dynamics to the best advantage, acting like creative viruses within a system that is always in need of new sap, yet without losing freshness and identity.

Today it is more intelligent to try to stand face to face rather than crash. Once it has been ascertained that the dynamics of profit will repeat themselves over and over, the winning strategy may be to succeed in stepping into this process as determinant players rather than as impotent spectators or as opponents who often act in favour of what was supposed to be destroyed.

The Craftsmen of the Code

In 2003, during an interview for the CyberZone magazine, I asked Jaromil (Denis Rojo's nickname), an Italian GNU/Linux programmer resident in Amsterdam, what the words "hacker ethics" meant for him:

I would talk about attitude rather than ethics. It is the desire to go hands-on, not be resigned to using without understanding, throwing out without repairing, passively accepting the rules that can often be disproved, broken and violated, generating new attractive possibilities. A hacker is curious and irreverent, sceptical and cerebral, rational enough to delight in the unachievable irrationality of the occasion (or chaos, if we wish), ecstatic admirer of fractals and eloquent minister of the entropy representing the web. The awareness of the value of information in today's world that leads the hacker to organise his

revolution on the basis of sharing knowledge, an ideal experiment of power redistribution without precedents and that makes up the most visionary, equalitarian and deliciously chaotic response to Hobbes's theorem in which knowledge is power: information wants to be free! (2003, pp. 42-46)[14].

In Jaromil's works the ideas of networking, artistic experimentation, hacking and political activism live together in harmony. His activity is the concrete example of what we described in the previous chapter, speaking about social hacking: as a programmer he intentionally uses free software, and as artist (better, craftsman, as he points out) he creates projects and works where the central theme is sharing resources and accessibility to technology. Jaromil calls himself a Rasta Coder <http://rastasoft.org> and this title conceals a philosophy that isn't only involved with the exterior aspect, it highlights an attitude of thought and action that Jaromil applies to his programming and defines himself a "code craftsman".

As Armin Medosch writes in *Roots Culture, Free Software Vibrations "inna Babylon"* (2005), a direct comparison can be made between hacker's *culture roots* and the *reggae roots* that originated in Jamaica. The *culture roots* represents the hacker's pride of being the root of a Unix system (including the GNU/Linux operating system), which is the super-user who has all the access "privileges" to the machine and manages other accounts. Reggae roots is a subgenre of reggae music with rhythmic African influence. This is closely linked to the Rastafarian basic movement that originated in Jamaica in the 1930s. Rastafarian was the expression and struggle movement of the Jamaican workers of African origin, opposing racism, colonialism and capitalist exploitation. It is a "hybrid" movement, influenced by the drumming style, by agricultural tradition and by African social and food organisation and by the R&B, soul and American black music sounds. Rastafarian became quite popular in the 1970s with the reggae music of Bob Marley and the Wailers, with the consequent widespread of dreadlocks, a status symbol for many young people who identified themselves with a certain lifestyle and way of thinking.

Armin Medosch stresses the similarities between the Rastafarian movement - seen as political resistance and struggle for freedom, peace and justice from oppression - and hacker ethics - belonging to the international hacker

community, working to open channels of communication and code sharing, proposing a constructive approach regarding computers and networks.

In Jaromil's work, an open supporter (and member) of the Rastafarian style, the approach to technology is targeted in giving life to open processes and the use of the computer becomes a means of freedom and not an ultimate end.

rastasoft.org

Jaromil, "Rastasoft Lion", 2003.

All his creations are freely available on the web under GNU General Public License (promoted by the Free Software Foundation <www.fsf.org>). And not in vain, his work has been on the web since 1991, through the CyberNet network, and his first experience with a computer was during the period of Italian counterculture BBSes. As is read on his site, Jaromil was co-founder in 1994 of the non-profit association Metro Olografix, for computer technology diffusion with base in Pescara, Abruzzo <http://olografix.org>. Metro Olografix is a virtual community founded on the free circulation of information, on the global village

concept, on the possibility of taking decisions democratically and it started in 1994 as a BBS[15].

In the same period, Jaromil participated actively in the FreakNet Medialab experience in Catania and collaborated with the Giardini Pensili company since 1998. His roots are therefore in Italy, yet his activity continued first in Vienna, Austria, where in 2000 he founded the DIY network Dyne.org <http://dyne.org> and then in Amsterdam, Holland, where he collaborated with the Montevideo/Time Based Arts institute <www.montevideo.nl> and he has always been active in the self-management environments. Jaromil is also part of the ASCII collective, Amsterdam Subversive Center for Information Interchange, a communications laboratory in the style of the Italian HackLab, with its base in a squatted city building (http://scii.nl).

As Jaromil explains:

Accessibility is a keystone for two of my projects, in the attempt to develop useful tools for the less expert, for those who are less interested in learning contorted computer formulas, and simply want to make the best use of its most recent potentials. The first one is *MuSE*: software for online network radio that offers a predictive graphic interface <http://muse.dyne.org>; the second one is *dyne:bolic* GNU/Linux[16], an entire operating system that runs directly from a CD-rom, no need to install anything, it too is configured to suggest its operability and make interaction as natural as possible (http://dynebolic.org) (*ibidem*).

Among Jaromil's other projects, *FreeJ*, for veejays and mixing videos in real time (http://freej.dyne.org), and *HasciiCam*, to allow ASCII video streaming by converting the video signal into ASCII characters using the Aalibs, Linux libraries, and giving life to a visual aesthetic of the programming code (http://ascii.dyne.org). Furthermore, Jaromil is normally considered part of the international net.art community, because he has collaborated directly with many people, such as Future Lab of the Ars Electronica Center in Linz, and because he has personally created net.art works while he lived in Vienna and Amsterdam.

Returning to the fifth point of Steven Levy's principles of hacker ethics described before, *you can create art and beauty on a computer*, "hackers enormously appreciated those innovative techniques allowing programs to perform complicated operations with very few instructions. The shorter the program, the more space available for other programs and everything ran faster"

(1984). From this reflection it emerges that the program code has its own beauty and even the programming style has its aesthetics. Jaromil is the person who puts this principle into practice, creating his *Unix Shell Forkbomb* (2002):

:(){ :|:& };:

The Unix Shell Forkbomb is defined "the most elegant forkbomb ever written" (Cramer, 2004). An apparently simple string code that is actually a virus for a Unix system: as soon as it is run, it replicates cyclically causing the machine to crash. Nevertheless, as Josephine Boxma writes, the fact that the machine is stopped isn't as important as the philosophy behind the work. The Unix Shell Forkbomb was selected for the "I Love You" show at the MAK, Museum of Applied Arts, Frankfurt, in 2002 (www.digitalcraft.org) and for the "P0es1s, Digital Poetry" event at Berlin's Kulturforum in 2004 (www.p0es1s.net). As Jaromil sustains, the forkbomb was created for all the people who sell off the web as a safe zone for middle-class society, showing how chaotic viruses must be considered spontaneous compositions, poems that cause imperfections in machines, a mirror of digital rebellion.

