



ART HACKTIVISM AS A FORM OF CONSUMER RESISTANCE

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WORD COUNT: 7,994

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank Janice Denegri-Knott for her encouragement and guidance. I am grateful for having had such an inspirational tutor who motivated me to strive to learn more.

Secondly, I would like to thank new media curator Anne Roquigny for being such an inspirational career woman and friend. I would also like to thank to the amazing participants for their time and for their eye-opening views of the world.

A special mention to my family and to Raphaël, who have been great motivational sources during the past few months.

ART HACKTIVISM AS A FORM OF CONSUMER RESISTANCE

ABSTRACT

Over the past decade, marketing and consumer research texts have accorded significant attention to consumer resistance as scholars recognise the diversity of approaches that can be used in describing this phenomenon (Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Hoy, 2004; Zwick and Dholakia, 2004). This study describes the practice of art hacktivism as a form of resistance within a consumer research context. Drawing on Michel Foucault's model of discursive power, this paper focuses on regimes of practice in order to determine how the circulation of art hacktivism discourse is produced. The regimes of practice are explored through an analysis of practice elements such as knowledge and general understandings, skills and competences, projects, rules and teleoaffective dimensions. The preliminary findings highlight an eclectic community whose practices can be defined by using Hardt and Negri's concept of "multitude". As a result, this paper aims to offer a better understanding of the relationship between power and resistance within the art hacktivism discourse.

Key words: art hacktivism, resistance, Foucault, practice, multitude

INTRODUCTION

The paper explores the phenomenon of consumer resistance through the lenses of the discursive power model proposed by Foucault. By using a practice-based approach instead of a focus on subjectivity, this project sheds light on the socio-historical development and the circulation of resistive discourse within the context of art hacktivism.

As consumption plays a central role in contemporary society, consumer movements have “arisen to challenge and transform aspects of it by propagating ideologies of consumption that radicalise mainstream views” (Kozinets and Handelman, 2004, p.691). Among the many forms these ideologies of resistance have taken, hacktivism remains a rather controversial topic that has yet to be fully explored.

Historically, hacktivism has been associated with a policy of “hacking, phreaking or creating technology to achieve a political or social goal” (Garrett, 2012) with a particular engagement in anti-globalisation, direct action, and resistance” (Von Busch and Palmas, 2006, p.16). It has emerged as a response to mainstream media culture. This phenomenon occurs as people have increasingly adopted new media technologies to “to resist, talk back to, or otherwise engage with the prevailing culture” (Lievrouw, 2006, p.115). These new media technologies, also known as tactical media, are used by individuals who feel wronged by the wider, mainstream culture (Lovink and Garcia, 1997). In the contemporary underground art scene, various artists adopt hacktivism as a practice to generate critique of neo-liberal discourses (Garrett, 2012).

An example of this type of action is Amazon Noir realised by artist duo UBERMORGEN.COM in collaboration with Paolo Cirio and Alessandro Ludovico. The premises of this project is that by searching for any phrase in any of the books which the amazon.com website offers for sale, consumers can obtain a 50 word

quotation from the book. UBERMORGEN.COM started the process by searching for the first few words of any book, then used an algorithm to copy the last sentence and search for it again. Thus, entire books were reconstructed by the automatic algorithm. Eventually, Amazon stopped their activity, but through their actions, UBERMORGEN.COM produced a critical reflection of the concept of free library (Ludovico, 2009).

In terms of practices, hacktivism is an umbrella term that involves various performance-based satirical interventions involving “the hacking of corporate adverts or events by the reverse engineering of their content” (Taylor, 2005, p. 634). These satirical anti-corporate operations are largely concerned with politics and societal change (Van de Donk et al., 2004, p. 57), as artists “repeatedly address issues of socio-political and cultural significance” (Dart, 2004, p.319).

The existing academic literature, however, highlights the ambiguities surrounding art hacktivism (Samuel, 2004), as in mass media hack has become associated with illegal computer intrusion rather than the original reference to innovative use of technology (Jordan, 2002). Due to the often illicit tactics accompanying this practice, hacktivism has generally been defined as set of ambiguous activities (Garrett, 2012).

Despite an increasing academic attention to consumer resistance in general (Alvesson and Deetz, 2000; Alvesson and Wilmott, 1992; Burton, 2001; Murray and Ozanne, 1991) and cyber resistance in particular (Jordan and Taylor, 2004; Galloway, 2004; Taylor, 2005; Juris, 2005; Fourmentreaux, 2008), these two concepts remain entangled. The existing research into consumer resistance is focused on different anti-consumption practices that try to “to withstand the force or affect of” (Poster, 1992 cited by Peñaloza and Price, 1993, p. 123) consumer culture within the marketplace. Thus, existing consumer theory research focuses on different forms of resistance and anti-consumption, such as: emancipated consumption (Holt, 2002), consumer resistance

(Peñaloza and Price, 1993), counter-cultural movements (Zavestoski, 2002) or ethical consumption (Shaw and Newholm, 2002). Although these marketing and consumer research texts describe different approaches to resistive behaviour, art hacktivism has yet to be described within the consumer research sphere.

Consumer resistance from a cultural perspective has been used broadly within the field of consumer research (Fiske, 1989; Hebdige, 2000; Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Ozanne and Murray, 1995; Gottdiener, 2000; Ritzer, 1999; Zwick and Dholakia, 2004), which is in line with the focus on Michel de Certeau's "Practices of the Everyday Life" (1984) as a theoretical framework within the hacktivism sphere, so that to associate hacktivism with tactics of subversion against capitalism (Lovink, 1997). The cultural framework, although effective in placing emphasis on resistance as an everyday lived experience (Goodwin and Jasper, 1999), it is mainly concerned with a phenomenological view, where the action of resistance is rooted fundamentally in the human nature (Mitchell, 2007). Thus, the cultural model proposes that subjectivity is related to notions of fragmented selves, a sense of loss and ironic disconnection (Napolitano, Pratten, 2007).

However, consumption - and implicitly resistance to consumption - is a social and cultural process (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). This is reinforced by Foucault's theory that subjectivity is constructed by socio- historical factors which are less perceptible to phenomenological inspection (Hoy, 2004). Thus, by using a Foucauldian theoretical framework, this paper proposes to contribute to the existing literature by providing a better understanding of the hacktivist practices within the wider society, rather than describing these practices as isolated phenomenological accounts.

Another contribution point of this study is an elaboration on hacktivism as regimes of practice, in comparison with other existing consumer research working with Foucault, which focus on the subjectivity and cynical identity created through various

power discourses (Cherrier, 2008; Beckett and Nayak, 2008; Mikkonen et al., 2011). In order to provide a deeper understanding of art hacktivism as a form of consumer resistance, it is important to define it within the production and reproduction of routine practices. By using Foucault and his discursive power model, art hacktivism can be conceptualised as an array of organised constellations of activity in social life, which manifest a logic of their own (Moisander and Valtonen, 2006).

Further on, the literature review will define art hacktivism as a discursive form of resistance located within the discursive power model. Then, art hacktivism will be discussed in terms of the Foucauldian regimes of practice, in order to better understand its discursive construction.

HACKTIVISM AS RESISTANCE

The hacking communities have been generally theorised within the academic literature as global resistance against capitalist imperialism (McCaughey, 2003, Dart, 2004). Described as the combination of hacking techniques with communicative strategies of political activism in order to challenge the issues of the new globalized social movement (Taylor, 1999; Fitri, 2011), hacktivism has become a current expression of consumer resistance. For the purpose of this paper, art hacktivism will be theorised as a form of resistance by discussing the power models proposed by Denegri-Knott et al. (2006): the consumer sovereignty model, the cultural power model and the discursive power model.

In the field of consumer research, the discussion of consumer resistance has often focused on the consumer sovereignty model (Denegri – Knott et al., 2006), where consumer resistance occurs in collective forms, such as boycotts (Mikkonen et al.,

2011). However, in the era of the network society, the nomad activist is described as being highly individualistic (Galloway, 2004), where hacktivists act independently and, as John and Klein (2003) note, “because individual consumers are typically small relative to the market, their actions are likely to have a negligible impact on producers” (p.1197). Moreover, this model has been widely used to explain the nature of consumer demand and to justify the role of marketing in satisfying it (Smith, 1987). Within this model, Denegri-Knott et al. (2006), describe that moments of conflict would be produced when the consumer is unsatisfied with the marketing efforts of a company, and thus, try to direct it and improve production. In the case of hacktivists, however, it is important to note that although their actions are directed towards specific companies, these organisations are chosen to showcase issues existing in the wider societal context (Jordan, 2002). Thus, hacktivists are trying to create awareness of problematic issues related to the predominant ideology, rather than focusing on the production of specific enterprises.

The second approach to resistance, the cultural power model, draws on Michel de Certeau’s theory (1984) and describes consumers as creative and playful agents inventing tactics against corporate players (Abercrombie, 1994). Among hacktivism scholars, de Certeau is used as the main theoretician as his thesis highlights hacktivism’s character of a tactical medium. For de Certeau, subversion is closely related to individuals’ daily practices, and it consists of tactics that are grounded in a signification system foreign to the predominant ideology (Peñaloza and Price, 1993). As argued by several authors, this represents the “raison d’être” of art hacktivists, who use their artworks as tactics to escape from the dominating capitalistic mode (Galloway, 2004; Lovink, Garcia, 1997; Cloninger, 2009). Another reason for the popularity of de Certeau’s theory is that it places emphasis on play as a core characteristic of these tactics. This is in line with the idiosyncrasies of art hacktivism, which involves

“performance-based satirical interventions” (Taylor, 2005, p.634). Although this model elaborates on various particularities of art hacktivism, it implies an inherent opposition to the dominant ideology and it attributes an antagonistic view to the concept of hacktivism. Combined with the ambiguous nature of hacktivism, this antagonistic position encourages a dismissal of hacktivism as “illicit computer intrusion” (Jordan, 2002). By framing online activism as criminal activity, they reinforce their hegemonic grip on dissent (McCaughey, 2003).

The last model proposed by Denegri-Knott et al. (2006), the discursive power model, proposes a “more integrative and less antagonistic” (p.961) view of resistance, based on Foucault’s arguments that domination is inscribed in the power operating in modern discourses, always provoking resistance (Foucault, 1988; Shankar et al., 2006). This suggests that the interactions between consumers and producers co-create and reproduce the market; thus, through their practices, art hacktivists realise a “critical furthering” of capitalism. (Von Busch, Palmas, 2006, p.53).

The premises of the discursive power model are anchored in the Foucauldian theory that power is not held by anybody and there is no authoritative discourse, but a number of competing discourses which produce different versions of events (Danaher et al., 2000). This approach allows for a legitimization of art hacktivism as a co-creator of the capitalistic ideology, where capitalism appears as an open structure, subject to rearrangement (Von Busch, Palmas, 2006). This is closely linked to the sociological conception of social interactions, which link power and resistance in a coextensive manner (Roux, 2007; Dahl, 1957; Giddens, 1987), which implies the “insubordination” of a free subject (Foucault, 1982, p. 1056). Here, it is important to note the role Foucault attributes to art in challenging hegemonic ways of seeing and of knowing, and to the “heterodox forms of practice capable of enunciating the intimate relationship

between ethics and aesthetics, individual and social transformation” (Heighton, 2009, p. 620).

According the Foucauldian discursive model power, resistance emerges from a set of everyday practices through which the consuming subjects constitute themselves (Foucault, 1988). For the art hacktivists, computers become the means by which they alter the power relations currently dictated by the establishment. The use of networked space enables them to challenge the commonly accepted views of the world (Boyd, 2005).

HACKTIVISM AS A PRACTICE-BASED APPROACH

Consumer researchers have been generally engaged with the discursive model of power in order to describe the genesis of consumer subjectivities and different representations (Bauman, 1988; Ewen, 1976; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004). For Foucault, however, it is not the subject, but the discourse that produces knowledge (Hall, 2001) and therefore, power. Since all social practices have a discursive aspect (Hall, 2001), the subject is constituted through practices that are always “specific to particular social and historical contexts” (O’Leary, 2002, p.111).

Indeed, scholars such as Denegri-Knott (2004) and Thompson (2004) argue that a focus on practices of consumer resistance operating within existing discourses could produce new resourceful narratives.

An exploration of art hacktivism as a set of discursive practices may produce an insightful account, as for Foucault, practices “possess [...] their own specific regularities, logic, strategy, self-evidence and reason” (Foucault, 1991, p.75). He proposes the “regimes of practice”- places of “where what is said and what is done”

(Foucault, 1991) - as programmes of conduct, “which have both prescriptive effects regarding what’s to be done and codifying effects - what’s to be known” (Foucault, 1991, p.76). Thus, by an analysis of regimes of practices in art hacktivism, we can shed light upon the context in which art hacktivism has developed as a form of resistance.

These regimes of practice are executed through what Foucault (1988) defines as technologies of the self as “techniques which permit individuals to perform [...] a certain number of operations on their own bodies, their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and this in such a way that they transform themselves [...] and reach a certain type of perfection” (p. 18).

In his studies, Foucault uses two complementary methods of enquiry, archaeology and genealogy in order to study the forms of discourses and their power-related origins (Alvesson and Skölldberg, 2000). However, Foucault’s methods of enquiry are problematic in concretely identifying the institutional means by which the circulation of discourse occurs and the modalities to determine it in particular instances (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005). Also, Foucault’s definition of regimes of practice as “where what is said and what is done” is also a relatively abstract notion in terms of methodology.

In consumption studies, scholars such as Barnett et al. (2005), Clarke et al. (2007) have theorized ethical and political consumerism through a Foucauldian perspective, “dovetailing at the same time with some more general ideas derived from practice theory” (Halkier et al., 2011). Following the steps of these academicians, a practice-theory approach was adopted, as it allowed for a better theorisation of the art hacktivism discourse construction within a consumer research context.

The definitions of practice offered by Schatzki (2001) and Reckwitz (2002) as a set of doings and sayings that is “organized by a pool of understandings, a set of rules and a teleoaffective structure” (Schatzki, 2001, p.58), namely a “routinized type of behaviour which consists of several interconnected elements: forms of bodily activities,

forms of mental activities, things and their use, a background knowledge in the form of understanding, know-how, states of emotion and motivational knowledge” (Reckwitz, 2002, p. 249–50). The definitions offer concrete areas of exploration, such as knowledge and general understandings, skills and competences, rules, projects, and teleoaffective structures.

The exploration of these elements can produce an understanding of how art hacktivism can be legitimized within the sphere of consumer resistance, as practice theory argues that social structure may constitute a site of resistance and challenge, where certain practices may involve adjustment, interpretation and alteration (Halkier et al., 2011).

Therefore, by using a practice-based approach, this paper seeks to understand how art hacktivism is performed, what power relations exist within the discourse and how art hacktivism can be legitimized within the capitalistic ideology.

METHODS

The empirical analysis consisted of nine practice-based interviews with a variety of internationally renown artists active in the fields of media art, bio-art, media hacking, net.art, software art, net-based installations and social interface. The interviews, conducted in March 2013, served in documenting and mapping out resistive practices, specifically in terms of knowledge and general understandings, skills and competences, rules, projects, and teleoaffective structures (Schatzki, 2001; Reckwitz, 2002) within the art hacktivism discourse.

An interpretive practice-based approach was adopted as it offered a more detailed illustration of Foucault’s definition of practices as “where what is said and what is done”

(Foucault, 1991). The advantage of interpretive practice is that it draws upon the Foucauldian discourse analysis (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005), at the same time offering methodological compatibility with a consumer research investigation. Within the fields of marketing and consumer research, scholars such as Schau et al. (2009), Orlie (2002), Barnett et al. (2005), Magaudda (2011) adhered to an interpretive practice approach to illustrate how individuals embrace and stabilize or change social practices (Halkier and Jensen, 2011).

The application of practice theoretical perspectives shows a great “variety of data collection methods” (Halkier et al., 2011). For the purpose of this study, in-depth interviews were conducted with the participants, as this form of analysis allows researchers to collect data on the ways in which institutionalized discourses are resisted and contested in everyday discursive practices (Holt, 2002; Thompson and Haytko, 1997). This method has been employed (usually in combination with other methods of data collection) by various advocates of practice theory (Gram-Hanssen, 2010, Magaudda, 2011, Hargreaves, 2011).

Pragmatically, a thematic interview guide was developed according to the areas of explorations as suggested by Schatzki (2001) and Reckwitz (2002). In addition to this, various materials found online, were studied prior to, during, and after conducting the interviews. These included the participants’ personal websites, twenty-seven other websites describing their projects, seven previous interviews, sixteen videos presenting the participants during conferences or performing artistic interventions, three books published by the participants, a book published about the hacktivist duo UBERMORGEN.GOM, as well as the PhD Thesis of Adam Zaretsky. As proposed by Foucault, these materials served as archaeological artefacts, which allowed for a socio-historical exploration of the development of the art hacktivism discourse (Kendall and Wickham, 1999). This was consolidated by an immersive experience in an international

community of new media artists, hacktivists and curators, which took place during a year of work experience (2011-2012) in the field of digital art, in Paris, France. This involvement opened access to a varied sample of participants.

Following interpretivist research conventions, the aim was not to attain a statistically representative sample. Instead, with a focus on a diverse sample of participants who are active in different fields of new media art and who are known for hacktivism interventions, four of the participants were contacted after an initial contact in Paris, and six others were selected through a snowball technique. The final sample included artists who are widely appreciated, whose artworks have been exhibited in prominent art institutions such as Guggenheim, Palais de Tokyo, SFMOMA and Centre Pompidou. Artists such as Steve Kurtz from Critical Art Ensemble, UBERMORGEN.COM, Heath Bunting, Shu Lea Cheang and Paolo Cirio have received prestigious awards, including Ars Electronica, John Lansdown Award for Multimedia, Transmediale. Due to the highly controversial nature of their projects, which in some cases led to the involvement of the FBI (as it was the case with Steve Kurtz), and other juridical polemics (e.g: a 27 minutes CNN “Burden of Proof” debate on the [V]ote Auction project of UBERMORGEN.COM), these artists are regarded as pioneers of the new media art sphere, who have had a substantial influence on the development of the current art movements. Their work has also had a significant contribution to the theorisation of art hacktivism.

INSERT TABLE 1

Overall, nine in-depth interviews were conducted. Due to geographic impediments, the interviews were conducted via Skype, as computer mediated communication is a “practical and cost-efficient way of conducting in-depth interviews”

(Holstein and Gubrium, 2005). At the request of the participant, one of the interviews was conducted via e-mail. Prompted by the thematic interview guide, the interviews encouraged the participants to describe their practices as art hacktivists, the knowledge around this form of resistance, the rules followed in their artistic processes, as well as the emotional commitment to their projects.

The interviews lasted 30 minutes -1 hour each, and seventeen pages of notes were taken during the interview process. In total the audio recordings produced 6 hours 10 minutes of data, and 67 pages of transcription. One interview was conducted in French, therefore it was summarised instead of producing a full transcript. Seven pictures were provided for the use within the research paper.

The notes and transcripts were analysed through ordinary qualitative coding and categorizing (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996), and thus, the key themes were identified. Also, the interpretation of the data was based on a “back and forth” process to relate part of the text (individual spoken) to the whole (the materials available online which relate to a discursive socio-historic development) (de Coverly et al. 2008; Holstein and Gubrium 2005).

Limitations of authorisation, confidentiality, integrity and non-repudiation (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005) were overcome by an initial informative e-mail where the participants agreed to be audio recorded and to be quoted with their full names within the paper. The challenge to transfer the flexibility qualities of face-to-face communication (Holstein and Gubrium, 2005) was reduced by the utilisation of Skype, which permitted an audio-visual form of conversation.

Issues characteristic to an interpretivist approach, such as authenticity, plausibility and criticality (Hogg and Maclaran, 2008) were dealt with on different levels. Thus, bias was reduced by requiring clarifications during the interviews to attain accuracy in the interpretation process. Moreover, the analysis of the data covered all the areas of the

thematic interview to ensure that potential emergent themes and findings were not ignored.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Existing literature on consumer resistance drawing on Foucault implies a certain degree of homogeneity regarding the discursive representation, as Foucault's analysis of power refers to a "disciplinary society [...] of managing, transforming, differentiating, classifying and hierarchizing all deviances" (de Certeau, 1984). However, our data articulated an occurrence challenging the idea of a unitary discourse.

The study of the art hacktivism praxis crystallised an eclectic community of artists whose projects consist of complex, multi-layered forms of creative practices. The analysis of practice elements as proposed by Schatzki (2001) and Reckwitz (2002) highlighted a high degree of incongruity. The manifestations of these multiform procedures led to a definition of this eclectic community of artists as a "multitude" (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Drawing on Foucault's concept of power relations in the modernity, Hardt and Negri (2000) propose the notion of "multitude", as "new figures of resistance are composed through the sequences of the events of struggle" (p.61), who "are in perpetual motion and they form constellations of singularities and events that impose continual reconfigurations in the system" (p.60). In Foucault's view (1980a), modern power is a relational structure applied from innumerable points, it has a highly indeterminate nature, and it cannot be acquired, seized, or shared, there is no centre of power to contest and there are no subjects possessing it. Under these circumstances, "if relations of power are dispersed and fragmented throughout the social field, so must resistance to power be" (Diamond and Quinby, 1988, p. 185); therefore, the multitude's acts of resistance are determined by the modern structures of power.

The data presented in this study contributes to the existing literature by introducing Hardt and Negri's concept of multitude in a consumer research context, as the themes presented below continuously reinforce the idea of multitude and lack of unitary discourse. The data showed that the interviewees had a wide array of intellectual and they seemed to reject the denomination of "hactivist" for their own practices. In terms of projects, their projects are elaborated as alternatives to the established discourses. Their goals suggest transformation as an act of resistance, whereas their rules of producing and sharing knowledge emphasise the Foucauldian concept of knowledge as a generator of power.

Knowledge and General Understandings

The concept of knowledge plays an important role in Foucault's work, as it is closely related to the notion of power, "each incites the production of the other" (Barker, 1998, p.25). For Foucault, it is the pursuit and creation of knowledge, which, "by creating norms and standards, helps form a disciplined subject" (Shankar et al., 2006, p. 1017). However, the general understanding of art hacktivism within the community presents no consistence, and thus, the participants resist to being disciplined through the a broad collection of sources of inspiration and by taking an active stand against framing their activities.

When exploring the knowledge revolving around art hacktivism, the participants mentioned a diversity of intellectual influences, as well as a multitude of sources of inspiration ranging from other artistic movements (such as Situationism and détournement), to political manifestos (such as Marxism), to fiction and science fiction, which emphasised a high degree of plurality among the interviewees. This was encapsulated by RYBN.ORG, an extra-disciplinary artistic research platform, which

organises conferences in order to share, perpetuate and develop the knowledge and critique within this sphere. RYBN's goal is to invite individuals from different areas of expertise, such as artists, philosophers, mathematicians and individuals with different political ideologies, in order to produce different articulations of the same discourse. They declare that they enjoy producing tensions between the participants, as they think their arguments are productive. This accentuates Foucault's approach to analysing how knowledge is produced, as he sustains that "discourse [...] is so complex a reality that we not only can, but should, approach it at different levels with different methods" (Foucault, 1973, p.xiv).

Moreover, when asked about how they would define hacktivism related to their practice, all the participants acknowledged hacktivism as being part of their methods, but none of them accepted the denomination of "hacktivist".

UBERMORGEN.COM, the controversial artistic duo formed by Lizvix and Hans Bernhard, that Jean Baudrillard described as "hardcore and radical in their actions and [...] extremely strange and highly intelligent people" (2000). They operate within the conceptual art, software art, computer installations, net.art and media hacking. They describe their objection to the term of "hacktivism" to describe their practice:

We like to separate our work from what we see as conventional activist work, which works with certain goals, searching agendas and certain types of objectives. So usually in hacktivism people define what they want to reach or what their goals are, or what their mission is. And in our field, we don't do that.

In the case of UBERMORGEN, we can notice an active rejection of the hacktivist because of the lack of a political goal. This rejection is rather paradoxical, as their projects have had significant political implications, and UBERMORGEN is often described as a classical example of hacktivism. This rejection is also present in the case of RYBN.ORG, who define hacktivism as amplifying a political purpose, whereas in

their practice, the political reflection exists across their entire research, but without defining a specific political goal to achieve.

A rejection of the hacktivist denomination also occurs in the case of media artist Paolo Cirio, whose work investigates perception and the creation of cultural, political and economic realities manipulated by modes of control over information's power. Although his work is also considered a classic example of art hacktivism, he argues that he does not necessarily perceives himself as a hacktivist, since he is not an adept of the cyber culture, and he uses the computer strictly as a medium:

I probably don't even see myself as a hacker, I just see myself more as the link between an activist and an artist [...] The reason why I am doing this is because today, it is the right field to work, and engage a wide audience, and put forward effective challenges against the power structures [...] I am concerned about the power of networks and how that influences the contemporary society.

The lack of a coherent philosophy in the case of the participants suggests that hacktivism is a “continually evolving and open process [...] it has no prophet, no gospel and no canonized literature” (metac0m, 2003), which reinforces the Foucauldian idea that resistance emerges as the refusal of discipline, hierarchy and systematization. These findings contrast other consumer resistance studies, such as the ethnography conducted by Kozinets (2002), which suggests a clear polarisation of the anti-market resistance, with a community adhering to common set of ethics and whose identity is more clearly defined. On the contrary, the art hacktivists taking part in this study appeared as a disparate, difficult to categorise collective, reinforcing Hardt and Negri's idea of multitude.

These differences could be explained through a socio-historical analysis of art hacktivism. Usually, hacking is a term connected to the world of computers (Levy, 1984). However, Otto van Busch and Palmas (2006), argue that more recently, the

emphasis has shifted to constructive modification as a central aspect of hacking, making this practice a “modifying culture” (p.29). This is captured by one of the participants, Vesna Manojilovic, an active member of the Incognita Technologia hackerspace in Amsterdam:

There are all kinds of different hackers, who are involved in hardware hacking, in bio-hacking, in the chemistry experiments, in electronics, in doing wood work, in creating art, and it's not just software hacking, just people who write programmes [...] that are going to attack your computer.

Moreover, Otto van Busch and Palmas (2006) suggest that hacking as an approach is “a set of activity tools more than a specific relation to computers, even though it is easy to interpret the systems they deal with as networks, protocols and systems of code” (p.27). This description of hacktivism as a culture of modifying systems is in line with the multitude’s characteristics, as they ‘combine and recombine in fluid networks’ (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p. 202) to exercise “power particularly through symbolic resources, such as by attempting to create new discourses” (Wall, 2007, p. 260-61).

This is closely related to another area of practice suggested by Schatzki (2001) and Reckwitz (2002), knowledge in the sense of know-how, namely skills and competences. Again, when asked about the competences required in hacktivism, the participants presented different answers, ranging from “being disillusioned” to “being curious” and “being subversive”. What Otto van Busch and Palmas (2006) suggest in their essay is that hacktivism is a set of activity tools, and this results in a great variety of skills, competences and tools. But some of the participants go even further, and argue that practices such as hacktivism, art, and even life itself (Adam Zaretsky) function as different tools, or different channels of diffusion, which are completely interchangeable, depending on the project. This conceptual abstractionism is captured by RYBN.ORG:

Art is just a tool that allows us to articulate a discourse at a certain moment. It's a field, where there is a critical discourse [...] we don't really portray ourselves as hacktivists [...] For us, hacking is simply a tool to produce different revelatory actions or interventions.

This abstract relativisation in terms of know-how suggests, again, a resistance to categorisation and hierarchisation. For Foucault, variation functions as a form of resistance as this is a modality “to stimulate resistance, that is, wriggle out of various determinations and classifications” (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000, p.233).

Projects

The majority of consumer research projects focus on a view of the resistant consumer either as a sovereign, empowered subject (Moynagh and Worsley, 2002; Nelson, 2002; Pitt et al., 2002), or as culturally opposed (Abercrombie, 1994; Fiske, 1989; Hebdige, 2000). But in a Foucauldian analysis, “there is no sovereign, founding subject” (Foucault, 1984, p.50), and moreover, the relationship between power and resistance does not exist as a form of opposition, as there is no one authoritative discourse, institution or group producing events. Indeed, the participants' various projects seem to serve to the creation of new discourses challenging the existing ones. Rather than trying to obtain control over the system or over certain institutions, their projects appear as dialogical forms, as experiments to create new extensions or different discursive articulations.

The Status Project by net.art pioneer Heath Bunting is a study of formal identity construction. His research explores how information supplied by the public in their interaction with organisations and institutions is logged. The project draws on the information he was obliged to supply in his life as a public citizen in order to access

specific services; this includes data collected from the Internet and information found on governmental databases. This data is then used to map and illustrate how we behave, relate and travel in social spaces. This research provides knowledge about our normative behaviour, and how through the identity maps we can enact different identities within the dominant system. Thus, the aim of the project is not to be in dialectical opposition to the dominant ideology, but rather to create new extensions and challenge the established discourses and habits.

INSERT PICTURE 1, PICTURE 2, PICTURE 3

This is also the case of the controversial project [V]ote Auction (2000) realised by UBERMORGEN. During the 2000 presidential election, US voters were given the possibility to auction off their votes to bidders on the Internet by using an online auctioning platform. The cast votes of an entire U.S. state could be sold to the highest bidder, with corresponding portions of the proceeds paid to those selling. Its catchy slogan “Bringing Capitalism and Democracy Closer Together!” suggested the juxtaposition of capital and voting power. Since 13 U.S. states issued restraining orders and injunctions for alleged illegal vote trading, one may argue that their actions were directly addressed against the U.S. electoral system. However, the artists declared it was an experiment to test the impact of a direct collision between democracy and capitalism.

INSERT PICTURE 4, PICTURE 5, PICTURE 6, PICTURE 7

Thus, by identifying areas of exploration and intervention, the participants are “in perpetual motion and they form constellations of singularities and events that impose continual reconfigurations in the system” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.60). Related to their

activity as a multitude, it is important to note that according to the experiment they are conducting, these artists perform their activities either as singularities, or they collaborate with other artists in order to accomplish their project. This phenomenon is captured by bio-artist and tactical media theorist Steve Kurtz: “different nomadic cells [...] [that] would coalesce around a specific problem allowing resistance to originate from many different points; then the team would dissolve” (cited by Galloway, 2004), which re-iterates the hacktivist community as a multitude.

In some of the cases, we can even notice a dialogical form in the power-resistance relationship. For instance, the NAZI~LINE project of UBERMORGEN.COM was a Neo-Nazi re-integration programme funded by companies including Siemens, Bayer, Microsoft and Deutsche Telecom. Something similar occurred in the case of the project Amazon Noir, when the software created to exploit and critique Amazon’s system of providing excerpts of books was eventually bought by the targeted company. This resistive form suggests a Foucauldian attempt for co-creation of the capitalistic system (Denegri-Knott et al., 2006).

Goals

Although the diversity of projects conducted by the participants indicated a variety of goals to be achieved, the data showed that ultimately, the fundamental goal of the interviewees was to produce transformation, which confirmed Otto van Busch and Palmas’ theory of hacking as a culture of modification (2006). The interviewees described two potential cases: social change or personal transformation. In Foucault’s analysis, social change refers to the production of power through establishing new truths via the production and circulation of knowledge (Danaher et al., 2000). In the

second case, personal transformation is what Foucault defines as the ultimate expression of resistance - the ability to change one's own mind (Barker, 1998).

In the case of Paolo Cirio, he defines the adoption of technology as a means of engaging a wide audience, which has as an ultimate goal the production of social change. By criticising certain corporations, his work aims to change existing discourses within the public sphere through information and in some cases, even through social practices:

People often through my artwork, rely on something that they didn't know. So in a way, surely it is informative, definitely, most of my artworks are informative, so people become aware of a problem in a different way. [...] So because of that, they act to change that platform, that technology, the rules. So yeah, sometimes it happens, technically, so there is an artwork, performance [...] that actually changes the reality in a really material way.

In the case of UBERMORGEN personal transformation is a fundamental aspect of their practice:

(Hans Bernard): For me [...] it's about looking at things, developing things that are maybe even unthinkable, or maybe unforeseeable, things that are not obviously to be connected, and most important, to go where the research leads you [...] That's why I told you we don't like hacktivism, we don't have an objective, we don't have a goal. We don't say "this and this is bad, and now we're gonna do something about it". We say "this and this is happening, there's some merits going into it", and then we go into it, and [...] it leads you to another place [...] And you start to think things that were unthinkable before, and do things that you thought you didn't want to do, or that you couldn't do [...] So for me, it's kind of a religion, it's kind of a faith in science [...] And this is why science and art are completely intertwined.

In this case, we can see that the artistic process attains a revelatory function, which produces a change in the thoughts and the actions of the artist. The goal of his artistic practice is to continuously interrogate established institutions, habits and discourses, rendering possible the connection between art and science. This is also the case of Heath Bunting, who interrogates different aspects of the dominant system through his artworks. Thus, he is able to modify his own beliefs, which, according to Foucault, is the “raison d’être” of the intellectual. Heath asserts that the most radical act of change is changing one’s own mind:

[Mission statement] *I remember saying during the past decade that it was to create good questions, but for the next decade it will probably be to skilfully change my mind about the world [...] I think, really, the most radical act is to change your mind.*

This is in line with the Foucauldian notion of self-transformation as an ultimate act of resistance. In analysing Foucault’s work, Barker (1998) suggests that “the very possibility of being an intellectual, a revolutionary or a radical is already a consequence of power relations” (p.31), and what intellectuals can do is “focus on the possibility of transforming their own thought and perhaps the thought of others” (p.31). The role of the intellectual is to “re-interrogate the obvious and the assumed, to unsettle habits, ways of thinking and doing, to dissipate accepted familiarities, to re-evaluate rules and institutions” (Foucault, 1980b, p. 30). Thus, the ultimate goal is “not only to arrive at an establishment of truth but also to experience something that permits a change, a transformation of the relationship we have with ourselves and with the world [...] a transformation of the relationship we have with our knowledge” (Foucault in Faubion, 2000, p. 244).

It is important to note that in other consumer resistance studies adopting either the sovereign consumer model (Nicoulaud, 1987; Swagler, 1994) or the cultural model

(Gottdiener, 2000; Ritzer, 1999, Murray and Ozanne, 1991), although resistance is well-defined within an anti-consumption discourse, it does not appear as radical as in this case, and generally, it does not involve acts of self-transformation.

Rules

Although at a micro-level the respondents showed a wide variety of rules to be applied, at a larger scale, the data showed that two main factors were adopted: to research the issues to be dealt with and to share details of their projects with peers and the general audience during conferences, lectures and workshops. This is closely linked to the Foucauldian relationship between knowledge and power, as the participants seemed to give prominence to the production and circulation of knowledge.

Research

Within the collected data, research appears as an empowering apparatus, as it allows the participants to produce knowledge and therefore power, and it also allows them to determine in what areas to perform their interventions. For the multitude, research is necessary in order to determine where to “impose continual reconfigurations in the system” (Hardt and Negri, 2000). Moreover, it is research that renders possible the process of self-transformation.

During the interviews, UBERMORGEN.COM and RYBN.ORG described their artistic practice as “freestyle research”, respectively “extra-disciplinary artistic research platform” to emphasise the role of research not only as “technical enquiry, but as cultural creativity and commentary, much like art” (Wilson, 2002, p.3). Candy (2011) argues that this type of creative research “plays a role in documenting the individual creative process and the insights gained from it to [...] influence the ideas and actions of others” (p. 57).

Other artists also described research as an important part of the act of resistance.

Steve Kurtz argues:

Hacktivism is some sort of enlightenment [...] So it's important, since we're trying to address issues and try to get it right, not to screw up or make the problem worse. We have to actually know about it, and know about it in some detail [...] We can get pretty well informed, in the sense that I think we can insert ourselves in the discourse, or issue, or territory we're working in, and shit right in. [...] So yeah, research is a key part.

Programmer, writer, performer and explorer Martin Howse also describes his projects as emerging from a research-based practice:

Projects tend to be quite open-ended and to flow into and across each other under a certain subject of research, at the same time trying to find wider connections.

Candy (2011) argues that research is usually “expected to lead, at one end of the spectrum, to better information and, at the other, to new knowledge that challenges existing theories and assumptions” (p. 55). This is closely related to Foucault’s description of the relationship between knowledge and power. He asserts that “knowledge and power are intimately and productively related” (Barker, 1998, p.25). In a more practical sense, the practices of these artists involve “a process of reflecting on one’s actions and learning how to act differently as a result” (Candy, 2011, p.43). Thus, research provides the vehicle for producing knowledge, which further produces social change or self-transformation.

This cycle of research as a site of knowledge, which in turn produces resistive power is well represented by the work of Adam Zaretsky, a bio-artist working as a research affiliate in Arnold Demain’s Laboratory for Industrial Microbiology and Fermentation in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Department of Biology. His genetic research is trying to produce knowledge related to the potential existence of

“more aesthetic organisms”, as *“I want to show how to make transgenic humans by using DIY methods, and [...] if we are able to design perfect babies, I want to be the person who will make them strange, maybe a protest breed of humans”*.