Among Jaromil's other works of art, the *Farah* net.art project, arising from the need to document, through the voices of the people, what is still left uncontaminated of Palestinian life and culture after years of wars and violence (http://farah.dyne.org), and the *Tubocatodico* collective theatrical performance, where an actor interacts with audio sounds and video images, putting on stage the daily use of television by any spectator <tubocatodico.dyne.org>[17].

Jaromil recently collaborated with Giacomo Verde in the "T&T Zone-laboratory for Technologies&Theatre" workshop, encounters on theatre and visual technologies at the Metarock Live Club in Florence <www.lacittadelteatro.it> (2005). Jaromil and Giacomo Verde's creative work presents various points of contact, above all concerning the artistic use of the video camera, the HasciiCam for Jaromil and the web-cam for Giacomo Verde <www.verdegiac.org>.

Also Giacomo Verde can be considered a true artisan of the code and the visual sign, always having worked with poor materials and worked at decomposing and recomposing video images, consistent with the computer hacker "attitude". In particular, his *Web-Cam-Theatre* (2001) project proposes using the web-cam through the Internet to connect and see distant places and people in real time <www.webcamtheatre.org>.

The idea was producing short theatrical events with a web-cam, using the small frame of the scenes that were filmed as if it was a stage, or better yet a "small planetary stage".

The artistic work of Giacomo Verde, as I mentioned before, is aimed at encouraging the development of collective relationships starting from the staging of web contexts, in which the *performatory* component plays a central role.

For example, in one of his previous projects, *Con-Tatto* (1998), in the forefront he places touching by hand, experiencing directly through technology. The interactive installation contemplates setting up a con-tact with the media, exploiting the *video-loop* technique, thus interfacing with a TV set and a video camera, generating luminous pulsations, corridor effects, rotating snail spirals. Hands or small objects can be inserted between the video camera and the TV to create visual effects (a kind of self-taught *TV-story*). In the second place, the installation enables con-tact with a touch-screen connected to a computer and a video projector, in order to navigate web sites based on aesthetic-political topics.

Giacomo Verde, describing the *Con-Tatto* work, maintains:

I intend pointing out that the various experiences of social activity, amplified by the web's connection possibilities, can be understood as the art works that have surpassed the limits of critical representation of the world and its problems, for a politically aesthetic action aimed at directly improving the state of affairs[18].

Of late, Giacomo Verde has been involved in the *EutopiE*, an artistic communication project on the new possible derivations of utopia.

The old social utopias are dead, but the new ways of "imagining" and creating "better worlds" are taking shape "here and now" without postponing the solution of injustices to a distant hypothetical future. Eutopia means a "happy place" and it is one of the "roots" used by Thomas More to coin the term utopia, in his book in 1516. The EutopiE website contains proposals of artistic operations and materials on the topic of the new Possible Utopias and also contemplates being space for giving notice of events and experiences concerning utopia, as a place for exchanging and sharing materials and ideas. Anyone who has information

about events, materials, hypotheses, signs, dreams to report is asked to do so by writing to: info@eutopie.net (<www.verdegiac.org/eutopie>).

As Giacomo Verde points out, Eutopia is also a root of utopia.

Returning to the discussion of artistic, critical and creative use of software and its interconnections with net.art, Florian Cramer maintains that "software is something aesthetically, politically and culturally oriented" (2003, p.6), regarding recent projects that use the programming code not so much for developing generative processes, but as a game and experimental tool.

Again in 2003, Florian Cramer writes on the "Nettime" mailing list:

I see one important difference between early conceptual art and contemporary software art in that the former strived, as Lucy Lippard called it, for "dematerialization" and, where it actually used the term software (as in Jack Burnham's 1970s concept of software exhibition or in the "Radical Software" magazine), understood it as a puristic intellectual laboratory construct. In contrast, contemporary software art treats software as an unclean material (involving bugs, crashes, incompatibilities) which is not purely syntactical, but loaded with cultural semantics, aesthetic associations and even politics; experimental web browsers and game modifications are cheap but still good examples.[19].

The "viral" operations of the Italian group [epidemiC] <http://epidemic.ws> are placed in this context. These unite creative experimentation on the code and on the web, irony about language constructions and détournements of communication mechanisms, plagiarism and pranks, disorientation for unaware users, customers and curators who take too many things for granted. The [epidemiC] is "a group of about ten people who from various professional and cultural points of view analyse and speculate on aspects, dynamics and paradoxes produced by the mass diffusion of information networks" (Lampo, 2006).

As Luca Lampo tells, in the phase before the group's formation in the mid 1990s, one of the [epidemiC] members, MacumbaDigital – an anonymous post-cyber label with Blissett sympathies – began producing various works-in-progress, among them the *dis-educational* CD-rom of various plagiarisms and recycling titled *AnalFabestia* <www.analfabestia.com>.

A review appeared in 1999 on Neural Online:

Rapid images, messages inoculated by pausing on the retina only as long as strictly necessary, apparently infinite repetitions. Almost a home version of the disturbing pathway undertaken by the irregular CD-rom "Blam!" produced in New York a few years ago, this "diseducational digital microwriting" allows itself a little megalomania, trendy for these times, rambling among erotic perversions, frames of little-known films, and animation made of successive shots, in a continuous loop it settles in its tones like a deliberate visual/sound aggression. A narrative pattern that is current, disturbing and a necessary virus to create antibodies to the TV-induced addiction and drowsiness (<www.neural.it/no19/no19.htm>).

This was [epidemiC]'s entry in net culture, even though the group's name comes later "officially". Subsequently [epidemiC] gave life to the *Ribaltatore* <http://ilribaltatore.net>, "a casual generator of Italian grammar that at first is used to spread 'viral' misunderstandings in 'fashionable' forums/mailing lists/chat rooms" (Lampo, 2006).

The urban legend that a "bizarre group of hacker-poets is writing a new computer virus" reaches 0100101110101101.ORG in 2001, who propose that the project participate in the D.I.N.A., Digital Is Not Analog, festival in Bologna in 2001: thus [epidemiC] is born formally. Luca Lampo tells about the spirit with which the group was formed, which well shows the reason for the irreverent ironic character of many of his works: "The only requirement for participating was to have a well-paid job – to avoid ambitions dictated by hunger or self-referential attempts of the group's promotion. After three years of work only one press release was sent. Just for fun!"[20].