Sharing Knowledge

The collected data showed that the interviewees attend a variety of events such as conferences, workshops and lectures. The focus was on sharing information, in terms of the circulation of knowledge, which in Foucault’s analysis, it is said to generate truth, and thus, power (Barker, 1998). Again, in some cases, the participants articulated the process of sharing knowledge with the purpose of producing awareness and societal change. In other instances, these events were related to self-transformation, as it allowed them to exchange information and learn from one another.

Martin Howse describes his practice as a set of individual actions combined with collective encounters where artists and art aficionados can exchange information and knowledge:

So it's more of an ongoing stream of workshops, experiments, meetings, events around certain thematics such as Crystal World, Psychogeophysics, punctuated by periods of more solitary, technical development.

In a Foucauldian sense, Martin’s statement suggests that for the resistive individual, in order to produce truth and power, knowledge has to circulate and become visible in the public sphere (Barker, 1998, Danaher et al., 2000).

Shu Lea Cheang is one of the pioneers in the new media art scene, who is renown for creatively combining social issues with artistic methods. In her case, one of the fundamental characteristics of her work is creating a sense of sharing and engagement with a wider audience:

My art is trying to build a public interface. I try to use very popular ways to interact with the public, in the sense that maybe I have some work that's more difficult to understand, but a lot of my work is also about presenting it out there,[...] with respect to a majority, I really want to have that interface with the public.

RYBN.ORG comment on the main functional roles fulfilled by the conferences they organise on a regular basis: explaining complex projects which are not easily comprehensible; showing parts of the research process which are not necessarily visible at the surface, but which include relevant details or critiques and being in touch with other members of the new media network of artists, in order to learn about their projects. In describing their activities, emphasises the production and the circulation of knowledge, to create and make public alternative discourses within the system, suggesting a strong connection with the Foucauldian notions of power and resistance.

It is interesting to note that the participants made no specific indications that these encounters might be realised as an effort to create a common ground for these practices or to create a unified theory that would address some of the ambiguities constructed around the hacktivism praxis, which re-articulates the idea of resistance through multitude and the lack of a non-unitary discourse.

To summarise, the concept of multitude is continuously reinforced on all the levels of practice throughout the community of art hacktivists, as it is, indeed, “a union which does not in anyway subordinate or erase the radical differences among these singularities” (Fenton, 2008, p.240). This idea is encapsulated by UBERMORGEN.COM:

In this type of art [...] you can just have a description or an idea [...], you can basically collect a whole variety of things under an ethos, you are then free to do whatever the fuck you want, you just have to kind of package it...

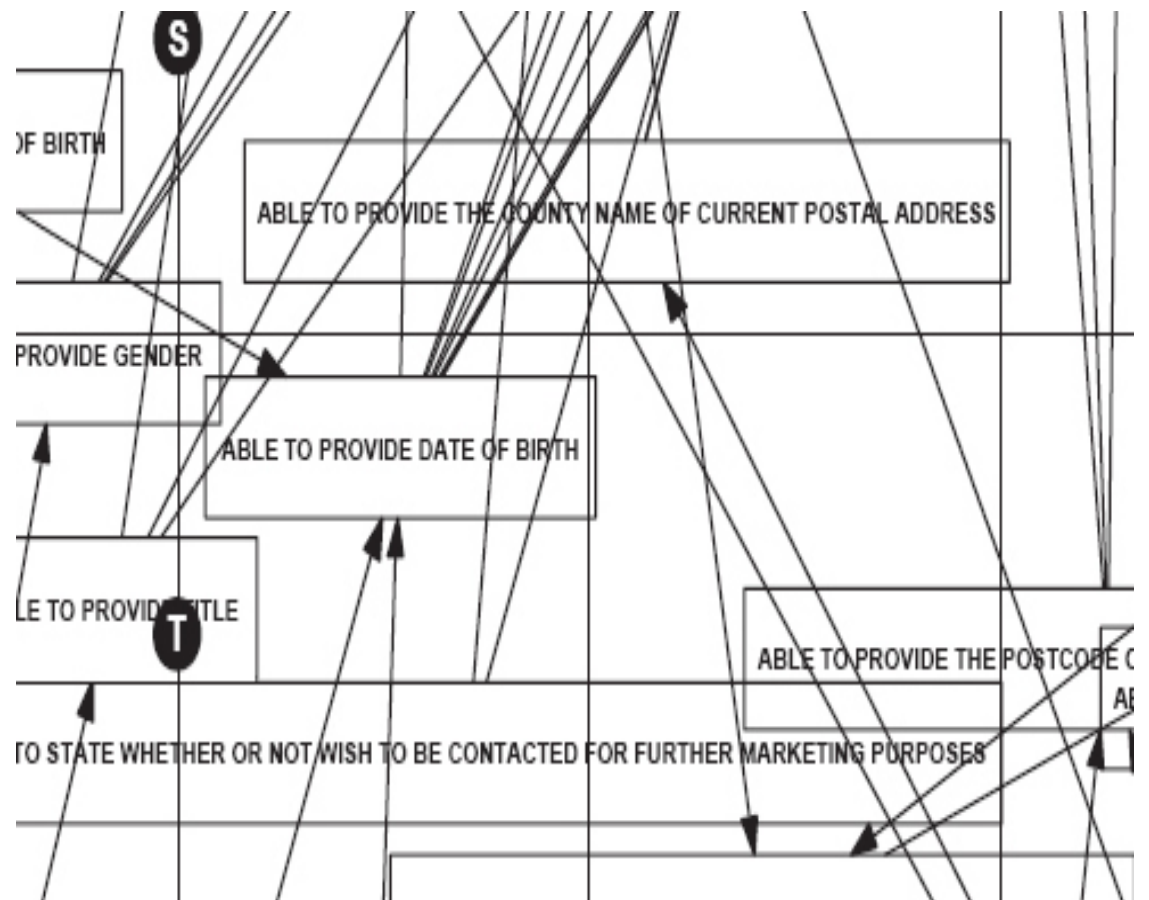
CONCLUSION

Although numerous scholars have previously described art hacktivism as a form of cyber resistance (Jordan, 2002; Jordan and Taylor, 2004; Galloway, 2004; Taylor, 2005; Juris, 2005; Fourmentreaux, 2008), this study contributes to the existing academic literature by defining art hacktivism within a consumer research context. Besides, previous studies concerned with consumer resistance have generally adopted a consumer sovereign (Friedman, 1996, 1991; Gueterbock, 2004; John and Klein, 2003; Smith, 1990) or a cultural approach (Goulding and Shankar, 2004; Kozinets et al., 2004; Peñaloza, 2001) as a theoretical framework. Through the analysis of the art hacktivist community, this study aims to contribute to the discursive tradition on consumer resistance. Moreover, the focus of other discursive model studies has been the construction of subjectivities within the marketplace (Bauman, 1988; Ewen, 1976; Schroeder and Zwick, 2004); one of the key contribution points of this research paper is the adoption of a practice approach to determine the production and circulation of the art hacktivist discourse. The main findings described an eclectic community presenting complex, multi-layered practices based on the Foucauldian paradigm of knowledge as a generator of power and resistance. The data suggested the absence of a unitary discourse and coherence in terms of practices, which permitted the introduction of Hardt and Negri's concept of multitude (2000) in a consumer research context.

Further research concerned with postmodern approaches to consumer research could engage with Hardt and Negri's concept of multitude, as this could offer interesting insights on how consumers act as constellations of singularities within modern forms of power. In addition to this, future studies of the community of art hacktivists could produce interesting data in terms of practical implications of consumption practices.

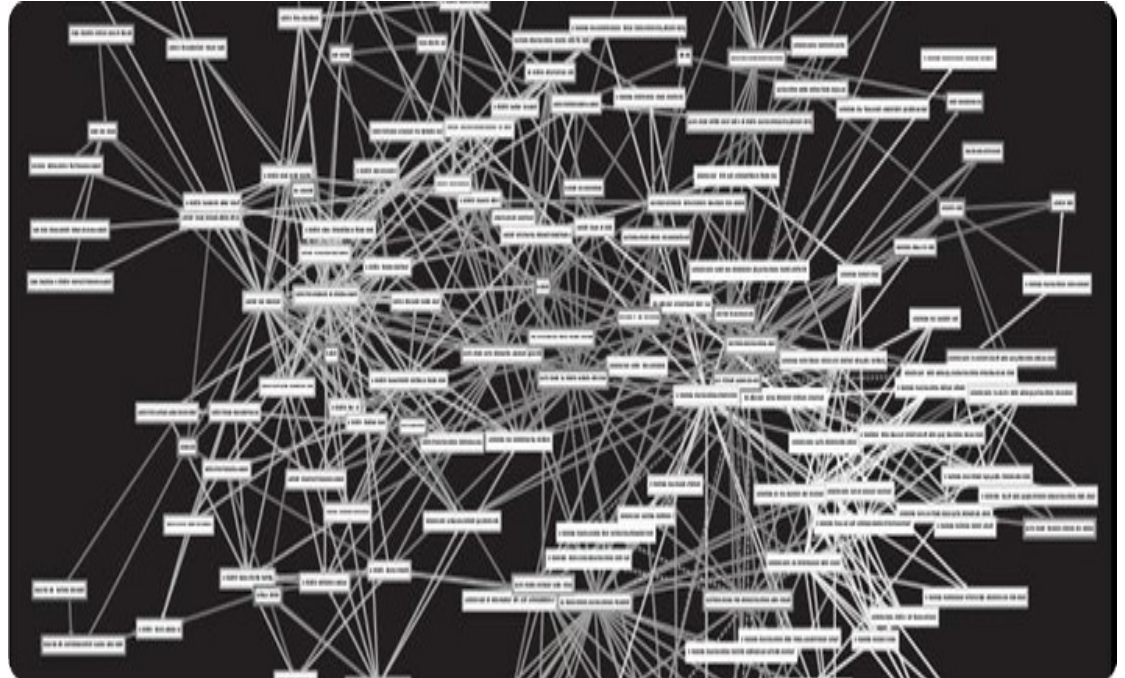
TABLE 1

NAME	OCCUPATION	COUNTRY	WEBSITE
Heath Bunting	net.art, sport-art, contemporary art, activism	UK	http://irational.org/
Shu Lea Cheang	multi-media art, net-based installation, social interface, film production	Taiwan	http://www.mauvaiscontact.info/
Paolo Cirio	net-art, street-art, video-art, software-art, experimental fiction	Italy	http://www.paolocirio.net/
Martin Howse	programmer, writer, explorer performer	UK	http://www.1010.co.uk/org
Steve Kurtz	bio-art, founding member of the performance art group Critical Ensemble, Professor of Art	USA	http://www.critical-art.net/
Vesna Manojilovic	member of Technologia Incognita, Amsterdam	Serbia	http://blogger.xs4all.nl/becha
RYBN.ORG	installations, performances and interfaces	France	http://rybn.org/
UBERMORGEN.COM	conceptual art, software art, media hacking, net.art and media actionism	Austria	http://www.ubermorgen.com
Adam Zaretsky	bio-art, science	USA	http://www.emutagen.com/

PICTURE 1

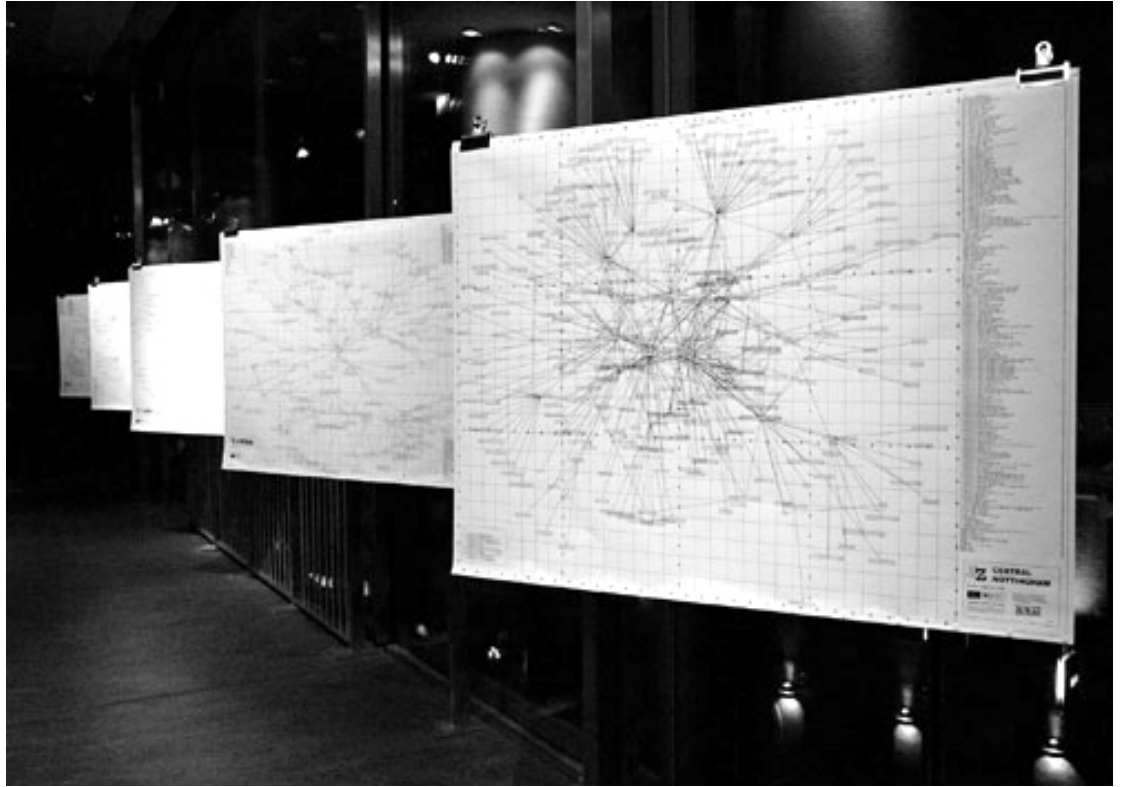
All Rights Reserved to Heath Bunting

PICTURE 2



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PICTURE 3

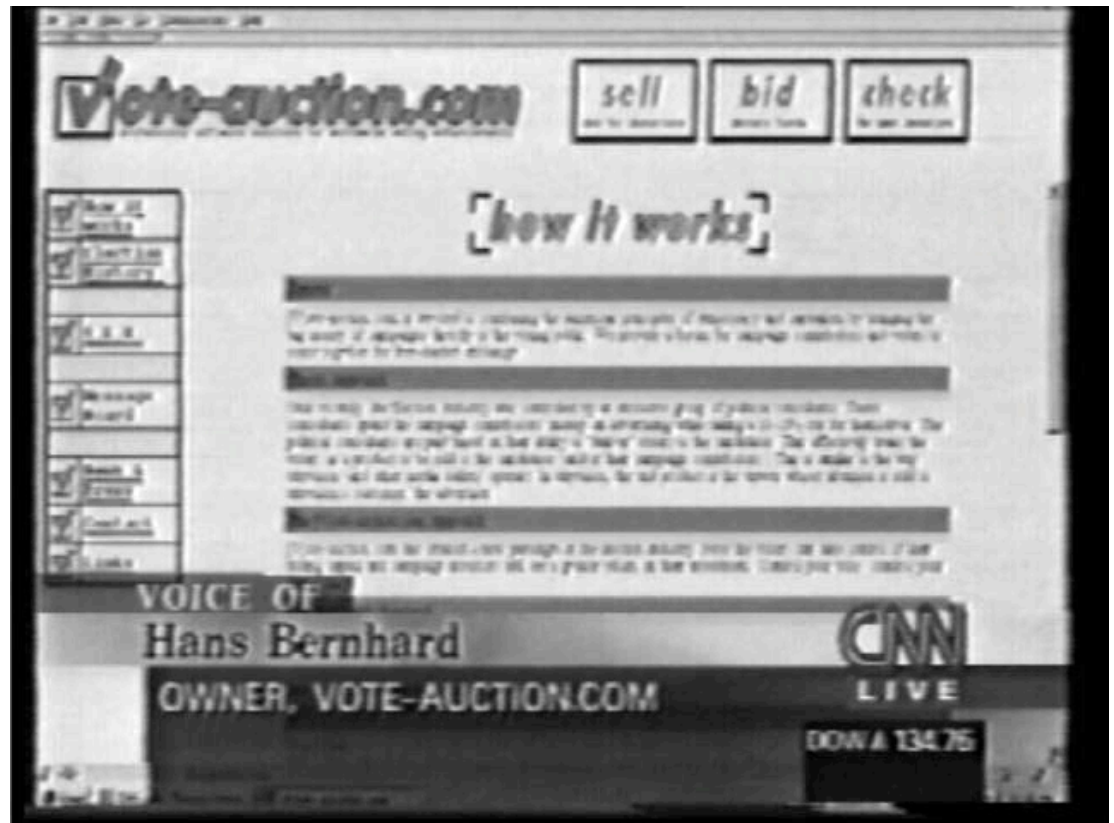


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PICTURE 4



PICTURE 5



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PICTURE 6

DIVISIONS
 Archives
 Business Programs
 Business Filings
 Notary Public
 Uniform Commercial Code
 Elections
 Information Technology
 Management Services
 Political Reform



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 Secretary of State
 State of California

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October 6, 2000

BY E-MAIL TRANSMISSION AND CERTIFIED MAIL

Hans Bernhard
 *****gasse ***
 Vienna, AU a-10**
 AU 43.***.***.***

Re: Criminal Activity by Voteauction.Com

Dear Sir:

This letter is to formally notify you that Voteauction.com is engaged in criminal activity in the State of California.

You are identified by DomainBank.com and media reports as the registrant, administrative, and zone contact as well as the owner of an enterprise known as "Voteauction.com". (see attachments) This enterprise was sold to you by an American citizen, James Baumgartner on August 22, 2000 after he was advised by elections officials in the State of New York that he was engaging in criminal conduct by operating the enterprise to buy and sell votes.

Your website specifically offers to broker the sale and purchase of votes throughout the United States of America and here in the State of California. A "block" of 810 votes is now offered for sale. Such activity is corruption of the voting process in violation of Elections Code sections 18500, 18521, 18522, and 18562 as well as Penal Code section 182, criminal conspiracy. These offenses are felonies that carry a maximum penalty of three years in state prison in California for each violation.

The right to free and fair elections is a cornerstone of American democracy. Any person or entity that tries to sell, does sell, or brokers the sale of votes in California will be pursued with the utmost vigor.

As the Chief Elections Officer of the State of California, I demand that you end this activity immediately. If you continue, you and anyone knowingly working with you may be criminally prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

Sincerely,

/s/

BILL JONES
 Secretary of State
 State of California

"Ensuring the integrity of California's election process"

[Vote-Auction - Letter from the California Secretary of State - Original Document
 2000, Ink on Paper US Letter

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PICTURE 7



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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS**Heath Bunting**<http://www.irational.org/>

Date: 6 March 2013

Interview Duration: 36:23

BIOGRAPHY

Heath Bunting emerged from the 1980s committed to building open/democratic communication systems and social contexts. He came from the street up, passing through and often revisiting graphity, performance, intervention, pirate radio, fax/ mail art, and BBS systems to become an active participant in the explosion of the Internet. He has produced many Internet projects, some highly recognized, and has helped form a strong context for the practice of net.art. Recently, he has moved into the field of genetics proclaiming it to be the next new media, and is also making steps towards producing work within financial networks, believing money to be the ultimate media for artistic practice.

I = Interviewer

HB=

Heath

Bunting

I: Could you tell me a bit about yourself and your work?

HB: Well, I'm Heath Bunting, I've been a professional artist for twenty years, I was originally trained to make stained-glass windows for churches, during that process I became radicalised by the artists and the people that I met, I've been taken to the streets, started working with graffiti and posters, and extensions. After that I kind of graduated in networking, and I was working on engineering, system and L-identity.

I: When exactly did you decide to become a hacktivist?

HB: It was in the 90's, I think, there was a little bit of a crisis... I guess I was a troublemaker in the early 90's, and I became successful, and like many other people around me, we became... We were feeling a bit impotent and we were seeking to re-engage with the "street" art scene, I guess you could say. So we started using a term like "hacktivism", or what was the term we were using... Yeah, "artists". But that soon became... It was obviously impossible to live the lifestyle of an international, acknowledged artist and actually be effective. So I retired from that scene and started working in Bristol with a community called Presenta, more grassroots, you know, I decided to do that instead of being a successful artist.

I: What would you say your mission statement as an artist is?

HB: Well, it changes every decade. I remember saying during the past decade that it was to create good questions, but probably, for the next decade it will be to skillfully change my mind about the world [laughs].

I: OK...

HB: Yeah, So that's going to be, to change my mind.

I: Fair enough! How would you describe the link between art and hacktivism?

HB: Hacktivism is performative, it's opportunistic, and probably quite superficial. And these factors are quite common in artists as well. Superficiality, it's something performative...

I: OK...

HB: Sorry, I'm a bit tired, I've been on the beach all day collecting mussels.

I: Oh, poor you! [both laugh] How would you describe the art hacktivism sphere at the moment and how has it evolved since you started?

HB: Uhm... I wouldn't say I'm a hacktivist... Well, I think, yeah, I think I could consider what I do as hacktivism, making new identities for people, yeah, definitely falls within that description, but I prefer to be comfy and cosy in the art world, rather than being, you know, arrested by the police every two weeks, that does get uncomfortable, as well as being labeled as a terrorist, you lose your liberty, and sometimes you disappear, and you are under threat, you know, the police plays force games against you. So I am more concerned with learning to survive outside that and making maps about that. But as I said, I still do some identity workshops. But I haven't got in trouble with the police recently, so they are probably just thinking "Oh, this guy is retired, he is not doing anything interesting".

I: To be honest though, when I first met you in Brussels and you were late, and no one knew where you were, no one could contact you, I was thinking somehow you might have disappeared, I thought you must have been a dubious character [laughs].

HB: My security situation is less severe now, as far as I can see, so I don't have to disguise my location, or, you know, I wouldn't normally use Skype, I wouldn't use a credit card or those kind of things. But there are no signs now that I'm under surveillance or under threat by any security organisation. So, I can, you know, just act like a normal person.

I: Is there a particular author or a particular book that influenced your work?

HB: Hmm, I guess Hacking based book of Wilson was important for me because everybody said I need to read this book, and as a very ambitious, independent young man, I refused to read it for many, many years. Then I actually met Peter Wilson, who is the author of the book and the character of the Hacking Bay, and I liked him so I thought I should read the book. So yeah, there was a kind of build up, mystery around that book, and I did ensure I would read it. So yeah, it was influential, without even reading it, for me.

I: Good... And what other artists do you appreciate and what do you think is special about their work?

HB: Let me see... Whom should I praise... I like all the artists in Irrational, and that would include people like Kate Witch, Kayle Brandon, you know... And then, otherwise, I like Adam Zaretsky, because he's just crazy and perverse, I love the Critical Art Ensemble, as they can accurately describe the outcome of a situation in terms of biotechnology or security, or you know, some computing situations, and you know, they can use the words that completely describes everything that I've been confused about... Who else... Yeah, I think that would be it.

I: What is your political cause and how political do your works get?

HB: Hmm, politics... Yeah, I've been often described as a hacktivist or an activist. But now, as I said earlier on, I think, really, the most radical act is to change your mind, and if you look at the current political situation, in the mainstream politics in the UK, what the political parties just try to do is really to keep everybody on board with persuading people that they have control, but in fact they don't have any control, but they just shift their position, in order to appear to be in control. You know, the economy... So really, politics now is just the ability to change your mind and convince other people that you've always believed what you believe now, and you know, it's no coincidence that the people who seem to be in power now, public relations experts, because the actual front, or the actual sight of decision-making of power has shifted from national politics to ... You know, it's just a charade now and the mainstream politicians play along the electorate and they do have to follow those who actually have power and do make the decisions. So you know, I'm in the same boat as they are, in the sense that I'm aspiring to be able to change my mind in various situations quite effortlessly, you know, that's quite difficult, if you've actually been brought up to believe in the truth and justice.

I: Could you tell me about your projects and could you tell me which is your favourite one?

HB: Well, I only have one project at the moment and that's the Status concerned with the survival of humanity, which is rather pointless, because all the signs indicate that humanity has got left maybe twenty years left, before we're wiped out by climate change, or you know, an energy crisis, or economic collapse, so.... But, you know, it's an absurd project anyway, to think that you could map the entire system, and become knowledgeable, wise of that information, so a lot of my work now is looking at the ECO system, and the species, and how relationships not to banks or to government, obviously, to define our

identity by looking at other organisms such as trees, or fish, see what our relationships are with them, or what they have been over the past couple thousands of years, and what they could be in the near future, if we can survive this total collapse of humanity. So that means I spend a lot of time in the forest, or like today, by the ocean, where I am acquainting myself with shells, seaweed and learning what we could do with them to survive, and then relating that information to more abstract statuses, such as your credit card.

I: OK. You said that you can describe what you are doing as hacktivism. Is this in your case a full-time job?

HB: Well, I don't really do a job, I don't really work that much, I don't do what most people consider work. So I think I have a full-time non-job, or something that you could call a full-time holiday. I spend a lot of time, as I said, just out and about, all this weekend I was on the beach, the week before I was in the forest, next week I'm probably going to be in the forest.

I: Climbing on trees?

HB: Yeah, is that a job, spending time in nature and eating things?

I: I don't really know, but I think that my existential crisis related to a my future career is about to take a turn now!

HB: [laughs] You know, I just spend time in the forest with other people, looking at things, and then changing my mind, saying that everything's going to be fine. We're going to die, we'll going to see the end of our species. You know, don't worry about it. Before we were experiencing the death of our friends, or our own deaths, but now we're going to experience the death of our species. That's quite a moment, that's very rare that any individuals of other species will experience death in the same way. So is that a job? That could be seen as a job.

I: Yeah, a very pleasant one! Pleasant when you get to eat things and spend time by the seaside, not so much when you start talking about the end of the world in twenty years! [laughs]

HB: Oh, it might be sooner!

I: [laughs] Thank you for giving me nightmares!

HB: Well, you know, you have at least ten years left.

I: Well, I'll try to make the best of it!

HB: Yeah, get a PR job, get a mortgage, get a husband who's a lawyer, it will be worth it, you know, you'll be well prepared for the for the collapse of society.

I: Well, yeah, after I finish uni, I have to start paying my tuition fees.

HB: Oh, no, don't do that. No one else is paying their debts, so don't pay your debts.

I: Is there a way to get out of it?

HB: Yeah, just don't pay them. Don't earn any money, don't pay your debts. You know, no rich people are paying their debts at the moment, only poor people pay their debts.

I: [laughs] Do you think there are any rules that characterise art hacktivism as a practice?

HB: Rules or roles?

I: Rules.

HB: Rules... Well, you've got to survive. So it's a survival strategy. You know, I'm not quite sure hacktivism is going to last that long as an employment opportunity. All those people than have to move onto other things. You know, when I was a young person all my friends did financial consultancy because that was a job that you could get easily and it paid a lot of money. And then, you know, it evolved into other things, being a video artist was cool in mid-2000s, everyone was aping Banksy and doing all this stuff and getting paid for it. So yeah, now I think there's actually a few more years left and, you know, when all these middle class kids who got degrees realise that they are not making enough money to pay for their iPhone 6, they're doing another thing, just drop hacktivism, and go towards something new.

I: Are there any forms of anti-consumption discourses that you consider to be effective?

HB: Hm... I think we probably need to do anti-reproduction, we need to reduce the population of the planet, at least 75% within the next generation or two for any hopes for survival of the wise people. You know, if humanity is gonna die, you'll be the last people on the Earth to be the embodiment of wisdom in humanity, not just the mafia, the Romanian mafia. You know, you want the last people there to act with dignity and spiritual awareness when the species dies. You don't want just people fighting over the last BMW or something, that's got petrol in it.

I: Fair enough...

HB: So hacktivism could help anti-consumerism through some sort of political action, it could help to bring that about, you know, the ... I can't think of the word now... Sorry, I've been in the sun all day... Dignify, to dignify their end, you know. The best we can hope for is a dignified death of our society. And hacktivists could bring that up. You know, buying more or selling more, you know, gadgets to the last inhabitants of the planet is probably not the thing to do.

I: What do you think the role of the computer is in the current existing types of activism? Do you think they are going to provide some effective means?

HB: Well, when the electricity goes of, most of the electronic devices are going to be useless. You know, most people in our society have now become artificially intelligent themselves through the adoption of the language of the devices, the protocols. So they could carry on, you know, talking and acting among the people as if Facebook exists still or Twitter... So definitely electronic devices are not that powerful anymore. So you could take the functionality of the online culture and take it back to the forest. People would stand in the forest, much as in the last scene of Fahrenheit 451 and just have streams of consciousness coming out of their mouth and you know... "Oh, I just saw a worm", and other people will say, "Oh, that's really interesting, I want to hear about that". Or you could say "I'm your friend" - "Oh, I'm your friend", and you could say that endlessly all day, and people would be happy like that, and they would be breathing to death or starving to death. So to answer your question, the physical object is probably going to become less important. You know, people aren't going to be able to buy laptops to download pornography or to chat to their friends, you know, they will all have to meet up again in pubs and drink alcohol and stuff. But the actual language and the culture are what's been embodied in the computer, computer and systems - could resist. That's what I'm trying to do, to take the knowledge and wisdom of computer sciences back to the forest and develop a language, a universal kind of knowledge that could express everything that we have and not negate nature as one of the reasons why we are going to die is because we don't have a language that's consistent with nature and that position.

I: Well, that's very interesting! You've started to change ideas in my head.

HB: Yeah, sorry about that! You can attend one of our workshops, if you want, we're doing one on identity and collapse with the Loughborough University, on the 22nd, 23rd of March.

I: Oh, I'm not in England that weekend.

HB: Oh, then nevermind... You won't be able to survive then!

I: I'll give you a quick call before and then you will sum it up for me.

HB: Do you know how to light a fire?

I: Yeah, I know, I was born in Romania, I grew up in the countryside, of course I know!

HB: Then alright, you'll be fine!

I: And in comparison with other kids on my course, I did see a real cow in my life!

HB: [laughs]

I: The last question, and then I think we'll be done... Are there any particular qualities or skills are required in hacktivism?

HB: Probably deception. Either deception of your opponents or self deception, that what you are actually doing is going to have an effect and that you are truly engaged in what you say you are. You know, most of these people have some sort of survival strategies that are deceptive, that tell them they don't want things...

I: OK... Anything else you would like to add?... Hello?

[CONNECTION INTERRUPTED]

Shu Lea Cheang

<http://www.mauvaiscontact.info/>

Date: 22 March 2013

Interview Duration: 29:09

BIOGRAPHY

Shu Lea Cheang is a multi-media artist who works in the fields of net-based installation, social interface and film production. She is a prominent figure in new media art. Cheang is one of the leading multimedia artists dealing with multidisciplinary studies. She is most noted for her individual approach in the realm of art and technology, creatively intermingling social issues with artistic methods. Her net installation works were commissioned and permanently collected by the Walker Art Center (*Bowling Alley*, 1995), NTT[ICC], Tokyo (*Buy One Get One*, 1997) and the Guggenheim Museum (*Brandon*, 1998-1999). She made two theatrical feature films, *Fresh Kill*, which premiered at Berlin film festival in 1994 and was included in Whitney Biennial (New York) in 1995; another film, *I.K.U.*, produced by Tokyo's Uplink Co., was premiered at Sundance Film Festival 2000. Her recent installation and web projects include *BabyPlay* (NTT[ICC], Tokyo, 2001), *Garlic=RichAir* (Creative time, New York, 2002), *Burn* (Venice Biennale, 2003), *Milk* (56K bastard TV, 2004), *BabyLove* (Palais de Tokyo, 2005). She co-founded several collectives: Kingdom of Piracy (based at netspace, since 2001), Mumbai Streaming Attack (based at Zurich since 2003) and TAKE2030 (based at London since 2003). In 2007, she launched *MobiOpera*, commissioned by the Sundance Film Festival for its New Frontier program, a public cinema collective made with mobile phones.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

I = Interviewer

SLC = Shu Lea Cheang

I: My first question for you is: How would you describe the role of art as a political tool?

SLC: Yes, I consider that my art is particular, if I wanted to do just political action, I would probably not choose art as a medium. In this case, what I mean is that art has, in my work... As an artist I think I try to reflect the sense I make of political and social conditions, in a kind of contemporary cultural context. In this sense, of course, when my work becomes a political tool, it is quite natural.

I: OK. Are there any specific authors that have influenced your work?

SLC: In terms of authors, do you mean writers or other artists?

I: Both, in fact.

SLC: OK. At the moment I'm very much involved, engaged with a particular writer, Matthew Fuller, teacher at Goldsmith, at the Goldsmith College for Art, in London. He's

not... I think that as a writer, I think we has worked a lot on cultural media writing, particularly on some cancer, evil media, or on media ecology.

I: OK. What other artists do you appreciate and why?

SLC: I've come from a background where I was living in New York City, and I was very much in the menu of the contemporary performance art, for example. In the case of New York, in the '80s, '90s that I've known, there was a very big performance movement, that promoted - how do you call it - it kind of promoted a narrating, a very straightforward type of narrative. In a way, if I think about my own participation in art now, it probably has a lot to do with a lot of these groups that I saw, in the early age. For example, the Wooster group, doing some performances, very singular performances, performing a piece of art, that kind of thing, you know. So as far as... yeah, in terms of influences, I am mostly doing Internet, network art, and I think that during an early stage I was influenced by a lot of these performing groups.

I: And how would you describe the link between art and hacktivism?

SLC: I usually consider my work as a kind of an infiltration, intervention. As far as hacktivism occurs, I think... I mean, there's been many different issues about whether hacktivism can be called art also, right? As an artist, I take hacktivism as a way of art. So I think, for example, Pollo, in his work, I think he does a lot of this hacktivism; Ricardo Dominquez, U.S.A., also does a lot of interventions in the network, some sort of demonstration sit-ins. My hacktivism, I think, it is not as officialised, it comes from a lot of concepts, I would say, I don't think I particularly hack into something, but I will hack with a scenario, a narrative in my work, that actually provokes hacktivism.

I: Do you think there are any recurrent elements that characterise your practice?

SLC: Recurrent, hmm...Well, I usually follow a science fiction narrative in my imagination, so usually, in my artwork, I will probably take more of a science fiction narrative, so lots of my artwork may be coming from reality, but it takes on a very different step to tell the stories. But as far as such a matter is concerned, it's more about like drenches, you know, the subjects that I'm dealing with are more like an extension of my body, my thoughts, which could include many different subjects. For example, recently I finished, I was engaged in this particular piece, U.K.I, which actually deals with software viruses, hardware viruses, and you know, replicants and big corporations. And you know, I proposed a Bio-net instead of Internet, it's like the post-net, Bio-net. And all these, of course, they kind of have a science-fiction fantasia to it. At the same time, I've been doing the Composting project, and in a certain way, if I say the title of my recent work, *Composting the City, Composting the Net*, which is also, of course, a bit of an exaggeration, but I'm doing in terms of Composting the City, for example, it's actually very real, very materialistic, very rotten. You know, I am composting vegetables.

I: OK. Could you tell, when you realise these projects, what is the process from inception to finalisation? Does it change you, how revelatory is this process for you?

SLC: For me, there is of course, a lot to learn, because a lot of my artworks do use a lot of technology, by technology I don't particularly mean fancy technology, but for example maybe sometimes I use programming, and for Compost I was dealing with sensors, so there's that technological part involved, and for this part I also usually have to also do research, and find out who I can work with, also. The other part of my work has to do with structure, a platform where I usually collaborate with other people. So for example, I did Composting the City in Berlin, and I ended up working with twelve Compost adaptors, Berlin-based, and that is kind of necessary, because for taking care of the Compost, that's the only way I can do it. But in this case, I designed a project according to the needs of the audience, so every project could be different. So there is a big, usually there is a big social aspect in my work, and with these social aspects in my work, I do need to deal with people and seek collaboration.

I: What is your favourite project?

SLC: Hmmm, every project I am doing now is my favourite project! That is a problem, isn't it? [laughs]. Yeah, it's very difficult to answer this question, particularly in my case, because I have many different type of projects. So now, I've just finished the biobot locker babies project, which includes Baby Play, Baby Love, Baby Work, that I've started in 2001, in Tokyo, and I've just done my last piece of the trilogy, the Baby Work part, in California, so it is my very dear project, for example. I also did Brandon, with Guggenheim, in 1998-1999, that was a huge project, it involved many people, many institutions, for me it's still a great project to do. My film, I.K.U., it also has a lot of references and continues to strive... So yeah, it's very hard to just say which one is my favourite. Sorry...

I: [laughs] No, that's absolutely fine. Do you have a least favourite one then?

SLC: Well, I think that would be the projects that I failed [laughs], that I didn't get to realise, maybe. But so far, I have been trying to realise certain projects, there are some projects that I haven't realised over the years, and I'm still trying to realise those. Usually, I think that when I consider projects, I try to do it, but sometimes I have to stop because of the circumstances - either funding, or i can't find a sponsoring organisation, I cannot stage it, I have to stop. But I think that since I've started my artworks, there's been a few project that I wanted to do, and I've tried to get different commissions, but mostly I was quite insistent with the ideas that I wanted to convey... But I can't name exactly a least favourite one, sorry.