During the D.I.N.A. Festival in 2001, [epidemiC] present the *Virii Virus Viren Viry* manifesto about the beauty of the computer virus source code. Here the artists commission Franco Berardi (Bifo) to read *Love Letter*, vocal interpretation of the *I Love You* virus source code (<www.kinakuta.it/[epidemiC]/loveletter2001.mpg>). A similar experience of reading literary, textual and poetic codes was repeated in Frankfurt during the inauguration of the "I Love You, Computer Viruses Hacker Culture", (Digitalkraft, 2002, MAK) show mentioned previously. Florian Cramer was present at this reading event, called *Code Slam*, and he selected the texts of [epidemiC], Jaromil and 0100101110101101.ORG. Experimentation on artistic viruses by [epidemiC] later finds a prestigious showcase during the 49th Venice Biennial (2001) with the production of *Biennale.py*, along with 0100101110101101.ORG, written in Python language.

The virus manifests itself in various media: the code is shown on a poster in the Biennial's Slovenian pavilion, printed on T-shirts and distributed on a CD-rom. In *Biennale.py* the code becomes "animated" and, using the programming language, tells about a virus that goes to a party, meets people and in the end copulates, driven by the uncontrollable desire to duplicate himself: *party...my body...fornicate...(guest)*.

When *Biennale.py* infects a computer, it carries out the intentions already declared metaphorically. It multiplies itself, infecting all the Python type programs. Following its diffusion, the Symanthec Corporation, world leader in computer security, identifies *Biennale.py* and starts the hunt. From this moment on, if a computer is protected by an antivirus, *Biennale.py* is immediately identified, recognised as an enemy and eliminated (Lampo, 2005, p. 68)[21].

In 2002, [epidemiC] move on to creating a creative program that plays with one of the most intimate means of computer users: electronic mail. "Since viruses continued being seen as 'damaging' to information or to computers, we began thinking about a type of program that could directly damage the person using the computer and the digital information," says Luca Lampo. So they created *downJones sendMail*, a program that doesn't cause visible damage in the computer, but is subtly conceptual: it enriches e-mails by slipping short phrases into the body of any e-mail, completely changing the meaning, without the sender noticing it and even the recipient doesn't notice any sign of "intrusion".

Phrases such as "I'm not sure", "I think I love you", "you give me dysentery", "even if I lied the last time", "by the way, can you loan me your stockings?", slip into the e-mails, playing with the language. As Domenico Quaranta writes describing *downJones sendMail* "the maximum damage is the one that eats into human relations, whether it is a work, personal or diplomatic relationship. If this kind of virus were to spread, we would no longer be sure of anything we received. Putting in doubt our trust in the unalterability of data, *downJones* makes communication centrality evident, and the dangers derived from an alteration of its flow" (*ivi*, p. 51).

The viral art of [epidemiC] continues with the creation of the "Brand Virus" *Bocconi.vbs*, a *worm* that, once it is carried out, multiplies by e-mail spreading the name "Bocconi" to the joy of the university that, as Luca Lampe ironically

tells, doesn't seem to be very happy but nevertheless consigns the compensation to the artists... <http://epidemic.ws/bocconi/version.html>.

Subsequently, the group gives life to the program *AntiMafia –Action Sharing* that, in our opinion, concretely epitomises the concept of software art as a culturally and socially oriented artistic expression and refers to many social hacking practices described in the preceding chapters <http://epidemic.ws/antimafia>[22].

AntiMafia appeared as a commercial software for Windows (but the code was under GPL license). Its aim was to unite experiences of dissent and protest such as Netstrike and Floodnet to an architecture more in keeping with the digital networks: the peer-to-peer, which at that time started to become widely used by "File Sharing". With AntiMafia, instead of sharing documents, actions could be shared or offered; in this case, disturbance towards web or e-mail servers. The program would do the rest, the "dirty work" :-). Anyone could protest about anything. The support rankings would multiply the effectiveness, the range of the protest, exponentially. The leader figure would disappear, in a very anarchic and democratic way. Obviously it was a provocation. Yet the software was real and its source code was public. The only thing missing was a function: an ordinary denial of service. Thirty lines of code that any programmer could have written. No one wrote them. AntiMafia was based on the Gnutella protocol. Now it is old, but maybe one day someone will write it again on more advanced protocols, such as eMule or Torrent, and the digital protests will become fashionable again... (Luca Lampo's personal e-mail, January 2006).

After participating in "CODeDOC" at the Ars Electronica Festival 2003, where the [epidemiC] presented a programme called *Double-Blind Invitation* <http://epidemic.ws/double-blind> causing invitations to the Festival to be unwittingly sent to equally unwitting programmers, the project was to be considered concluded, even though several of its members remained active singularly[23].

Beyond the Limits of the Net

As we have seen, describing the work of *viral art* by [epidemiC], networking doesn't always mean being politically correct, in fact at times by playing, social

hacking can be done on the "system errors" (not just by the machine). As we have already seen, social hacking comes from two main needs: making networking the central idea, sharing collectively, using technology according to politically oriented means, and creating a prompt social hack, revealing the backstage in its ordinary sense and playing with the media and communications strategies.

In the second case, we still speak of hackers, or rather of *cultural hackers*. Hacker ethics, if considered without moralism and value judgements, are directed towards network action seen as a disclosure and, according to what Steven Levy teaches in the third fundamental principle of hacker ethics, as a criticism of the authority to promote decentralisation. Therefore a hacker is always a hacker even if, to show that information must be free and decentralised, he uses "borderline" actions. This doesn't mean that senseless destructive acts should be legitimised; it promotes critical, aware actions, that in order to be truly constructive and actually dismantle the logics of power, they can happily (and effectively) be "amoral". Or give rise to a new "moral", that of having no moral, above all in the case of appropriating other people's works if protected by copyright or by a closed, unmodifiable system.

In this sense, "the only responsibility of an artist is to be irresponsible" (<http://0100101110101101.org/texts/cyberzone_generic-it.html>).

Cultural hackers can initially act on the quiet, but once the hack is done, they make it totally transparent, quite often to shed light on the social and media bugs that until then were unknown or commonly accepted.

As Luther Blissett teaches, one can take possession of the logics the "mediasphere" feeds off of, reveal its mechanisms and find new means for reply and protest, playing with the dynamics of a society that speaks through images and expresses itself through formal memberships and immaterial codes. The web and other media, from printed paper to television, are functional platform for spreading "viral" practices, giving life to media prank and widespread telltale press releases.

An extremely significant example is the activity of 0100101110101101.ORG, a rebel cyber-entity, author of numerous media hits. In fact, the Bologna duo Eva and Franco Mattes comes from the Luther Blissett experience, putting into concrete practice the concept of "having the maximum visibility with the minimum effort" <http://0100101110101101.org>.