I: How would you describe the evolution of your work?

SLC: I think it's gone from... I think that when I was in America, I lived in New York City for twenty years, I was dealing a lot with certain social issues, particularly in my earlier work, I was working a lot with racism and sexism, so over the years, I think now I don't take these as my subjects, as subject matters in my artwork. During the last few years I've been dealing with tranny trash, and actually, I've been dealing a lot with trash issues since my feature film, *Flesh Kill* in 1994. It all started with how the first world countries were dumping a lot of trash in the developing or underdeveloped countries. So coming from

that sort of global, sort of imbalanced crisis or class issues, or race issues, I have been actually dealing a lot with trash. For example, *Flesh Kill*, this feature film is actually dealing with a lot of nuclear, toxic trash, and then in the past three or four years, including *Baby Work* and *U.K.I.*, I have been working with electronic trash, e-trash, and of course, the last year project - *Composting the City*, *Composting the Net*, where I am dealing with the data, accumulating data on the Internet and the food trash, so bio trash. So there's, I guess there's a particular continuity in my work, also, yeah.

I: OK. How would you describe your mission statement and how is this manifested in your art?

SLC: My mission statement [laughs].

I: Sorry or using such a corporate term.

SLC: This is also very hard... OK, maybe I'll just make one up. It's *Let them eat art* [laughs]. Let me write it down [on Skype]: LET THEM EAT ART [laughs]. Yeah, because sometimes I do a lot of work with food, with feeding people, sometimes when I do collaborations, we always eat together, we enjoy different food together, with different food, we come out with some inspiration or with some collaborations, so for me, this kind of working environment is very important.

I: OK, very interesting. What would you say that your work is trying overall to achieve?

SLC: I have been saying that my work is about trying to build a public interface, in particular, I think that a lot of the time I try to use very popular ways to interface with the public, so in a sense that maybe I have some work that's more difficult to understand, but a lot of my work also is about presenting it out there, and then everybody can appreciate it, although they might not label it particularly as art, you know. So for example, like *Baby Work*, I was working with so many keyboards, so many keys, but it is interactive, everybody can interact with it, in a majority way, so I think that in this way, I really want to have that interface with the public.

***** COMMENT: relate this to social transformation, the goal of influencing public opinion *****

I: That's very interesting! Could you please tell me why you chose to use the computer as a medium in your art?

SLC: I actually never went to a school, a computing school [record interrupted] [...] with the computer, with the network, but gradually, I think it became quite normal to take the computer as a means of my art creation.

I: OK... Are there any qualities that you think they might be required in this practice?

SLC: Qualities required in this practice?

I: Yes, let's say I wanted to start doing what you're doing, how would you describe the qualities that I would need?

SLC: It is about persistence [laughs], and being able to withstand frustration [laughs]. I think it's always going to be a lot of other various frustrations that come through, in your research and in your contact with people, and in the realisation of the project. I think the quality you really need to have is persistence, never give up, you know. So the R&D step sometimes can become such a task that you have to conquer, even a little program, some programming code, sometimes you work through the code, you can't understand, you couldn't figure out a little mistake that makes things not function, all this kind of things. It's because that, if you're not persistent, you wouldn't be able to realise those projects. So that's my advice.

I: Except for, of course, computers, do you think there are any other necessary tools in performing the type of art you are doing?

SLC: Actually, personally, I think that my tool is also the way I work, my personality, the way I can connect people, network with people, a lot of my work connects many, many people, fifty or sixty people. A lot of my work is about setting up a platform, creating different platforms for many people to come together to collaborate. So in this case, the tools I need is actually to convince people or to bring up people to have these, what I would call them is more of a collective hallucination, that truly lets this particle work, and then we can work together, so yeah, that's pretty much my tool.

***** COMMENT: Is there a sense of community, or is it a collaboration between the Deleuzean nomadic activists? *****

I: Very nice! I think this will be my last question for you: you mentioned earlier that you were on a talk tour. How important are these lectures, these talks and whom exactly are you trying to reach when you attend these conferences?

SLC: Yes, we did a full lecture tour, with YOHA, a group based in London, with Glenn Howard. Actually, each lecture is quite different from what we did in universities and art schools; we did it in a museum and we also did it in a more like non-funded art center / art space. And now, in Tokyo, we did it in a gallery, and so each occasion brings in different audiences and different public that we want to communicate with. For me, after this tour, what I realised is that how important cultural studies are, media ecology theory... All the series where I've talked, you know, one has to understand where the projects come from. Like the project we are doing, me and YOHA, for example, and that we are talking

about, is based on certain data / database, it's based on certain cultural contexts. So without understanding this kind of cultural contexts, it's quite difficult to understand our work. So in a certain way, when we are introducing our work, we're also trying to understand the cultural differences and try to communicate these cultural differences.

I: OK... I actually do have one more question, if you don't mind, before we finish our conversation. We've talked about the evolution of your art. I was wondering if you could tell me a bit about the evolution of art hacktivism in general.

SLC: I think that in general, hacktivism... Interestingly, I think that in the earlier days, I mentioned, for example, the Disturbance Theatre, they do a lot of public action, they were able to organise different public sit-ins, different network sit-ins, and in fact, actually, they have some effect on the government's decision, you know, various, I think, if you look at the Yes Men, for example, there was always a striving to have some different effects, different influences, to realise different infiltrations in a system... At the moment, if we look at hacktivism, sometimes I feel it's a lot less political, maybe, it's becoming more of hack for hack's sake, you know. But that is, basically, how we define a hacker, or you know, you can say that some hackers are doing hack for hack's sake; if I can get into the system, then I'm in, but for example, the whole WikiLeaks business, then that's a very different political mission. So as far as artists are concerned, I'm afraid that I am not sure if there is a lot of the art where the hacking is done for a political statement. There isn't a political statement they want to make, but they have to hack. Does that make sense?

***** COMMENT: Hack for hack's sake may refer to the modifying culture; different goals that may be political or not *****

I: Yeah, yeah! Can you predict some changes in the future?

SLC: Oh, I always think there's going to be changes in the future and also in the present [laughs] but I'm not predicting anything, I think that everyone has their gadgets, and everyone is updating their gadgets. Of course, the technical medium is always going to be changing. Now people are using iPads, iPhones, whatever, next time it's always going to be new media, new techniques; at the same time you cannot keep following all these media, you know, so I'm kind of in a very post-internet era thinking at the moment, so it's the post-internet thinking that I don't want to keep tracking down all these different devices, that's how I feel.

I: And... this is the last one, I promise, then the torture is over!

SLC: No, no problem.

I: I was wondering if you could give me a synopsis of the contemporary art sphere at the present moment. You know, there is the divide between commercial / non-commercial art, and I was wondering how you would generally describe the art scene.

SLC: I am not really in the scene of commercial art, or even gallery art. I used to work with a gallery, but I had to give up, because the work that I'm doing doesn't fit. So I haven't really followed the so-called mainstream art at the moment, so it would be hard for me to say exactly how I feel, but I, myself, I am happy, I am practicing the type of art I've always wanted to do, so I'm quite happy myself and somehow, my art was shown in different museums and art spaces, so that's good.

I: OK, that's brilliant. I am done now, thank you very much for all your time, it has been an honour talking to you!

SLC: You are welcome, no problem!

Paolo Cirio

<http://www.paolocirio.net/>

Date: 14 March 2013

Interview Duration: 32:53

BIOGRAPHY

Award-winning artist born in 1979, Italy. Paolo Cirio has worked as a media artist in various fields: net-art, street-art, video-art, software-art and experimental fiction. He investigates perception and the creation of cultural, political and economic realities manipulated by modes of control over information's power. He is known for his controversial and innovative political artworks. In 2013 He stole the identities of 200,000 companies at the Cayman Islands and he sells them off to democratize legal and tax corporate shields. Cirio's work deals with various issues related to the emergence of digital media in fields such as copyright, privacy, transparency, finance, advertising, geopolitics, democracy and fiction. He has won several international awards, exhibited in major museums and currently is a fellow of the Eyebeam Art and Technology Center in New York.

INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

I = Interviewer

PC=

Paolo

Cirio

I: Could you tell me a bit about yourself and your work?

PC: Oh wow, this is really a general question...

I: This is part of the interviewing process, but because I stalked you on the Internet, and I know exactly what you're doing, maybe I can just use some information from your website.

PC: [laughs] Yeah, you can skip it, I mean, there is my bio, my CV that is quite standard and you can find there everything, at least the more important things. So I don't think it's necessary to start from the beginning.

I: OK, but I am going to ask you some general questions, as I need to understand how the knowledge of art hacktivism is constructed in your practice. So I will start by asking you how you would define art hacktivism, and how would you describe the link between art and hacktivism?

PC: So I would have a link that is not related to the cyber culture, but I feel more strongly related to the art and activism culture in a way, so political artworks, and specifically when artworks have an effective outcome, politically and socially, so the point for me is not really the technology itself, but it's just a question of medium, and a question of contemporary environment, contemporary situation in a way, sociologically, anthropologically and so on.

So my references are not from the science-fiction theme, and literature and movies or whatsoever, and I've probably never read Gibson, or some of the science-fiction masterpieces. My references are much more from the Situationism, for example, from... Debord, is for example was a key read, and you know, the dada movement, and those are my references. The reason why people call my practice hacktivism, art hacktivism, or whatever, is... I know, I probably don't even see myself as a hacker, I just see myself more link an activist and an artist, so I am probably not very familiar probably with a lot of types of practices out there. The reason why I am doing this is because today, I feel it is the right field to work, to engage a wide audience, and have effective challenges against the power structures. And because of that I am working with this medium, and aesthetically, it is particularly interesting, because it is a new medium, and there is much more freedom to experiment, and see what can be done with this medium. And this is why I am using it, and you know, the cinema was used at the beginning of 20th century, and you know, Debord was really concerned about the cinema, for example, and the power of image, the moving image and all these technologies of communications and how they were influencing his contemporary society. And for me it's the same, today I am concerned about the power of networks and how that influences the contemporary society. So yeah, I am not really interested at all about cybernetics or you know, the cyberspace, and all this literature and academic research. For me, there is another issue here.

I: How would you say that art functions as a political tool for you?

PC: Well, I think that a society is built by a culture and generally, in general terms, it is built by anthropological constructions, mental constructions, and that influences psychology and so on, until it becomes law, it becomes authorities. So I do agree that you doing your research from a Foucauldian perspective, as he is talking about power, and repression of power, and that's really from the top to the bottom. But for me, of course, my works are talking about challenging this power structures, but what is also particular, I find, is that I propose something from the bottom to the top, so how to change, and propose new solutions, so it's not just a direct action against the power, to subvert it, but it is also a

proposition of something new, an alternative. Most of my work is not just like, you know, challenging the power, but also proposing something that's an alternative and that potentially works as an alternative. So it is also trying to insert, to push another type of culture, another type of proposition, an alternative... sorry, I lost myself [laughs].. Yeah, you are asking me how that is effective. It is, totally, because my projects tend to try to reach and engage wide audiences, so you know, I'm not trying to engage the gallery audience, or the festival audience, and sometimes it is not even just against the power structures, so it is not that I am talking only to the power structures, but I am trying to engage wide audiences to rise up against the power. So because of that, people through my artwork, often rely on something that they didn't know. So in a way, surely it is informative, definitely, most of my artworks are informative, so people get aware of a problem in a different way. So for that, it is already effective as an artwork. Sometimes, it's really about putting ... not at risk, but I mean the power feels threatened by my artworks, so because of that, they act to change that platform, that technology, the rules, or.. anyway. So yeah, sometimes it happens, really technically, so there is really an artwork, performance, how you want to call it, that actually changes the reality in a really material way. So for that, yeah, it works. And you know, I think this is not the first time that this happens, it depends how you see art. For example, some documentaries, or some movies, they really engage people to take action, even music, if you include music as an art form... You know, let's say the punk movement, or the hippie movement, you know, that art changed the world in a way, or the mindset. So yeah, I mean, art is totally functional, in that sense. And I do believe it's the most functional, because if you change the culture and the mindset, the politicians will act to follow the demands of the people, of the majority, so if you, like, manage to influence the majority, their politicians will follow the people's wills, or at least they will try to.

***** COMMENT: Proposing alternatives rather than dialectical opposition; co-creation of capitalism ; art is functional because of its informative character and the capacity to influence the majority - this refers to Foucault and the knowledge / power relationship *****

I: What other artists do you appreciate and what do you think it's particularly special about their work?

PC: Well, I do respect the Yes Men, and I've followed what they were doing since the beginning, and also the Critical Art Ensemble, and their work on theorising it, and you know, they are still working, they are still great, and yeah, these artists really influenced me, but again, it came from even before of them, and so from the avant-garde art of the 20th century, or the social movement of the 60's, and this huge cultural transformation and this huge XXX of the practice, and there were some hippies who were doing something very similar to the Yes Men, they didn't have Internet, but they had something else. And there were artists hacking TV and radio, prior to the 80's or even before. So it's like a tradition, you know, I don't think I am doing something new, in a way, the difference here is that Internet in particular, and especially now, has particular characteristics and allows for direct communication with people, so you get the feedback in a one-to-one way, globally, and in an instant way. And that wasn't happening with other media, so that wasn't happening with books, with radio, with TV, so this is a great thing, and that is happening now. And there are artists who have done this type of hacktivism since 2000, and of the '90s, they were important, but they didn't reach what you can do now, because at that time, Internet was just at the beginning, so also many people were using it, even the big power were using it,

and people were not even dreaming about the Internet, and today, maybe it's just the beginning, I don't know, but today, everyone is really dependent on the Internet. And Facebook is the first example, and everyone, even our grandmothers are using Facebook. And because of that, they will engage with the artwork. What is really particular about the Internet, and why today it is much more interesting than the first hack / hacktivism that we had in the past.

I: What is your mission statement, and how do you think that is manifested throughout your work?

PC: [laughs] Oh... Well, you know, I am still pushing this idea of working around this concept of information power, and that is really a broad idea, but somehow it works. My mission, I mean, I don't have only one mission, but I can say that it is really interesting to see what can be done by manipulating a huge amount of information, or really sensible information, in any type or form, and distributing that information or re-contextualising that information in other forms that reveal something that wasn't visible. And in this process, I also often materialise that information, in a way that wasn't so visible. So another part of my work, is not just visualising something that is invisible, revealing some truth, or revealing some extensions or what is about that type of sensible information, but it is also about materialising something that's often considered just virtual, or separated from reality. And my point of view is that information today, the Internet, or information in general as a site that is really material, and influence our physical, material reality constantly. So it's not "cyber" at all. And there is a mutual relationship between these two spheres, but in the end, they come as unique entities - so it's physical / it's digital, but in any case, it's your daily life, and that is what's important, that it's your daily life. So in my work, I always show how information is actually physical and material. So let's say the credit cards, the project with the credit cards - so in that case, it's all about virtual money, right, but even in the case of virtual money, you rely on that piece of plastic. Although that piece of plastic is just useful for some numbers, it's still something very material. And let's talk about the last project with the Cayman. That was completely virtual, that was a virtual database, but it is materialised with these printed certificates. And those printed certificates are real, and really meaningful in the Cayman Island, and really meaningful for all those companies that I am subverting. So even if it sounds really that it's all about data, information and cyber attack, but that cyber attack it's not effective because I have a database; yeah, it is that, but it is also really subversive, because I print this information, and you know, I reveal what is really important about that information and how that can be used on a real, physical level. And you know [laughs] I keep giving examples like that, but that's what maybe is particular about my work, in comparison with other hackers / hacktivists, that they never materialise, but this is my approach to this type of art, showing and actually really materialising the extension of that type of object.

I: Do you think there are any recurrent elements that define art hacktivism as a practice?

PC: Hmm, well, I suppose for sure using the Internet, having social aims in using it and... yeah, I would say just these two points. Because I don't think it's always about challenging power, and I don't think it's always about exploiting a vulnerability. I mean, it is, often, but the definition of hack is really debatable, there are different ways to define hack. It can be something related to violate security, or violate some laws, but hack can also

be just reversing an idea, in creating ways to show something really different, and a hack is of course, something I would call a sophisticated idea, that subverts anything, that's how I would define it, beyond the technology and beyond the laws. But it's a really broad definition, so it really depends in which context you talk.

***** COMMENT: Hactivism is not necessarily related to computers, it is rather about subverting an idea, culture of modification *****

I: Do you think there are any specific qualities that are required in hacktivism?

PC: I think this one the same thing as I said before.

I: Well, the previous question was related to recurrent elements or rules, and this one is about the artists and their qualities.

PC: OK, well, yeah, I would say that thing, you know, to subvert a system for a social and for an artistic aim, yeah, that would be a really broad definition.

I: In your case, is art a full-time job?

PC: Yes [laughs], it is.

I: Can I ask you about your most and least successful projects?

PC: Oh... Well, this last one about the Cayman Islands is for me a masterpiece, in a way, it is really bringing together everything that is important for me, and it's working, so I would say that this one for me, personally, and for my taste, it's the most important, and I would also say, the most successful, because I mean, it's really fresh, so, I don't know how far it will go, it changed something at the Cayman, they perceived it as a threat and it went beyond that, I got a lot of responses from the general public and from the press, so it totally worked out well, so I liked it a lot. The least successful...Uhm.. I mean, there are a bunch that are not successful. Yeah, probably the least successful one was probably that one about security regulation in the airport, so I never managed to exhibit it in an exhibition. I got a couple of reviews probably, and it got some people really happy about that, they were really into it, but no one ever asked me for an exhibition of that. The reason, maybe, I mean, the point is that this field, when you combine art hack, hacktivism, they don't really match well, sometimes, because they are too different. And that's the same if you combine general activism, because they have different goals too, so you know, activism, I am doing it because I want to disclose some truth, and I want to criticise something, and your audiences, I mean, general people, you know, I want to engage normal people. And art, instead, has a totally different type of aim and mechanics, so you need to know the right person, you need to know critics, that get the work and see something new and interesting in it. And hack / hacktivism is how you manage to exploit a vulnerability. So how much you are successful, technically, or conceptually, is about how to subvert a system, but if you

don't manage to subvert the system, and the system doesn't feel threatened by you, you are not successful. So you see, this three fields have completely different aims. So to have the three of them combined together, it's really hard sometimes. But it doesn't mean that you are not good in one of them. For example, in that project, it was successful from the activism side, but it wasn't from the art and it wasn't, let's say, general hack, because airports didn't give a shit about what I was doing, you know. But politically, all the activists really liked that... So is that OK?

***** COMMENT: Art has a political function - contradicts Ubermorgen. He wants to establish truth his mechanism is to produce knowledge, relate to Foucault *****

I: I only have two more questions, sorry for taking so much of your time.

PC: No, it's just that is really crazy now, but tell me.