Known initially thanks to the Darko Maver hoax, they subsequently brought forth actions aimed at unmasking the media and art system strategies, working with plagiarism and *détournement*.

In particular, in the Darko Maver case, dated 1998-1999, 0100101110101101.ORG spread the story of a Slovenian artist, during the war author of works considered unpatriotic, and later persecuted and jailed in 1997. As reported in the announcements publicising the case, Darko Maver is a Slovenian artist who created murder scenarios in abandoned houses, exhibiting slashed mannequins to demonstrate the violence of the tortures during the conflict in ex-Yugoslavia. The artist's event found great solidarity in Italy, above all after the news of his death in a Kosovo prison; various commemorative shows were organised at the 48th Venice Biennial, at Level 57 in Bologna and at Rome's Forte Prenestino. The problem is that Darko Maver never existed, but no one thought of searching for the origins of the "legend", so the case was publicised as an episode of censorship and abuse of power <http://0100101110101101.org/home/darko_maver>.

At the beginning of 2000, 0100101110101101.ORG wrote a long press release and the hoax was revealed to the whole world through the web, stating that they invented Darko Maver's total existence. Newspaper headlines cry out: "We exposed the tricks of the critics" (Caronia in l'Unità, 14 February 2000). Indeed 0100101110101101.ORG showed how, in many institutional (as well as movement) fields, much news was accepted giving rise to myths, legends and famous artists.

Again in 1999, 0100101110101101.ORG organised the "theft" of the Hell.com art gallery, an art site accessible only by a limited nucleus of users, with password and protected by copyright. Thus begins the series of *fakes*, which will directly "attack" the sites of the principal artists of net.art, making copies, perfectly identical to the originals, of their works.

A "cut-paste strategy", as 0100101110101101.ORG defines it, which after Hell.com hits the sites of Art.Teleportacia.org and Jodi.org, recognised pillars of international net.art <http://0100101110101101.org/home/copies>. Hell.com immediately starts a lawsuit for copyright violation and the international press begins discussing topics such as authenticity and copyright in relationship to network art.

Actually there is no sense in talking about originality on the Internet: any file can be reproduced to the infinite with no loss of quality, and every copy is identical to the original. Furthermore, while surfing the web everything that is displayed is immediately saved on the hard disk and, consequently, become one's own.

As 0100101110101101.ORG sustains,

the fact that the figure of the author is no longer so important does not condition either the quality of cultural production or artistic creativity. This should make us reflect on the social nature of culture: no one has ideas that have not been influenced, directly or indirectly, by their social relations, by the community they are part of. No genius exists who is isolated form the world and inspired by a muse; there are only people who exchange information and re-elaborate what they have been told in the past. It has always been like that. Culture is enormous plagiarism.

The answer to this type of reflection isn't long in coming, and in 2001 Florian Cramer creates "the plagiarism of plagiarists", publishing on-line a copy of 0100101110101101.ORG's original site[24] and a self-interview of the authors, which later turned out to be a fake.

Again in 1999, 0100101110101101.ORG carries out *cyber-squatting* (unauthorised occupation of Internet addresses) buying the *vaticano.org* dominion and keeping it for a whole year as the official information organ of the Holy See (no one notices the difference). Actually, even though the site is formally identical to the original one, the contents presented are modified into something quite different: song lyrics, encyclicals revised and corrected, cut-up of the official site contents, but assembled in an unusual manner. After a battle with the religious authorities, 0100101110101101.ORG didn't obtain renewal of the dominion, but the cloned site still exists at <http://0100101110101101.org/home/vaticano.org>.

Later they made the virus-artwork *Biennale.py* created with [epidemiC] we have already written about, then in 2002 they originated the *Vopos* project. The idea was to reflect on the global control we are always subjected to: from the start of the project and for one year both of them wore a GPS transmitter that, by sending signals via satellite, showed the artists' exact geographical position on their site. Therefore 0100101110101101.ORG is constantly "tracked"

physically, and, with the *Life Sharing* project (2000-2003), even virtually <http://0100101110101101.org/home/vopos>.

Life Sharing is a digital portrait in real time that for two years was the mirror of 0100101110101101.ORG's activity. Their computer became an open sharing system and everyone had direct visibility on the artists' hard disk, including private correspondence. The artists sustain that privacy nowadays is "stupid" and apply their idea of hacktivism by opening themselves in a transparent manner, through a platform based on Linux <http://0100101110101101.org/home/life_sharing>.

The work that would cause greater discussion on an international level was *Nike Ground* <www.nikeground.com>. Keeping abreast of the times, the project reflected on how brands pervaded urban spaces, creating a fake-info-point in the city of Vienna, Austria, in which passers-by are informed about a new futuristic project by Nike, the famous gym shoe multinational. At the same time, the duo create an Internet site in perfect Nike style, which explains the operation and presents itself perfectly in line with the corporation's official sites. *Nike Ground* proposes substituting the name of various important city squares with "Nike" and putting an impressive monument right in the middle with their "swoosh" (Nike's logo worldwide). For example, Karlsplatz, one of the most famous Viennese squares, is renamed Nikeplatz and 0100101110101101.ORG informs curious citizens about the upcoming event with a very credible info-point placed in the "incriminated" square.

Obviously in this case too everything is false, but the month-long campaign provokes an indignant reaction from the Vienna citizens, who want to save their square, and, naturally from the Nike Group, who declare they are extraneous to the whole operation and start a legal battle…

The interesting aspect is that this time the duo don't work in isolation; the entire performance is produced directly by Public Netbase, a Vienna *netculture* institution directed by Konrad Becker, who states clearly that *Nike Ground* is an artistic intervention and that its presence in the square must be seen as a creative appropriation, aimed at artistically manipulating the symbols of daily life. In a certain sense *Nike Ground* is also a turnabout by 0100101110101101.ORG, who decides to play the game supported by an artistic institution. The "opponents" become the Corporations, whereas art world is the playfellow.

In reality we should wonder how much of an "opponent" the multinationals are in operations like these, since everything could be seen as a source of indirect advertising for Nike and as the mirror of a new creativity that could benefit the multinational's image. The question that remains unanswered is whether the members of Nike are sharp enough to understand it… maybe the answer is yes, since the sports giant's lawsuit comes to nothing.

One thing for sure is that, with its new operation, 0100101110101101.ORG has made fun of the whole city of Vienna and everyone who fell for it completely, whether for or against Nike.

In the most recent artistic operation by 0100101110101101.ORG, the two levels, artistic experimentation and institutional prank, remain in synch. By now 0100101110101101.ORG is known in the art world and somehow the art system has become its "ally". But the mega-corporations and new business horizons are still a playing field. In the duo's last operation, this horizon took shape with a word: cinema.

United We Stand, Europe has a Mission is the new *fake-movie* by the pair of artists, who include movie stars in their cast, from Penelope Cruz to Ewan McGregor. The idea is to present, for the first time on the screen, United Europe as a champion of justice, in a scenario that sees the United States struggling against China, incarnating one of the most ingrained fears of overseas power. The film appears in perfect Blockbuster style, it books appealing actors and naturally starts the media chatting. But the film doesn't exist, obviously, even if on a media level it has all the attributes of being real: posters in all the main cities in the world and an official Internet site <www.unitedwestandmovie.com>.

In the 0100101110101101.ORG site the film is clearly stated as being a fake, false, but we know well that this information will reach only an "Internetized" audience, while everyone else will believe that the film really exists. Let's hope that a producer believes it soon too, since at this point the film could be interesting to see. It would be the latest hit of the duo of clairvoyant tricksters…

Actually one of the qualities of 0100101110101101.ORG has always been being more farsighted than the others and knowing how to "obtain maximum visibility with the least effort" (Eva and Franco Mattes, 2000). So much so that today "Flash Art", the Italian magazine of contemporary art best known in the institution spheres and most hated in the movement ones, placed 0100101110101101.ORG in the one hundred and second place of the "Top 100: the new classification according to Cattelan" (yet it contains 134 artists), based on the opinions of the top Italian critics. This classification appears rather debatable (even because the names of the critics that decided it are not shown), but it is useful as an expression of current trends in the artistic market circuits, in particular the galleries.

0100101110101101.ORG, which originated critically revealing the underhand work of this world (see the Darko Maver operation), appear in a good position in the classification, after they started showing the digital prints of their works and other productions reminiscent of them in the Fabio Paris Gallery in Brescia. Among these is the *Macchina Perpetua Auto Dis/Infettante* installation (2003) where the *Biennale.py* virus stands out. These operations start being highly rated for all the late-coming lovers of the cyber-rebellion that was. We are waiting for someone who at this point makes a theft in true Lupin III style, to continue the tradition…

The present artistic path of 0100101110101101.ORG may seem a contradiction compared to its previous experiences, but in my opinion it should be interpreted as the achievement of an awareness, mixed with a good dose of cynicism, that doesn't escape from the market mechanisms and therefore it is more strategic to bend them to our advantage. Or simply it is all another hoax in the art system, demonstrating that the rule of obtaining maximum visibility with the least effort is always valid. So instead of creating works from scratch, the previous artistic operations are exhibited in a gallery, taking advantage of the same market circuits that once "fell into the trap". Of course the prank remains, but the critical element that was found in the first works signed by 0100101110101101.ORG is lost, which, with tactical irony, irritated and confused various circuits of power, from the artistic one to the ecclesiastic one.

Network vs. Network

It is the year Two Thousand, and because of a classification of the best artists based on the judgement of critics and gallery managers in the magazine "Flash Art", the magazine editor, Giancarlo Politi, received an inflamed, colourful e-

mail from the artist Oliviero Toscani, protesting about his not flattering position among the "Top 100". A thick exchange of inflamed e-mails begins (among them "Dear Editor, your newspaper makes me vomit." signed Oliviero Toscani) and in the course of correspondence, in spite of the ranting, Giancarlo Politi offers to edit a section of the infant Tirana Biennial for the photographer. A biennial exhibition that the editor of "Flash Art" is starting to organise in Tirana, Albania, involving numerous artists who for the occasion become editors, among them Maurizio Cattelan, Vanessa Beecroft, Nicolas Bourriaud, Francesco Bonami and many others for a total of twenty editors. The icing on the cake seems to be the photographer Oliviero Toscani, by now acclaimed on an international level for his photos in the transgressive advertising for Benetton, who accepts the proposal promising sponsorship from his friend Luciano (Benetton). Is this the real Oliviero Toscani? Politi doesn't seem to have any doubts.

This is the beginning of the famous "Tirana Conspiracy", maybe the best Italian media hoax pulled off so far, which was spoken of at the time by numerous local and international dailies, and fully involved the so-called "first art magazine in Europe" and its editor[25].

Authors of the legendary Conspiracy are the mysterious Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping, pseudonyms of two unknown persons who pass themselves off as Oliviero Toscani, signatories of a press dossier sent to all the major Italian and international newspapers. The envelope, containing the thick e-mail exchange between the fake Oliviero Toscani and the real editor of "Flash Art" is worthy of the best mystery films, accompanied by a treatise explaining the artistic-theoretic motivations of the hoax.

The (fake) photographer proposes four still unknown artists to make the Tirana Biennial unforgettable. Four characters who actually were ahead of the times, but who unfortunately are perfectly inexistent!

The first one, Dimitri Bioy, from Miami, is a confessed paedophile and makes amateur hard core videos accompanied by teenagers travelling from one hotel to the other. For the Tirana Biennial he proposed a series of nude young girls and teenagers; the Nigerian artist Bola Ecua, tells about the horrors in her country, fighting for human rights through photocopied photos; the Italian Carmelo Gavotta, proprietor of a Milan kiosk, produces self-made pornographic videos

in perfect trash style; lastly, the real pearl of the four, the fundamentalist Hamid Piccardo, is appreciated by Bin Laden himself and by Al Qaeda.

Oliviero Toscani (the fake one) describes his (fake) creations in a long sincere article published in the July 2001 edition of "Flash Art Italia" and this same text is published in the Tirana Biennial catalogue, along with the texts of the other editors. Here is an indicative extract:

My fantastic four (allow me the analogy), have not had esoteric consent. To get to know them better I went on trips that took me from Morocco to Nigeria, from Florida to Piemonte. How can I introduce them to you here in just a few lines? I'm sure that in spire of appearances, Dimitri Bioy loves mankind as maybe only did Keats– the poet whose name was written in water. His photos were often misunderstood (as were mine, for that matter), therefore some prominent American judge pointed out that it is just rubbish… But I know that he really loves them and can't stop taking them; I'm not a transgressive quirk of an artist in search of vainglory; I am a vital function for him. For years Bola Ecua has been committed in the protest against capital punishment that still exists in her country and it appears that her works are a further tough testimony of the legal murders that persist in Africa, as well as in Asia and in the Americas. Bola always refused the typically local techniques of expression, such as sculpture or painting that often result in Afrokitsch, and I think she was the first African artist to use the photocopy as a means of revelation/delation, a kind of Yoruba Andy Warhol who, with the force of monotone images, denounces the crimes of Nigeria's militarist government. Carmelo Gavotta is Italian for all intents and purposes, and today this seems almost a fault. Right, an Italian artist should at least be required to be famous. In any case I don't think he is less interesting than Phil Collins or Maurizio Cattelan. Gavotta's short-video reminds us, with honest simplicity, that pornography can be produced today by anyone who has something to record images that each one of us can experience and investigate at will. It's too bad that he didn't let me present the series of his Lovelysecam videos, which he defines "unfinished masterpieces of a chronic voyeur". Lastly, a few words are more than enough to introduce Hamid Piccardo, who can't be called just an "artist": his Islamic fundamentalism places him one step higher; his burial shrouds (kafans) inscribed with phrases from the Koran about the apocalypse are pure acts of faith and they are not less conceptual than the religion he confesses. Osama Bin-Laden proposed him as Jihad spokesman in art[26].