I: When a project is not that successful as you were expecting, do you still have the same commitment to finish it?

PC: Uhm... If I am personally satisfied about that [laughs] the point, I mean, for me, I don't focus on only one topic, so I really get interest for what is important once at a time, so for example, back at that the time, I was really fascinated by this paranoia in the airports, because it was affecting a lot of people, and a lot of people were very concerned. And not is much less of an issue, and in the meanwhile, that changed a lot, so for example, since a few months, you are again allowed to carry a lighter and even a knife on the airplane. So sometimes it's about a struggle of the moment, and it's important to talk about it at that moment, to produce a change. When the change has produced, you know, you go on on something else. That's my approach but I mean, my commitment, it is about the social issue that is important at the moment, but is also about, you know, I'm still an artist, so I am pretty interested to explore this way to practice, of performance and engagement of people, challenging of power and using these strategies, and then there's also my type, my way to work, so I'm not interested just to open some environmental issues, I am more interested in researching in an artistic language, I think.

I: When exactly did you decide to adopt this anti-preneurship attitude?

PC: I don't know. I always ask that to myself. My parents are not really politically involved, and I don't have. I know, my background is weird, I really think it's part of my personality, and I don't really know where it comes from, but I can tell you that since I was really little, I always had these needs to inform people, or to, you know, getting really upset about injustice, or when something is wrong, I just get really upset. Or when I see something that is absurd, ad it doesn't make sense, it's natural. And you know, the more you get in it, the more you discover things, and the more you get upset, you keep going and especially when you are young. That's all.

I: OK, thank you very very very much for all your time and your very interesting answers.

PC: No problem, keep me posted!

Martin Howse

<http://www.1010.co.uk/org/>

Date: 24 March 2013

Interview Conducted via E-mail

BIOGRAPHY

Martin Howse is a programmer, writer, performer and explorer. Since he has been involved under various initiatives (ap, xxxxx, micro-research) in publishing, lecturing, and exhibiting, as well as developing several open hardware and free software projects. He has collaboratively published two works, [the] xxxxx [reader] and xxxxx peenemuende, lectured worldwide, and exhibited in group shows in Iceland, Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Belgium and China. He actively contributes to the detektors project alongside several free software initiatives. His micro-research project has been established as a mobile platform for psychogeophysical research with ongoing projects in London, Peenemuende, Kiruna and Yekaterinburg.

I = Interviewer

MS

=

Martin

Howse

I: Tell me a bit about yourself and your work. When and how did you decide to become a hacktivist?

MH: I grew up just outside London, started making films and more conceptual works before studying at Goldsmiths college, again working with video and conceptual approaches (performative lectures with no clear point or subject, works inspired by film credits and enframing). Since then (late 80s) I worked with film and performance and over the last 15 years with free software, open hardware and technology - firstly creating performances with junked hardware and self-made software under the heading artificial paradises, and in the last ten years moving more into collaborative situations - performances, conferences, workshops (xxxxx and micro_research in Berlin). So my work is quite diverse, mostly involving other people, creating experiments and sharing the results of these investigations.

I wouldn't describe myself as a hacktivist but I imagine all of my work over the last 15 years could be described so in its critique of the projects of science, engineering and technology and a questioning of how these inform a view of the world. This work/decision was prompted by an increasing disdain for the insular concerns of contemporary art and also the everyday encounter with junked computers (my first projects attempting to code using these some kind of literature machine).

I: What is your "mission statement"?

MH: Where exactly does the plague known as software or technology execute? And what exactly does earth and technology have to do with the human psyche?

I: How is this manifested in your work?

MH: For example, within the collaborative Crystal World project (with Ryan Jordan and Jonathan Kemp) we explored in several workshops and two exhibitions precisely how to subvert the faux cybernetic cycle of mining for minerals to be used within technological apparatus, planned obsolescence, and the final returning to the (polluted) earth of the byproducts of the recycling of so-called obsolete technology - an entropic cycle which is also mimed within economics and systems of control and regulation. Within projects such as Pyschogeography we literally examined the relation of man-made signals to the human psyche, measuring these fields and signals, and correlating these with psycho-geographic play and observation. More recent works have attempted to construct computational devices from earth and organic materials.

I: What are your goals, what is your work trying to achieve?

MH: I have an intuitive understanding of my work and feel that there is a drive there which is not so much an expressed goal, an end in sight which I try to achieve. This explains the diversity of the work (software, performances, writing, sound) and the collaborative approach - asking questions with others. The goal could be perhaps stated as to re-instate an animism within the world - this is what the work tries to achieve through its use of technology. To bring back the feeling of a total life within geology, plants, animals and the world.

I: Tell me about your most recent project. How did you feel when the started the project?

MH: Again, the projects are not so finite, more open ended. One recent project which was quite clear in intent was the earthboot project - an attempt to make an appendage which would allow the earth to code the computer's operating system. Although small-scale, the project was quite technically challenging but when I started I was very excited about the concept and possibilities.

I: When you completed it?

MH: Happy to have the device finally working, interested in how to develop further the core ideas and also finally extending the device to work with the sonification of composting processes, of worm movements.

I: What are you favourite /least favourite projects?

MH: Of my own or of others? Of my own - favourite would be the Psychogeophysics summits (London and Suffolk) conducted over two years - the opportunity to work intensely with a small group sharing certain interests but with widely differing approaches and backgrounds. A sense of adventure in both summits, of the daily creation of something new and interesting. My least favourite possibly a certain 12 hour performance which became physically stuck/couldn't move and although to some extent successful was like an island or a block, an enclosure.

I: How would you describe the role of art as a political tool - what kind of intellectual work do you draw on?

MH: Art is an everyday activity which questions the (un)certainly of the world - asking how the world comes to be as it is for ourselves which is a totally political way of thinking in questioning for example the contagions of technology and capital which hold the world's resources in reserve (and for use) and define a world view for many people. The role of art is on a non-elevated level to re-code the world and the view of the world. I draw on, but am hesitant to draw too heavily on, contemporary philosophy (well not so contemporary); reading across a huge range of literature and theory relating to software, tragedy, gothic horror, philosophy of science, pharmacology, plants and fungi, the early history of technology, geophysics, chemistry. I enjoy to find connections and to imagine a new, unconstrained literature.

I: How do you define art hacktivism - what kind of intellectual resources do you draw on?

MH: For the next 3 questions, I should say I'm not totally clear on the term of hacktivism which I guess is key here. I think all art is hacktivism in asking the questions of the world I stated. Again, these intellectual resources are very diverse, primarily provoking an imagination or other relating than that which has become crystallised.

I: How would you describe the link between art and hacktivism?

MH: See above.

I: How would you describe the art hacktivism sphere at the present moment?

MH: I'm not sure I see this sphere so clearly outlined as perhaps a few years ago (when also I was more actively involved in the free software movement). I'm not sure the sphere is so coherent.

I: How has it evolved since you started?

MH: Again within my particular scene of, let's say, new media art: perhaps becoming more segregated and professionalised which I find worrying. It felt much more free-wheeling up until around 4 or 5 years ago, when the scene which I'm more familiar with seemed to become more career-oriented and there's a greater involvement from the various academies

I: Has your work evolved following the same patterns?

MH: I hope not! But I think my work now has less to do with an evangelism of free software (which is hard to sustain given so many current commercial interests in that field).

I: Is there a particular author that influenced your work?

MH: J.G Ballard probably the most strongly.

I: How?

MH: In suggesting that the (contemporary) world is an expression of the psyche and can be equally coded and decoded as imaginary - that it is equally created through fiction, software, through all forms of writing.

I: What other artists do you appreciate and what do you think it is special about their work?

MH: I appreciate mostly the many artists I work with or perform with as well as key artists such as Gustav Metzger. In the first instance I think it is important and impressive for artists to work together in open research whilst maintaining a highly personal approach and a refined energy and direction. In the case of Metzger his work is the clearest for me in proposing a new relationship with (damaged) nature which includes technology in a critical way. It is also non-specialist and questioning of the world.

I: Can you tell me more about the trajectory your projects take (the process conception - realization)

MH: As I mentioned there's a drive which means that projects tend to be quite open ended and to flow into and across each other under a certain subject of research (at the same time trying to find wider connections). So it's more of an ongoing stream of workshops, experiments, meetings, events around certain thematics (Crystal World, Psychogeophysics) punctuated by periods of more solitary, technical development (designing hardware, writing software). In the latter case, the development is sparked by some kind of speculation (what

if we were try to do this, some kind of twisting of a clear thread, of that which is usual in one realm, of applying say fictions or concepts to harder realities, doing things "wrongly").

I: Are there recurrent elements that characterise art hacktism as a practice?

MH: I would like to stress an openness and open-endedness - a lack of finality with blatant disregard for a career based on the production of finite works, and total interdisciplinarity coupled with a complete critique of all disciplines.

I: What exactly are the skills / qualities needed in hacktivism?

MH: I think the ability to cross-disciplines is the most important, also the ability to experiment without clear goals, or any kind of theoretical backup or justification. To question any given tools, or skills yet at the same time to have a (contradictory) ability to seriously bend and misuse these tools creatively. An interest in all aspects of the world, and the desire to collectively re-write and re-code the world.

I: What are the "must have" tools in hacktivism?

MH: I would say "see above." Equally the ability to imagine tools in a completely new light, to bring something unimagined and unimaginable to the familiar world.

I: How important is this in your life?

MH: Extremely. My work and research drives me.

I: In your case, is hacktivism a full-time job?

MH: Yes.

Steve

Kurtz

<http://www.critical-art.net/>

Date: 20 March 2013

Interview Duration: 34:13

BIOGRAPHY

Steve Kurtz is a professor of art at the SUNY Buffalo, former professor of art history at Carnegie Mellon University and a founding member of the performance art group, Critical Art Ensemble. He is known for his work in BioArt, and Electronic Civil Disobedience, and because of his arrest by the FBI in May 2004. His work often deals with social criticism.

I = Interviewer
SK = Steve Kurtz

I: Wow, I don't even know what to start with! Anyway, I will try not to repeat the questions that you've been asked before, as I don't want you to get bore.

SK: That's good, I don't really like to keep repeating myself.

I: How would you describe the evolution of art hacktivism up to the present?

SK: Oh, come on, you can't ask a question like that! That's thirty years of history! [laughs] You don't know where to begin to ask me, I don't even know where to start talk about that! I mean, going all the way back to the '80s and thinking about what we were doing then and what were the opportunities of hacking... I suppose, you know, just measuring it decade by decade, it went from a narrow specialisation in the 80's to one where it was realised that hacking could be a concept that was used in a very broad spectrum sense, and that could be used for almost all major forms of resistance, it really wasn't just a digital form, there was actually more than that. And in the arts, you just see greater and greater diversity of how it's done and what it's used for. So this a generalisation, you'd think that's how it evolved over the past thirty years.

I: Yeah, I think this is going to be an issue for my research, as the title of my paper is Art Hacktivism as a Form of Consumer Resistance, and everyone I've interviewed so far said "Well, I don't know if I could name myself a hacktivist"...

SK: I know, I wouldn't, I never use that term.

I: Yeah, so I will see how that goes... But you know, I've spoken with people as UBERMORGEN, Heath Bunting, Paolo Cirio, and they always use as a reference the Yes Men and your group, of course. So I was wondering whom you consider as art hacktivists.

SK: Well, Ubermorgen, for sure [laughs]. You know, I think you can go all the way to the other end of the line, you know, almost everyone who's doing interventionism. You know, the Billboard Liberation Front can be an art hacktivist. Anyone who's doing eco-based work and is working on hacking ecosystems, I think, could very well fit in that category, like Sara Lustingman, for example and now, Natalie Jeremijenko. They are classic hackers, but I don't know if they would describe themselves that way, if they would use that word. You know it has so much digital baggage to it and so much attachment to a kind of a technocratic model of working, that a lot of people don't like it.

I: [laughs], I've noticed!

SK: It's not that it doesn't apply, I mean you can, you can use it as a filter or a lense to discuss a lot of different artists, but whether it's the best word to use is another question.

I: What qualities do you think that are required in hacktivism?

SK: [laughs] Well, I don't know, what do you mean, technical qualities or human qualities?

I: Something that you consider to be crucial, and probably except for the ability to use a computer.

SK: No, it doesn't have to... I think a lot of very good hacktivists don't use computers at all, but you know, that's certainly the common association, that computers might get in there somewhere. I can't think of almost anything that the Critical Art Ensemble does, that a computer doesn't sneak in in some way. But it's just the tool of the realm right now, you know, it's kind of you had to have a horse in the 19th century, and in the 20th century it evolved, we got the computer now, and it gets involved in one way or another. But you know, in terms of qualities, I think that the base qualities are more ones that you're more lucky to get, if you're a curious person, you know, that usually has to be one; another is that you're some type - and that's another word people generally hate to use, you're some type of humorist, who can connect and empathise with others, and because of that, you want to do a practice that makes a difference in people's lives, that you are incapable of reducing artwork to visual pleasure. It's nice that that happens, I don't have anything against it, but when that happens, it means it's limited to the beginning and the end of a practice, that's not going to interest a good hacker or a cultural resister, or whatever you might want to call us. So it's this kind of abilities... And finally, a sense for recombination, since that's the real methodology, particularly for someone in the minoritarian ideological position. We don't really get to generate any dominant discourse, we can only take it and do something else with it. So you need to have a sense of how to invert, or subvert, or change what's given, and to take opportunities when they are given.

***** COMMENTS: recombination - refers to capitalism as an open structure, dialogical form *****

I: Speaking of that, I recently read an article where someone was making a case that hacktivists are largely perceived as technical problems, rather than someone that an organisation might engage in a dialogue with. Do you think that there might be a case for dialogue, or do you think that hacktivism should remain in that sphere of opposition, of resistance?

SK: [laughs] You know, I don't see this just as a technical position. I mean, you can tell from the answers that I already gave you, I see it as a very cross quality in people, that you have to have. There's a lot of way in which you have to be thinking, and you know, you can be someone who doesn't write code at all and be quite a good hacker. So you know... As to the dialogue question, I'm always for mobilising dialogues, you know, and particularly between people that don't normally talk to each other. So there's always something that you can get, if not good ideas, it will force the people involved into a greater articulation of their position. Contrast is always the thing that, I think, you want to look for,

if possible, right, at least when working in the field. Now there's other times, when you want to come in and you want to talk to your peers, "this is what I've been working on, this is what seems to be working, and this is what isn't working". So you know, everything has its place, but in the field, if you're working, and it's not just a discussion you're having with others to share research, contrast is the thing to go for. I don't know if that necessarily has to be conflict, it can be, but it doesn't have to be.

I: OK, I've already read about your mission statement, but since Heath Bunting told me that he changes his every decade, I'm going to ask you the same question, to see you you've changes yours.

SK: I don't think we have, I think we've left it the same ever since, you know [laughs]. The only thing that gets changed is the name we use to refer to ourselves by. That gets changed. Because, for a long time... I mean, when we started, there were no hacktivists or tactical media, digital resistants or any of these kind of things, any of these terms didn't exist. So that gets updated now and then, although I don't know if we'll ever really move away from tacticality. We might have to move away from tactical media and probably we should, but tacticality, I think, will permanently stay in the mission statement.

I: OK, and you think you should maybe move towards what?

SK: Towards what? I don't know, I'm not sure what the word is, but I think it would have to be even more open, you know, that we can just talk... Maybe we'll be tactical opportunists [laughs] cultural opportunists, that's maybe what we should move towards.

I: Again, I'm going to go back to a question you've been asked before as the articles I read were published in 2004, 2005, 2006. Are there any particular authors that have appeared as your influence, within your inspiration zone?

SK: I don't know, you tell me, you know better than I. I don't know, I never try to claim influence, if people want to announce that, that's fine, but I don't think that's... I have the authority to talk about something like that, I think we've become more or less some sort of influencers. I mean, I can tell you anecdotes, like when we were at the Influencers conference in Barcelona, we were the bedder influencers, they said we influenced the influencers. I don't know what that means in detail, but I got quite a fair idea, I mean "You guys are pretty old now [laughs] and everybody knows who you are" [laughs].

I: Fair enough. What is your favourite project?

SK: Oh, man, I don't know, that's like asking me to pick a trial. I don't know if I really have one. I was very enthusiastic about our Documenta Helicopter project, because we had been trying to do that for twenty years, and finally, the planets aligned and we were able to do it, and at the same time, we had to do it, and you know, it was really good, because basically we had to burn every bridge in the art world, because we just disturbed everyone so badly, the story with that helicopter [laughs].

I: And can I ask you about your least favourite project?

SK: Hm... The least favourite project... Probably the Indian Town project, the one that we did around twenty years ago, that was a bad project. Everything went bad in that one [laughs]. You know, if you want a lesson on how not to do things, probably you should study that project.

I: Well, learning how not to do things are always quite useful for improving practice, right?

SK: Yeah, I'm always up to talk about it, I mean, in my lectures - not request very much, but it's there, and I've sometimes been asked for, you know, when I've been in places doing it more than one, it's called "crash and burn", and it's just about the mistakes that we've made, stupid things that we've done. And that's the problem with hacktivism, I mean, it's about experiments, so you don't know, it's not going to be a real experiment if you know what the outcome is going to be. And man, there were some times - we've made some bad mistakes.

*** COMMENTS: Experiments as an important part, proposing new alternatives to the discourses within the dominant ideology ***

I: [laughs] Speaking of experiments, when I talked to the other guys, they all placed a great emphasis on the role of research, and they even named their artistic process as research. How would you describe the role of research within the hacktivist practice?

SK: Oh, it's essential, it's essential, 'cause, you know, the hacktivist practice, for the most part, is grounded in reason, you know. I mean, the hacktivist practice is really a kind of enlightenment, a light type of artwork, we are not just expressing ourselves, in fact if anything, we're trying to take ourselves out of the formula. And to try to make it more objective, and try to limit the subjective dimensions of it. So it's important, since we're trying to address issues and try to get it right, not to screw up or make the problem worse. We have to actually know about it, and know about it in some detail. Now, it might not be to the point of expertise, it might still be this striving in learning that this is not the same as what a specialist would do, but we can get pretty well informed, in the sense that I think we can insert ourselves in the discourse, or issue, or territory we're working in, and shit right in, you know. We're not kind of seen as interlopers. So yeah, research is a key part and you need to do a lot of work, and this is why for major projects - we do so few, that takes a lot to get ready to do it, and you know, then it's over! And that's how we do it, especially for us, we're doing such ephemeral projects, it's amazing how much work it takes us to prepare for it, and then it's there for a day and then it's over. It's like "OK, onto the next thing"...So yeah, we're definitely a research practice, and Critical Art Ensemble has done seven books now, the books don't come from expressing ourselves [laughs], they come from research.