We must remember that when this text was written the attack on the Twin Towers in New York (September 11, 2001) hadn't happened yet, and Oliviero Toscani (actually Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping) quotes Osama Bin Laden expressly. We also remember that the Tirana Biennial was inaugurated on

September 14, 2001, three days after the New York attack and presents an artist supported by Osama Bin Laden in the front line. For the same reason, the artist Maurizio Cattelan will decide not to participate, displaying only his silence. For Oliviero Toscani (the fake one) participation is an opportunity not to be lost, because it is as false as the four exhibiting artists and, after September 11th, is even more grotesque.

But the hoax doesn't stop at the presentation of the four artists invited to the Tirana Biennial; even more outstanding is the creation of its manifesto, which Oliviero Toscani (the fake one) takes responsibility for preparing it free of charge, after Giancarlo Politi proposes it to Fabrica, the graphics 'factory' founded by Toscani (the real one). None of this, just like the shipment of the works by the artists, is ever agreed over the phone and Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping send the poster by e-mail. This is, naturally, another provocation: the image is a distorted Albanian flag, with a two-headed eagle like the KLA eagle. In a country like Albania, ravaged by wars and surrounded by countries at war where people die for a flag, Toscani's proposal rings paradoxical and dangerous, and is opposed by the local authorities.

But thanks to the pressure by (the fake) Oliviero Toscani and the threats to foul things up, the poster passes and the symbol of the review becomes the flag, crooked, with the words "Tirana Biennial". At the same time even the invitation postcards are the fruit of the tricks of Oliviero Toscani (the fake one): presented as being created by Rocco, his son, actually they came from the imagination of Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping and were sent to various members of art and critics. Among them, one has a photo of a smiling Osama Bin Laden, here too cynically foreboding (it is 2000 - 2001, before Bin Laden's name is on everyone's lips).

As can be seen in the various articles on the topic, the matter lasted a year and a half with Giancarlo Politi never having felt the need to call the real Oliviero Toscani on the phone, and Toscani never knew about his organisational role in the Tirana Biennial. The knot unravels only at the end, when the hoax is complete. As soon at the catalogue is ready, the editor of "Flash Art" sends it to the address of the real Oliviero Toscani and naturally the photographer is flabbergasted.

But the Biennial has now been inaugurated, the catalogue distributed and the works of the (false) artists exhibited. All of this a few days after the fateful 11th of September! Oliviero Toscani doesn't want to take into account the genius of the organised conspiracy, which in our opinion says a lot about how the system of Italian and international art functions. So, assisted by two lawyers, he reports an unknown person who pretends to be him, but even today it isn't clear who Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping are. Giancarlo Politi, impotent before this hoax, writes in the October-November 2001 issue of "Flash Art" that the pair are geniuses and offers them a desk at "Flash Art", maintaining that the works sent are real artworks of great value. Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping don't turn up, naturally.

If we want to find the "moral" of this story, the answer is that it doesn't exist, but as in the fairy tale "The Emperor's New Clothes" by Hans Christian Andersen, the Conspiracy clearly turns the cards of the players of the art system face up and shows how games function in the art system and in our vacuous society of patronage and always putting in an appearance. Luther Blissett teaches, and some have learned the lesson better than the teacher, above all because they have shown they not only know how to keep playing the game but they can also pull the marionettes' strings in an exemplary manner.

This episode shows us that Orson Welles' Martian attack in the end isn't so unreal and above all it makes us wonder: what is real? What does art propose today? If all of us can make art, like Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping show with their action, where two nonexistent people create four just as nonexistent artists, whose even more nonexistent works are acclaimed by art and by critics and upheld by the "most famous art magazine in Europe", what is the sense in perpetuating a system like this? If anyone, urged by the right person, succeeds in reaching the highest goals, is there still any sense in taking the artistic market seriously?

The Tirana conspiracy shows that making art today is decidedly, and heavily, conditioned by the market, in turn monopolised by traders-collectors who influence the very market, triggering a vicious circle that decides who can be an artist and who can't. Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping turn market strategies into aesthetic rules, demonstrating that in today's art world these latter are equal

to nothing, they don't exist, just like the four imaginary artists proposed for the Tirana Biennial.

In a certain sense the Tirana conspiracy also shows that making art today is conditioned by networking, meant as the ability to create relations that keep alive the market strategies described above and therefore endorse the mechanisms that decree certain people to be artists.

A networking naturally different from the one in this book, two forms of network creation that end up coexisting and clashing with each other at the same time: one dictated by the business networks, by the power relations, by "upper floor" friendships, that steps heavily in a Jurassic territory, always putting in an appearance, superficial, of slight substance, that continually needs life blood to self-replicate always the same; the other one knowing how to exploit the networks, critically dominates them and knows how to use them to its best advantage, because it understands the fluid, global, viral range, it knows the system's strong points and weaknesses.

As shown by the fake Oliviero Toscani, his fake son Rocco, the four fake artists and the fake Albanian flag, the "Tirana Conspiracy" is only the reflection of a period that stopped asking itself questions and can substitute one face for another, all that's needed are the right contacts and the right arrogance when necessary. Cynically, in this case too the real art was the network, the net of relationships (between Giancarlo Politi and Oliviero Toscani; between Oliviero Toscani and Benetton; between Marcelo Gavotta, Olivier Kamping and Giancarlo Politi; between Marcelo Gavotta, Olivier Kamping and the four fake artists), whether horizontal or vertical. The works of the artists (actually nonexistent) were not determining factors for planning the Tirana Biennial, it was the people behind them, the commercial image of Oliviero Toscani and behind him economic support from Benetton that Giancarlo Politi evidently hoped for.

The validity of Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping's action is in having claimed responsibility for their "conspiracy" to the various newspapers *anonymously*, and then disappear totally in the web flow. At the time they claimed responsibility in the press, the two cyber-ghosts refused to reveal their true identity, to avoid a successive "appearance" effect, thwarting all the action of complaint perpetuated by entering the artistic system. It may be for this very

reason that the Tirana Conspiracy was so quickly forgotten and the protagonists who were the actors and victims of it have gone back to their usual routine.

In spite of newspapers with good credibility, such as "Sole 24 Ore", having spoken about it and the editor of "Flash Art" discussing it publicly in the "Letters to the Editor" column of his magazine, the news was not long-lived and the virus didn't actually take root. Even though the "conspiracy" was a legendary hit that somehow made many cathedrals tremble, and was a very successful net.art work, in Italy the event soon sank into oblivion.

A system of art made of friendly relationships surely played its part, not wanting too much exposure and preferring to forget, and also the part of a media mechanism that makes artists be stars only if they can be associated to specific faces to put on the front page, or if there are certain critics who will talk about it, struggling with each other to give visibility to their works. Furthermore, what Italian critic could have spoken about it without siding against a system that is worthwhile for everyone (including critics), possibly risking to reveal having participated in a phoney Biennial? And on the other hand, who in the movement linked to hacktivism visits the more "traditional" network environments of the art system and reads magazines such as "Flash Art", or dailies such as "Il Giornale", to actually become aware of these kinds of actions and, above all, intervenes "getting their hands dirty" with the institutional art system?

In this sense, even though Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping simulated an artistic networking operation, presenting four artists and organising a section of a Biennial, they subsequently did not take advantage of the network that could have supported them: hacktivism and net.art. They worked like viruses in the official art network, but they did not try to gain benefit by participating in the countercultural network.

The fact that Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping did not immediately reveal their identity in a press release, showing themselves as stars in the various art events and international festivals, contributed in actually making them ghosts, for the artistic network of gallery managers and critics, and for the of net.art network and for hacker art.

Two networks somehow incommensurable, which for once are confronting each other, yet they have neutralised each other, answering with silence to a

perfect work of art. This might be because Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping did not belong to either of the two, so no network "recognised" them.

Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping played in a true non-place on the web that embarrassed everyone.

The "Tirana Conspiracy" was a strong artistic operation because, among other things, it sunk the knife in the system's weak point: the market strategies and the collector-market-artist relationships. Unlike the hoaxes, such as those by artist Maurizio Cattelan, who in reality winks an eye at the system, or those of 0100101110101101.ORG, who acted on détournement of communications mechanisms, plagiarism and pranks, the conspiracies like the Tirana one were carried forth with a different severity that brings them closer to the political-radical type of subversive actions. This means staying "masked" once it has been released to the press and the legal complaint has begun.

Paradoxically, even though the conspiracies are much more assertive than the spoofs in terms of criticising the system, they can be forgotten more easily for the very reason that they are not immediately associable to an "author" and because they are not functional to any network, even though based on the networking relational dynamics.

Therefore the "Tirana Conspiracy" shows us, on the one hand, that today's artistic challenge is in the invention of new means of action and new contents, as long as someone is still interested; on the other hand this action cynically demonstrates that neither the network of art critics nor the one of net artists are interested.

Endnotes

1   The "Nettime" mailing list archive of that period and later can be consulted on-line at: <www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/>.

2   Unfortunately, today 7-11 no longer exists, since its domain was bought by an English corporation that intimated the removal of the archive because of copyright violation. Information about this case are found at <www.irational.org/7-11>.

3   Alexei Shulgin "Net.Art. The origin", message sent to "Nettime" on the 18th of March 1997, <www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9703/msg00094.html>.

4   Cf. Schultz, *The net.artists (Fwd)*, text written by Vuk Cosic, 31st May 1996 <www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9606/msg00011.html>.

5   The message sent by Heath Bunting is an ironic text titled "pickin up nettime" that describes the network the artist is part of, showing the e-mail addresses of the various characters it is made up of in a kind of celebrative punk-rock piece, optimistic about the future of the web practices to come and about the presence of a network capable of supplying them. "Pickin up nettime" was sent on the Nettime mailing list on the 27th December 1995 <www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9601/msg00051.html>. In the 1980s Heath Bunting began working on building networks that were social and open, originating from the street, graffiti, performances, pirate radios, fax and e- mail art, BBS and becoming one of the most active participants during the Internet boom. He created various web projects, many of them highly recognised internationally and he was one of the net.art pioneers. Today Bunting works in biotechnology, which he considers today's "new media" and he creates network performances that make active use of the body <www.irational.org/heath>. For experience with pirate radios, as *Heath Bunting suggested to me in a personal e-mail, see*: <http://scanner.irational.org/> and <http://67.19.211.178:8004/>.

6   The same map was *detourned* by me in 2004, showing a split in the Italian net.culture. Collectives and authors of projects are present in <www.ecn.org/aha/map.htm> in the hacktivism sphere up to net.art. The Jodi map was *detourned* also by Marco Deseriis and Giuseppe Marano to show the connections between various international net.art projects.

7   See the minutes of the ZKP4 meeting, The Nettime Spring Conf, Lubiana, 23-25 May 1997, Beauty and the East <www.ljudmila.org/nettime/zkp4/>, in particular the text by Joachim Blank *What is net.art? :-)*, published on <www.ljudmila.org/nettime/zkp4/toc.htm> taken from a message sent by Blank to "Nettime" on the 22nd of April 1997.

8   The quotation is taken from Deseeriis, Marano, 2003, p. 200. The original text is on the "Nettime" mailing list, Josephine Bosma's e-mail, "Vuk Cosic interview: net.art per se", 27 September 1997, interview with *Josephine Bosma for the net.art.per.se event in Trieste (1997)* <www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-9709/msg00053.html>. From 1997 to 2006, Josephine Bosma gave various interviews to the main network members of net.art, publishing them on the "Nettime" <www.nettime.org> and Rhizome <www.rhizome.org> mailing lists. The database of these interviews, along with many essays, articles and conference texts is found in Josephine Bosma's Database: <http://laudanum.net/cgi-bin/media.cgi?action=frontpage>. Another mail art critic very active in the period is the German Tilman Baumgärtel, who among the various texts on the subject, wrote the books: *net.art – Materialien zur Netzkunst*, Verlag für moderne Kunst, Nürnberg, 1999 and *net.art 2.0 – Neue Materialien zur Netzkunst*, Verlag für moderne Kust, Nürnberg, 2001. Website <www.thing.de/tilman>. Again in Germany, active as critics are Inke Arns, now artistic director of the Hartware MedienKunstVereins in Dortmund, author of the book *Netzkulturen,* Hamburg, Europäische Verlagsanstalt, 2002 <www.projects.v2.nl/~arns> and the Transmediale director Andreas Breockmann <www.v2.nl/abroeck>.

9   Consider festivals such as *Next Five Minutes* in Amsterdam and *DEAF Festival for Unstable Media* in Rotterdam, *Transmediale* and *Wizards of OS* in Berlin, *Ars Electronica* Festival in Linz, *Read_me Festival* in Eastern and Northern Europe, *Backspace* in London, *World-information.org* and *Public Netbase* in Vienna, *Beauty and the East* and *City of Women* in Ljubliana, *Metaforum* in Budapest, *net.art.per.se* in Trieste and *Digital is not Analog* in Bologna and *Campobasso* (now *The Influencers* in Barcelona) and the Nettime mailing lists, 7-11, Syndicate, Spectre, Rizhome, Faces, Roulx, Xchange, Rohrpost, Old Boys Network, to mention only the main ones.