I: And in this research projects, is it more about changing other people's minds, or is it rather about changing your own mind?

SK: Yeah, I mean, sometimes it's changing our own minds! We're just trying to get to the bottom of things, so what is a practical, operational take on things? And yeah, when we start, the hypothesis that we start with, might not be the same one that we end with. But that's not exclusive to hoping to change other people's minds, right? So you kind of get them, they have to be confronted with that information, that might challenge where their starting point is. But they have to think things through, and to try to build the kind of theater, to build the kind of cultural experience, that's going to make people want to think these things through.

I: And what do you think the role of conferences and lectures is, within the hacktivist practice?

SK: Well, that's, you know, when we talk to each other, like any other specialisation, or activity, or practice - you want to know what your peers are doing. It's a good thing to know what they're doing, too, because you can get some really useful information, it's a great place to trade materials, to trade technologies, to trade codes, to trade ideas, you know, you gotta get together and talk about these things, you know, it makes the process of evolution much quicker, then, if you just try to build it alone and be secretive. You know, so... As much as I hate conferences as conferences, some kind of means by which we can organise as an aggregate is in the end good.

*** COMMENTS: conferences and gatherings, not necessarily an emphasis on community, as much as on sharing knowledge in order to produce the evolution of the practice ***

I: Yesterday I talked with someone from France, and I was told, "well, we need to explain it to our peers, we need to explain it to the galleries, otherwise no one understands what we're actually doing"...

SK: Well, I don't know if that's the case, you know, it's not that new at this point, right? And interventionism, I mean, it goes all the way back to the 60s, it's not as if we just thought about it now, it has a really old history that you can trace back to various types of hacktivism movements, and even to the '50s, to some degree, and then, if you want to get generous, it goes into the '40s, into the '30s and back into the labour movement, and you know, on and on. So [laughs] you know, I just look at it as we are a link in a chain of practice, and, you know, that is responding to the current economic, social and technological situation. So right, it's going to come out different, but it still has some of the old DNA in it, and all that cultural DNA doesn't just disappear, it stays and it forms what you are doing in the present. So no, I think there are people that understand it and understand the historical flow of it. We're not doing anything that new, that person was padding themselves on the back a little too much.

I: OK, fair enough. You mentioned in one of your interviews Foucault as an intellectual influence, and since I am using him as a theoretical framework as well, I was wondering if you could tell me how he influenced your practice.

SK: Well, I don't know if he's one of the best, he's awfully abstract [laughs], but what Foucault helped us understand is to not always think about power as a source of domination, that actually - and this is very hard for hacktivists and activists and whoever else, 'cause that's almost always the mode render, right? That's always about oppression and exploitation, and domination and dominion. And Foucault really helped us to marshall the idea that it's about how you want to get rid of power, it's about how you make it productive. So he kind of got us on asking much more broader questions when we approach the social field. And to not narrow it down to this just one thing, to this one power formation. So yeah, it was helpful in that sense, it did kind of reframe how we did some things, to some degree.

I: OK. Now I'm going to ask you a rather cheesy question. When you work on a project and you don't get the feedback you were expecting, do you have the same commitment to finishing it? Do you pursue it with the same interest?

SK: Yeah, of course, it is like I told you, the public distribution is the end point, that's the last thing we do. So we're already done with all other discussions, with all the research, all the writing if we're gonna write about it - that's also all done. So we go out and we do it, and we do it until we're bored doing it, which is usually maybe four or five, that might be, and then we don't ever do it again. And then that's that. So if we get lots of feedback -fine, if we don't, well, it's too late, the project is all done [laughs]. You know, we don't do lots of these cross-temporal ones, we did a hundred day project, Documenta, but that's very unusual for us. And also, doing institutional critique like that is also very unusual for us. But yeah, normally, we don't do projects that's going to take two years to complete and that's... That's too slow. We work faster than that. And if we ever did that, then we would probably not finish that project, because we would probably be bored to death by the end of it.

I: Now I'm going to ask another cheesy question...

SK: [laughs] That was actually a reasonable question, asking me about my favourite project, that was a cheesy question [laughs].

I: How important is this in your life and how has this shaped you since you started?

SK: [laughs]

I: You see, this is a cheesy one.

SK: Well, the significance one isn't, I guess, because there are people who are really committed to it and there are some others for whom hacktivism is rather something to do in their spare time, you know. You know, for me, I mean, I am totally committed, I've been part of this group for over twenty five years now. We've just celebrated our 25th anniversary in October, so I think that shows that there's pretty good commitment; I was willing to go to jail, you know [he laughs], I got arrested by the FBI, I was looking at twenty years in jail, so you know, I think I've done pretty well from the commitment angle, so yeah, it's pretty important to me. And to see this history continue, and to see it have an impact in the social sphere and in the public sphere is very important to me. And so in terms of shaping me, that's probably the one thing that defined my life most. I can't say any more than that, can I?

I: Fair enough. How do you evaluate the future of hacktivism? What do you think it will develop into?

SK: It will be the same... It's not gonna develop in any form or sense, I don't think, it's going to be this tactical practice that responds to the opportunities that are offered. So you know, it's going to go into grey areas, to the territories that are not yet overly regulated and do what it can. Now, how it does that, the means by which this will happen, that's what's gonna develop over time, and you know, I'm... You know, I mean, I guess we've been fairly prophetic in the past, if you look at past books and what we thought that should be done, and then it's done... I've always been really skeptical about any kind of futurology, because most of it, you know, you just don't see it coming, you know [laughs]. The future doesn't just turn in some kind of rational progression, it has its revolutionary moments that change the paradigm completely, you know... Like the personal computer, or you know, of making molecular biology an accessible science, I mean, what does this mean? So it really, it changed people, and everything's different now, and who could have really called it? No one. I mean, most of the time, when you look at details about the future of things, it's all wrong. I mean, how could anyone, any futurologist sells a book is beyond me, 'cause they are so completely wrong. So I try not to join their ends [laughs].

I: I don't think I have too many questions left... Except for the element of tacticality, how would you describe the recurrent elements that characterise art hacktivism as a practice?

SK: Well, I guess that tacticality - you can break that down, and that's what characterises it. That you're always in a shifting, moving territory, you're always in the minoritarian position, that always seems to be valid [laughs]. You're always going to act on opportunity and you're always trying to, basically, get your materials from the dominant world, 'cause that's the only place where you can get it. So there's always this big field of appropriation that you are working in, and followed by a process of recombination. So these are the things that are pretty universal and pretty endless in the hacktivist practice.

I: OK. And this is my last question for you... When you do some long projects, when you finish them, do you feel different, does every project change you?

SK: No. I mean, we do a lot of short projects and a couple of big projects in a year, but, you know, we do a lot of brief interventions as well; if an opportunity comes up, we take it. So after a big one is over, you're changed in the sense that you cannot unlearn and unsee the things that you've learned and seen [laughs]. So yeah, consciousness is enriched and diversified, so there's always a change. I don't know, you're asking about feeling a lot, are you into the affect theory, is that one of the things that you're looking at?

I: Yeah, I'm looking at the practice theory in my research, so I am looking at the knowledge - but I've already studied plenty of materials you've already published on it, then at the skills, competences, rules, and also at the teleoaffective structures - goals and the affective part of your practice.

SK: Yeah, well, that's an important question, but usually that's a question in terms of organisation, you know, that's where I think the affect has the greater consequence. Because affect is what determines whether you're working collectively and collaboratively, whether that's gonna go on or not. You can have a tremendous meeting of the minds, in terms of ideas, but if you don't like each other, it's not going to be a good collaboration, it's not going to go anywhere [laughs]. You know, you have to get that non-rational stuff, you know, of love and happiness and trust. Those things have to all be on the table and if they are not, if you don't have those feelings towards those that you're working for, and toward what you're doing, you're in the wrong game, you know, and the projects are not gonna happen. So yeah, affect is an important element, but primarily, I think, if you're looking, you know, at different quadrants of resistance, in the organisation element. Then, in the existential field, is more a question of are you pulling some kind of pleasure? And you know, that's one of the reasons why we never really went into straight activism, because it is just too unpleasurable. I mean, it's just... It takes a certain kind of personality to be a long-term activist. And that's why you see so few of them. You know, you see an activist that's been really good on a campaign for five years and hasn't stopped. They are better, right? Other people are looking up to them, and then you meet someone who's been doing it for twenty years, it's like... They are a legend, they are a fucking legend. Because no one knows how you can do it. It is so fucking unpleasant to [laughs]... It's such hard work, it never ends, it's just a giant black hole, no matter how much time you put in, it still wants more time, right? No matter how much work you put in, it still wants more work. It's just a sacrifice machine that runs at full blast all the time, and so people get burnt out really quickly. You know, they do it for as long as they can, they do it for two or three years and then they decide they can't do it anymore, they have to rest. We really hope not to repeat it, and I think this is something that hacktivists really have going for them, it's that they understand that there has to be a pleasurable principle to counterbalance the reality principle that we have to deal with everyday, and you know, and work to make sure that pleasure between others and in the work is there. So that's the other affect area that I think is really important to discuss about in terms of this kind of practices.

I: OK. I think the torture is over.

SK: Is there like a database where we can see all the interviews?

I: Yeah, I'll definitely post them online, the transcripts, not so sure about the audio files, but I will definitely keep you posted. Thank you very much, it's been a real honour to

talk to you, thank you for all the interesting answers and for making time to talk to me. It's been a real challenge talking to all of you, especially that except for Heath, I didn't actually know anyone.

SK: Well, you see, you're luck, if you know Heath, you know everybody. No problem, any friend of Heath is also our friend. You know, in the net.art, we are a bit like the Mafia here [laughs].

VESNA

MANOJILOVIC

<http://blogger.xs4all.nl/becha>

Date: 13 March 2013

Interview Duration: 1h 11 mins

BIOGRAPHY

Vesna's link with the hacker scene is closely linked to her education, as she studied Computer Sciences in Serbia. Whilst she was living in Serbia, she was an employee of Cyber Rex, a media center, where she organised exhibitions of computer generated art. In 1997 she became acquainted with the hacker scene and she is now an active member of the Technologia Incognita hackerspace in Amsterdam. Her contribution to the hacker sphere is mainly a communication one, creating liaisons between different parties.

I = Interviewer

VM = Vesna Manojilovic

I: Hello, thank you very much for accepting to do this interview with me. Firstly, I would like to mention that all the information provided will be used strictly for academic purpose, it is not going to be used commercially. And now, let's get started. Could you please tell me a bit about yourself and your work?

VM: My name is Vesna, Vesna Manojilovic and I have two different works, let's say, so I have an official job - what I do for a living, and I think you are more interested in the other side, which is my involvement with the hacker scene. There, I am a member of the hackerspace in Amsterdam, called Technologia Incognita for now... less than a year, we started doing things actually around September, October last year... Oh no, it's more than a year! Yeah, sorry, a year and a few months, and currently I am a member of the board of that hackerspace. It's an organisation of about probably fifty members by now, it keeps changing. We have, since October, a permanent location that we are renting, and before that we had a temporary location, and before that we were just meeting in a café. So the Amsterdam hackerspace is one of the reasons why I am doing this, but I have been involved with the hacker scene since '97, and I've been going to the hackers' conferences that were happening, so the big hacker conferences in the camping, that were happening every four years in Holland and every four years in Germany, since '97, and I've missed only one, because I just gave birth.

I: Oh, nice!

VM: But then, for the other ones I was going when I was pregnant, when I had my child, with my other children I managed to go, and I actually managed to go to most of them.

I: Nice! How did you decide to get involved with this community?

VM: It started long time ago. I'm originally from Belgrad, Serbia, and I was studying Computer Sciences in the School of Electrical Engineering, and there I was also working in the Computing Center, and I got connected to the Internet, as it was at that time in Serbia, the connection between University networks, the academic network, that was B92. After that I started working for a small, I don't even know how to call it, let's say media lab, which was part of the Independent radio station B92. So we had something called Cyber Rex, which was like a media center, where I organised exhibitions of the computer generated art. So at that time, it was mostly people from the demo scene, people who were making music and videos on the Atari computers and Amigas. So those were the hackers from Belgrad, from Serbia, and I was involved with the more... youth movements, let's say, and I was also teaching people how to use the Internet, because at that time, so that was in '96- '97, there were not many people on the Internet, especially not in Serbia. And the radio station where I was working was one of the first ones to actually air the programme over the Internet. So then I was doing workshops on how to do the internet radio, and so on, in conferences and other media centers in Europe, then I got connected with artists in that way, then with the hackers, in another way, and because I knew about computer technology, and from my electrical engineering background, I was then somehow in the middle of all of them, then somehow connecting them, and the director of Cinema Rex was a Dutch woman, who had connections with the organisers of these hacker conferences. So she helped me and the group of people who were taking part in that exhibition, the group of hackers from Belgrade, she basically sent us there and she said: "I'm sure you will like it there", and we did.

I: You just mentioned that you were in the middle, creating a connection between these fields - how would you describe the connection between art and hacktivism?

VM: Well, my definition of hackers is people who use computers in the unusual ways, so the ways the computers were not meant to be used. And on the other hand, artists are doing more or less similar things, with... Well, with reality, let's say. So I think there was a natural connection between artists and computer users, who are creative in different ways, to start using the new medium, so from the artist side- to start using the new medium and for computer users, to use computers for their art. Yeah, so that was called at that time net.art, which had eluding definitions, and it was happening on the early Internet, and around it, and on the mailing lists, and in the conferences that were happening around the net.art at that time, so I was also taking part in a lot of those, and I made lots of friends, with artists, and activists, and hacktivists, and hackervists - so it's quite a mix!

I: And artivists as well... Yeah, it's quite difficult, I've tried to provide a definition, but in the end I had to give up, because there are so many different explanations! Do you draw from any specific intellectual sources, any authors who particularly influenced your work?

VM: Well, a long time ago, it was a really long time ago, since then I've been rather busy with my actual work life, which is slightly related, because I work for an organisation which is at the core of the Internet infrastructure, so it distributed IP addresses to the ISPs, to the Internet Service Providers. That is such a low level of technical detail, that nobody actually knows about that company, but it is organised in a very interesting way, which shows the governors of the Internet in a very practical sense, and we are a Not for Profit association, it's a membership association, of all the Internet Service Providers, who have to get together and agree on the rules that they are all going to follow, and then come up with these rules in a consensual way, and then follow those rules, while there is actually no reason for them to actually stick to those rules, because there is nobody who is going to punish them if they don't do it. So it's a very... grassroots, let's say, way of organising themselves, and it follows very much the history of the Internet, because there was nobody who said "Hey, let's just do it this way, because I say so". It could not be imposed from the top-down, so basically, in my work, there's this community of geeks and net co-operators and businesses, that have to find out the way to work together, without external laws to govern them. So I got very much busy with that, and a little bit less with art and activism and hacktivism, except for these conferences where I was going, and sometimes I would even speak at those hacker conferences, and sometimes I would even speak about the topics related to my work, so that was also quite connected let's say. But from the "all time" theory, I can show you some of the books...

I: Yeah, that would be brilliant!

VM: One of them is from the Net Time Reader, called *ReadMe!*, and that is just like a print out of the mailing lists, that's it. And that's one of the lists where Heath Bunting was also very much active and she was also one of the early net.art people, and then there was another mailing list called *Syndicate*, they used to also have physical meetings, and this is a book, one from their collection, in which Mike xx (10:40) was also published, in around '89. No, '98, sorry. And this is one of my close friends from those times, net Syndicate, and she published a book a few years ago, about net.art, this and from the last conference in which I also took part in '99 and in 2001, and it was called *The Next 5 Minutes*, it was happening in Amsterdam. So after that I stopped doing these more arty things, and I've been just going to these hacker conferences every two years.

I: How would you say these book have influenced your general philosophy?

VM: Now, these are more, the actual practical books, these are just the writings of my friends, but if I have to think about the actual theoretical books, that influenced my philosophy... Let me try to remember, that was really, really a long time ago... Those would be Bruce Sterling, *Holy Fire*, which is also written in '97 - '98, like the *Cyber Punk* book, more or less, and which other one... Let's say that one. So other books would be about the Techno Utopianism, so if there is any philosophy that I would ascribe to, that would be Techno Utopianism, which says that the new technologies are going to make our world a better place. And by saying that, I mean the way the Internet is connecting us is going to help us communicate better and understand each other better, collaborate in an easier way, get new ways of governance which are now possible because we can use computers to help us out, in making decisions, talking to each other, trying to understand each other better and come up with better solutions.

I: How would you describe the evolution of hacktivism since you started, up to the present day?

VM: Uh [laughs... In the early days, when I started, which was in '97, one of the main topics was providing the tools for encryption to the masses, let's say. So the PGP [Pretty Good Privacy] was exported to Europe on the Hacking in Progress, in '97 - the first hackers conference where I was, by people who actually brought the printed version from the States, and then scanned, SCAN-ded and then OCR-ded [Optical Character Recognition], to actually make it into a text and then ask a lot of people to double check this OCR-ed version, and then published it in Europe - so ok, it wasn't exported in a digital format from the States, but it was exported as a book, which is legal, and now we have an European version. So that was one of the main topics then, so how to provide strong encryption, how to teach people to use encryption and so on, for privacy purposes. And later, other became somehow more important, on how to teach people not to expose so much of their private lives on social media. The critical approach to social media became more important when people actually started using Facebook and Twitter, and teaching people how to be careful about it, teaching also... Making alternative social media, which is more decentralised, and less commercial available. So on the recent hacker conferences, there was a lot of talk about different platforms, which are not Facebook, and which are not Twitter, and explaining to people why it is better to use this alternative social media. The the other tools that were promoted for the hacktivists were for example, anonymisers, like Tor. So to provide people with actual anonymous access to the Internet, especially in the countries where the dissidents, and the actual hacktivists had their lives in danger if they were using the Internet. And, well, in the Western countries, and the more democratic countries, that is not so life threatening, let's say, but people in these countries have to confront their governments who actually build the tools that are then used for surveillance in the less democratic countries, and so on. So those became the more prominent topics on the conferences where I was going to.

I: Do you think that these topics are academically well documented? Do you think that the knowledge around them is well expanded or maybe not enough?

VM: Well, definitely not enough, because I think that these topics usually stay within this hacker communities, and they are not very popular with the general public, let's say. And very often, it is very difficult to explain it to the general public, because people just shrug it off, saying "Oh, that's too technical, I don't even understand what you are talking about", or people are also, most of the time, the biggest reason why the general public doesn't want to be concerned with that is that they are mostly going to choose for convenience. So whatever is easy is always going to be more important than something which is giving you privacy, anonymity, or something about human rights or whatever, if it is complex, if it is just more difficult to do, people are just not going to bother. But in the academic circles, and actual activist circles, I think there is enough knowledge and enough information about it, for people who want to find out about it, but most don't want to bother about it.