10 The review "Connessioni Leggendarie, Net.Art 1995-2005" retraced the work of net.art artists and activists over the last decade. It took place at the Mediateca di Santa Teresa, Milan, 20 October -10 November 2005, Ready-Made Editions, 2005. The exhibit was managed by Luca Lampo, with the scientific committee composed of 0100101110101101.ORG, Marco Deseriis and Domenico Quaranta.

website: <www.connessionileggendarie.it>. The text is taken from the catalogue at Acknowledgements, p. 117.

11 Text from *La nuova comunicazione interattiva e l'antagonismo in Italia* edited by Tommaso Tozzi Stefano Sansavini, Ferry Byte and Arturo Di Corinto, with the collaboration of Avana (Rome), Decoder (Milan), Lamer Xterminator BBS (Bologna), Luther Blissett, Senza Confini BBS (Macerata), Zero BBS (Turin), F. Innocenti and M. Tognoni. It is published on the web at: <www.hackerart.org/storia/cybstory.htm>.

12 Giacomo Verde and Lello Voce, promotion flyer of *Qwertyu* distributed in 2000 during the Hackmeeting in Rome at Forte Prenestino.

13 An initiative that stands out in terms of diffusion, care and visibility of content is the "ExiWebArt" section, founded by Valentina Tanni in 2000, hosted by the artistic portal Exibart.com. Valentina Tanni received her degree from the Rome La Sapienza University in 2001 with a thesis titled "Net Art, 1993-2001" and that same year started the on-line column *Random, notiziario quotidiano sulla new media art* <www.random-magazine.net>, still active. Another young Italian critic recently attentive to the net.art phenomenon is Domenico Quaranta, also active in Exibart and in 2004 author of the previously mentioned *Net.Art 1994-1998. La vicenda di Äda'web*, Vita e Pensiero Publications, Milan. The book comes from the same thesis in Modern Literature at the Catholic University, Brescia.

14 Jaromil, in Tatiana Bazzichelli, "Artivism, quando l'arte diventa consapevole", interview with 0100101110101101.ORG Jaromil and Giacomo Verde, published in "CyberZone", number 18, year 8, 2003, pp. 42-46. The interview is on-line at: <http://0100101110101101.org/texts/cyberzone_generic-it.html>.

15 Among the many members of Metro Olografix I point out Stefano "Neuro" Chiccarelli, author with Andrea Monti of the book *Spaghetti Hacker. Storie, tecniche e aspetti giuridici dell'hacking in Italia* <www.spaghettihacker.it>. Stefano Chiccarelli was initially sysop of the Neuromante BBS in Pescara, a node of the CyberNet network. Among the various events organised by Metro Olografix, the Metro Olografix Crypto Meeting (MOCM) began with the aim of presenting the principles of cryptography in a popular way so as to make the importance and means of application understood <mocm.olografix.org>.

16 Dyne:bolic was created in perfect hacker style with the collaboration of various people, among them many activists of the Italian code such as Smilzo, Bomboclat and c1cc10. For a complete list of the co-authors, see <http://dynebolic.org/index.php?show=authors>.

17 The performance was prepared with many Italians, among them DinDon, Lele, Mag-One, MikyRy, Pinna, Shezzan, Maresa and GradoZero.

18 The text is taken from Verde *Presentazione installazione interattiva CON-TATTO (polittico interattivo)*, April 1998.

19 Florian Cramer, message "Re: <nettime> Don't Call it Art: Ars Electronica 2003", September 2003, on-line at: <www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0309/msg00119.html>. The message arrived on the list due to a thread started by Lev Manovich with the theme "Don't Call it Art: Ars Electronica 2003" referring to the Ars Electronica Festival that year with the theme being "Code" (Linz, Austria, 2003).

20 Luca Lampo, personal e-mail, subject: "Various info about the epidemic", received in January 2006.

21 *Then one year later the virus was "exposed" in Frankfurt and Symanthec was among the sponsors of the show!*

22 An unpublished video of the *AntiMafia – The Action Sharing* project is found at: <http://epidemic.ws/antimafia/AntiMafia.rm>

23 Luca Lampo, for example, organised the "Connessioni Leggendarie, Net.Art 1995-2005" review, at the Mediateca in Santa Teresa, Milan, 20 October-10 November 2005, already mentioned several times before.

24 Found at <http://0100101110101101.org/other_projects/01vs10> is the description of the plagiarism of plagiarism from Florian Cramer during an interview organised by Snafu.

25 Here is a list of the magazines that dealt with the "Tirana Conspiracy". Il "Sole 24 Ore", 6 January 2002, titled *Vittime del Complotto di Tirana*, article by Manuela Gandini; "Il Giorno", 27 October 2002, titled *Beffa firmata Toscani*, article by Marinella Rossi on-line at: <http://ilgiorno.quotidiano.net/chan/80/7:2670692:/2001/10/27>; *Rekombinant*, 8 January 2001, which quotes the article in "Sole 24 Ore", on-line at <www.rekombinant.org/old/article.html.sid=1421>; "ExibArt", 24 October 2001, titled *Numero 230, Ottobre/Novembre 2001, Flash Art*, review by "Flash Art" by Massimiliano Tonelli, visible at: <www.exibart.com/notizia.asp?IDNotizia=3319&IDCategoria=81>; "Artforum", 23 March 2002, titled *Tirana*, by Francesco Bonami on-line at: <www.artforum.com/talkback/id=1677>; "Raster", titled *Biennale Tirana* at: <raster.art.pl/prezentacje/tirana/tirana.htm#moni>; the Derive Approdi publishers, with the book not on sale commercially by Marcelo Gavotta (!) at: <www.unilibro.it/find_buy/product.asp?sku=1931445>, "Artnet", 4 September 2001, titled *Tirana "Biennale Opens"*, at: <www.artnet.com/Magazine/news/artnetnews/artnetnews9-4-01.asp> (who seem to be aware of the conspiracy); Yahoo! News on 16 January 2002 *Beffa Informatica, artisti inesistenti alla Biennale di Tirana*, by Roberto Buonzio <it.news.yahoo.com>, and naturally in the Letters column of "Flash Art" in October and November 2001, where Giancarlo Politi wrote a letter figuratively sent to the artist Maurizio Cattelan.

26 Signed by Oliviero Toscani, but actually written by Marcelo Gavotta & Olivier Kamping, published in "Flash Art Italia", July 2001.