I: What I am also trying to figure out within this paper is that hacktivism is usually perceived as something bad, as an enemy. Ad I am trying to figure out what in the academic literature is making hacktivism more of a technical problem rather than something organisations would be willing to engage in a dialogue with.

VM: One of the big challenges is that the word hacker very often has a negative connotation, so once you say a hacker, most of the people just think of someone who is attacking your computer, and your network, and they don't want to look further than that. And partly, that's due to terminology, because there is no other word that is so popular, and it could be that someone should come up with another word, or try to reclaim the word "hacker" as something positive, but someone would have to come up with a word for the actual attackers, who also exist. The other problem is that somebody doesn't exist as an entity who is taking care of the reputation of hackers, because by definition, that is a group of people who is completely decentralised, there is nobody who is going to take responsibility for such a thing, but recently, what happened, maybe about three or four years ago, is that there is this big movement that kind of developed, the hackerspaces. And now, the hackerspaces are actually gaining quite a positive reputation, and people are willing to consider hackerspaces as something which is positive, so until then, they were called "maker labs" or ... well, there was not one word that would create unity between all this hackerspaces. They existed, in places like Amsterdam, but they were just not called "hackerspace", they would have a specific name, and you would go from Berlin to see this, and you would know what to expect there, but there was no name for it, a generic name for it. Now there is a generic name for it, and the hackerspace movement is now reclaiming the positive connotation from the word "hacker".

Maybe by exposing a different side, the actual physical, or what some people call "meet space" side of hacking, which is not just a lonely geek, a kid who doesn't have any friends and he's just sitting in his attic and is sitting behind the computer the whole day and night, these hackerspaces are actual physical spaces, where people who don't know anything about it can go and actually meet other real people, and see that there are all kinds of different hackers, who are involved in hardware hacking, in bio hacking, in the chemistry experiments, in electronics, in doing wood work, in creating art, and it's not just software hacking, which is just people who write programmes that are going to be used on the internet and that are going to attack your computer. So I think this is one of the things that helped, the physical spaces, that bring these people out their bedrooms and give them one voice. So if you go to Brussels, let's say, and there is a hackerspace there, you know you can go there and meet like-minded people, and then they start also organising themselves in a way that is one website which lists all the hackerspaces. So you know where you can go to find them, and there, every hackerspace has a list of their members, a list of their projects, a list of their events, so it's all becoming a bit more visible.

So that's one of the reason and the other reason is that internet became a lot more important in the life of ordinary people, so now there is just more audience, but also more participants. So now people who are just users of the internet, they know that these hackers are not such bad guys, just because they know how to use the computer, because now all of a sudden, my mother knows how to use the computer, then she's not going to think badly of someone who also knows how to use a computer because now she sees "Yeah, it's not a big deal, I can also send an e-mail", something like that.

I: Fair enough. What other artists or hacktivists do you appreciate, and what do you think it's special about their work?

VM: So one of the guys I like very much is Mitch Altman, he is into electronics, and I saw him for the first time, oh God, it was six years ago, on the conference in New Berlin, the CCC, Chaos Computer Congress. He gave a talk about making workshops, so how to develop a workshop, and how to deliver a workshop, in which he stressed very much the beauty of making mistakes. And the beauty of failing, and not being afraid to do things wrong, and not being afraid to make mistakes, because that's what you're going to learn from. and to encourage other people to make as many mistakes as possible and as early as possible in their process, so that they can learn from them and overcome them, and you know, to do that in the workshop environment, where you are going to share your mistakes and learn from them and from other people's mistakes. So that was actually the first time that I saw him live, and he was doing a lot of electronics workshops there, and then recently, he gave a talk about hackerspaces on the TEDxBussels, I can send you the link later.

I: Oh, that would be brilliant!

VM: So he is one of the founders of the hackerspace in San Francisco called Noise Bridge, and yeah, he's very very inspiring, when you see him speaking it's really really great. So he's one of them, and there are too many others to mention, Rob Roneich, he's one of the people who actually changed my life completely, he was founder of Access for All, the Internet provider in Holland. So his company, Access for All, was about giving Internet connectivity to open net, port of the B92 where I was working in Belgrade. And he was also responsible for organising this hacker camping, so he was also responsible for bring me for the first time to this hacker camping hip, and there, I met a lot of people from the group around him, called From Hell, which is the first group of hackers, that I encountered, that was more or less organised, that was that one, there was this group in Belgrade that I was part of, called Corrosion. So he's the leader of, or let's say... Ideologically, they are Hippies from Hell, this hacker movement in Holland, and yeah, he became a friend of mine, and we are still friends, so he's a really really inspiring person and hacker, in the best possible way, and best possible meaning of the word.

I: Oh, thanks, I'm definitely going to check them out afterwards, you've inspired me as well. You mentioned earlier that there are no specific rules within the hacker community. But are there some recurrent elements or patterns that can be noticed?

VM: Well, we actually have a list of rules in our hackerspace, which can maybe used as an example, and the rule number zero is "Do not be on fire", which means... yeah, be safe. So just be careful, and be safe, and take care of yourself. The other very important rules are "Be excellent to each other" and "If you notice the problem, fix it yourself", so don't complain to other people or don't ask "Who is going to do this?", just do it yourself. So if there could be any rules following from that, that is "Do it yourself", the other one is "Do it together", and finally, be excellent to each other.

I: And do you manage to incorporate these rules in your work?

VM: Yeah, yeah, actually we do, so if somebody, for instance, says "Oh, why is this like this?", then people just look at them and say "Rule four!", which means, do it yourself. And also, well... let's say, a challenge that we face is making agreements. Because everything that we have to do, as a group, we have to all somehow agree on what we are

going to do, and in which direction we are going to go, because there is nobody who is going to tell us, like a boss, “OK, this is my decision, and all of you have to do like this”. So in this decision making process, this consensus making process, we try to, you know, listen to each other, and have discussions, to hear everybody and so on, but finally, when it comes to actually doing things, the people who are going to put their actual work and hands on it, they have more right to say how something is going to be done, then there are people who just say “I think it should be like that”. So this is how we put these rules in practice, if you want something to be done, i you want it to be done your way, then you have to be the one doing it. And so that actually makes people either more active, or you know, if they have a strong opinion, they just cannot stick to their opinion, they have to actually become practical, and do things. Or persuade other people to their opinion, and other people who are actually doing it are going to say “Oh yes, I see your point, I’m going to do it your way”. But that makes it much more practical and much more active, let’s say.

***** COMMENT: Difficult to agree - emphasis on the multitude character, constellations of singularities *****

I: Speaking of this challenge to reach an agreement, hacktivism is generally perceived as a nomadic practice. Do you think that in this sense, hacktivism is, or could be an efficient political tool?

VM: Yes, and I think there are already quite a few example about that, the rise of Pirate parties, that are very much overlapping with the hackers’ community, I would say. And the so-called liquid democracy models, that are visible in Iceland, in Germany, and I’m not so much familiar with that, but on a lot of hacker conferences, there is a talk about the political side of things. Before the rise of the pirate parties, there were a lot of political elements in the work of hackers, and that were mostly concerned about the freedom of speech. Especially that now, the Internet was a new medium that was used in one way or another. And it was very easy, because it’s all digital, to abuse, or how can I say, to limit, to use the Internet also for surveillance and for limiting the freedom of speech of other people. So on one hand, it was empowering, because now everyone could have a say and actually spread their word in much easier way. So it was enabling the freedom of speech in unprecedented ways, but on the other hand, it was much easier to observe who said what and to then, prosecute people, because they couldn’t stay anonymous. So then, the people who were aware of these dangers were these hackers, and they were warning, and they were fighting for the freedom of speech in creating strong encryptors so that when you are communicating to each other, that other people who don’t have any business in trying to find out what that is that you are trying to talk about with each other, so that you can protect your privacy, and then creating tools for anonymous expression, or for example, WikiLeaks, that’s the biggest example with Tor.

I: Now I’m going to ask you more specific questions related to your work. Could you please talk to me a bit about your most recent project?

VM: There are three things I would like to specify, and maybe later you can choose one of them. One was actually the article that I published about the future of the Internet, from the hackers and the utopians’ point of view. So that was published in December by Access for All, I’ll send you later the link to that, and I’m really proud of that, because it took me a lot of time to formulate those opinions, which are based mostly on following all

these hacker conferences and mailing lists and events that are happening in our own hackerspace and so on, so that one of them. The other one is organising ladies' nights in our hackerspace, to increase the participation of women in the hackerspace in Amsterdam, specifically and in general. Because women are still a minority when it comes to hacking, hacktivism, the use of technology. So yeah, that is going slowly, we've already had two meetings, we have a third one scheduled, and it has mixed results, let's say. So on one hand, during those evenings, there were lots of women that are interested, we had very nice discussions, but then we also got into an unresolved discussion - yet, in the sense that should it be only women's nights? and women only activities, in general and also in the hackerspace. So then we had quite emotional and heated discussions. And yeah, it's also disturbing. And the third one is something that's in progress, it's an idea that I had and soon it's going to be maybe put in practice, there will be a conference in Amsterdam, called Unlike Us, for the alternative social media, and they will have a hackathon in which several ideas are going to be suggested, and the people who can write code, are going to maybe work on idea that I had, which is tidying the posts in the mailing lists, and creating a so-called karma server, which would be just a tool, for enabling the participation in the mailing lists, which is more similar to the interactive forums that already exists already on some websites or for example, in like Facebook discussions and so on, where you would be able to combine the participation in the mailing lists for the people who actually want to write an e-mail and for the people who just want to read the content of the mailing lists on the web archives and then see and maybe tag also on the web archive. So to merge different approaches to the media and also to rend new the old, the very old fashioned, let's say, social media of mailing lists.

I: Very Interesting! Which one would you say it was the most successful project?

VM: Well, from those three, the ladies' night.

I: OK, and in general?

VM: Oh yeah, there are some really, really small things that I'm really proud of, and that is making a quilt of hackers t-shirts. I did that for the conference called What the Hack? which was in 2005, and by that time I collected a lot of t-shirts from all these conferences, and well, firstly, I couldn't wear them all, because they were just too many, second, they are not the most sexy garment that you could put on, so you know, I didn't really want to wear them, but I didn't want to throw them away, I wanted to show them, I wanted to expose them, because they actually are a sign of honour, they actually increase your geek credo if you have that t-shirt, from that conference. And they are also used for bonding and four recognition, like "Oh, yeah, you have that t-shirt from that conference, I was also there". But you know, you can only wear one at a time, even if you do want to wear them, so then I actually just cut out the fronts of all of them and put them all together in a huge flag, in a huge quilt, and then I exposed it there, in one of these hackers campings, and it was quite a popular thing, a lot of people were taking photos, and a lot of people were also saying "Oh, yeah, I was also there", "Oh, that's a good idea", and so on, so now, the next project related to those t-shirts is Fifty Shirts of Grey, because, you know, they are mostly either white or black, to start with, but then, when you've washed them a few times, over the years they all become more or less grey, so I want to put all of them in another flag, not so colourful, but mostly with black, white and grey. So yeah, I'm looking forward to also doing that.

I: I also want to ask you about your least successful project.

VM: Oh [laughs] Let me actually check the list of project that I have there, you know, we have it all documented... Oh yeah...Ahhh, I don't know which one to choose! I don't know...

I: Well, if you don't necessarily want to talk about that, maybe I can ask you: in the cases where a project doesn't go as you were expecting, it doesn't get a very good feedback, do you have the same commitment afterwards to finish it?

VM: I guess not, but let me just see which one I could use, you know, to have something in mind... Oh yeah, can I tell you another one for the most successful ones?

I: Yeah, of course!

VM: That was something called Hackerspaces Exchange, which is something that I did on 29C3, which is like the CCC congress, in the campus in the winter, in Germany. So this one, every year, in Germany, so this one was in Hamburg, I organised a workshop, where there were people from around twenty-thirty hackerspaces from around the world, and then we all talked about our experiences, we all brought our speakers, and those stems, and those flyers and so on, and yeah, talked about what are our challenges, what are our biggest successes, so that was one of the most successful ones. OK, one of the least successful ones, because it's really not finished yet, it's Book Crossing, I want to have a cupboard with books in the hackerspace, which people can take the books away, now we just have a cupboard which is a library, and we don't want people to steal books from there, but I have too many books at home, as you can see, and I want to get rid of them, and I want to put these stickers on them, which says "this is a free book", you can take it away and you can register it on the website so that we can follow where it's going and so on, but yeah, it's a lot of work, so maybe I should just do it as a workshop, get all the hackers from the hackerspace and say "alright, tonight we're all going to stay here and put all the books in the system and then you know, do something with them, but nothing is actually happening. So yeah, that's one of the less successful ones.

I: And you said that your commitment decreased a bit...

VM: Yeah.

I: That's a shame, it sounds like a really interesting project.

VM: Yeah, I saw, in the other hackerspaces, they have that bookshelf... Let me just get the power, otherwise it will die. Oh, and when you finish with your questions, there is one more thing I would like to add.

I: Yeah, brilliant, the more the better! What about your first project and your inspiration for it?

VM: Wow, let's say that the t-shirt flag was the first project, because the other one is from, like, '97, and I can't remember. That was kind of the exhibition of hackers art, which I did in Belgrade, and which is so old, that it's even difficult to remember it. So it was the demo scene, the group Corrosion that was making music and videos, and we also worked in creating a few net.art pieces together, with Hugh xx (46:50), whose net.art pieces were also exhibited there, on that exhibition. And yeah, I don't remember about that one anymore.

I: Earlier, we were talking about the evolution of hacktivism. Has your work evolved following the same patterns?

VM: Uhhmm... No, not really, because I was not, how can I say it, I'm not like a typical hacker from this hacktivist scene. So I'm not really a programmer, so I can't say that I was involved in creating the tools for secure communication. Or any of that. This was more for me, in general, personally, I'm more somebody who connects people, and I'm really more interested in the social side of hacktivism. So my personal work is just these very few things that are very hands-on, or I write articles, or I write blog posts, or I just take part in conferences, because I like being surrounded with like-minded people.

***** COMMENT: I'm not a typical hacker, resistive behaviour *****

I: How would you define your mission statement, and how is that manifested in your work?

VM: [laughs] Let me find my article and then I will read it for you. OK. So my personal philosophy of how the society should be governed and what is going to be the future of the Internet is participation and sharing. So participatory altruism. And that's quite theoretical, and very idealistic, let's say, because I wish I could also follow my own philosophy, but sometimes I don't, so when it comes to the altruism, that is also something that I wanted to refer to, for the first part, and I can also mention it now, that is the principle of sharing, and that is also what attracts me to the hackers and to the hackerspaces, so sharing of knowledge, sharing of experience, and in the case of the hackerspace, is also sharing of resources and sharing of responsibility. So we all pull our resources together, and everybody, in a very physical way, pays a monthly fee, so then we get this shared space, so that we can all follow our own dreams, work on our own projects, collaborate and so on, and all for twenty euros per month. I mean, if i wanted to rent a space for myself, it would cost me much more, I would not be able to get all these tools that we have there, so this is like the very physical manifestation of that principle. So we all share, we contribute a small part of our resources and then we all get much much greater benefit from this. So it's not only the monthly fee, of course, there are some people actually because they just want to support this goal and then they never show up, but if everybody didn't do that, than this space wouldn't actually develop, or nothing would be happening there. And, which is actually, even more important, we invest our time, and our energy, and our work and our contribution, and most of the people who are there, are actually already employed, so if someone wanted to employ me to do the work I am doing there, i would have to ask, I don't know, a hundred euros per hour. There, i just do it for free. Because you know, I want to teach, and I want to organise, i want to help and so on, and not just me, there are people who would actually have to be paid a lot more than me. And there are also people who are students and you know, they don't even pay twenty euros, they pay ten euros, but then they

spend much more time there, doing interesting things, doing interesting projects and so on. So in that way, that is the sharing, and then you know, people bring their tools there, and they don't mind if somebody else is using it, and so on, so that is the altruism and then the other part is participation, which means all kind of things, it is reflected in our rules, Do it Yourself, so you have to take part, especially if you want things to go the way you want, you have to take part in making decisions, and also it brings up the governors model, which is egalitarian, so it's very decentralised, it's not hierarchical, there is nobody who has more right to influence the decisions more than somebody else, so all the participants are on an equal standing.

***** COMMENTS: Sharing of knowledge and of experience: production and circulation of knowledge - truth - power - resistance, relate to Foucault; decentralised - emphasis on Foucault's idea of modern power and the nature of the multitude *****

I: And what do you think the practical implications in terms of anti-preneurship are?

VM: Yeah, so in this way, we are not contributing to the consumeristic society, because instead of buying for each one of us a drill, the soldering iron, and a sofa, and a computer that's going to be used for server, and the projector, we all, you know, forty of us share one of those things, so instead of buying all that, we say "I'll buy something, I'll share it with forty of you; you buy something else and you share it with other forty of us. So in that way, we are not contributing to the consumeristic society. The other thing is that we teach people how they can fix their own things when they are broken. So if something is broken, you don't just throw it away, you fix it. Or you know I can go on with the very popular things of the maker scene, with and without 3D printers, so that we can be able to print things ourselves - I don't know much about that, so I would rather not say, and we also teach people, by example, how it is possible to share and how different way of organising your life and the society, are actually possible.

I: Can I ask how you arrived to have this attitude and this perspective on anti-consumption?

VM: Uhm, well, I'm not totally there, yet, I can't say that I am totally following that because I do have things in my house, and I do work for money and so on, and I am, how can I say it, very harsh on myself. So I can't say "Oh, yeah, I'm following that totally, so I'm always going to be very critical of myself, but the one way of arriving to that was that I grew up in a communist society, or a fake communist society, and we actually didn't have much, or at least in my family, we were just poor, so we were forced to share. And yeah, we just got very good at that, because we had to and after I moved to Holland, which is an epitome of a consumeristic society, I also got involved with the hippie scene and the squatter scene and because I was new in this city, I also didn't know and have much, and even if I had a good salary, I couldn't really afford a lot of things, so I was just following the practices that I grew up with, but also that in Amsterdam, it would be quite normal to recycle things and pick up furniture from the street. And nobody is going to look at you strangely, like there are junkies who pick up things from the street, but there are also, you know, very sophisticated looking ladies in expensive coats that are also going to go to the rubbish and actually pick up a chair. And then they will call it "retro", but yeah they are also going to get things from the street. So it was very liberating to be in Holland, where people are actually using the things from the street, and there are also people who don't

want their furniture anymore, they're going to put it on the street with the cable, let's say, if it's an electronic appliance, with the cable leaving a note on it "it's still working" or if it's not working, then they are going to cut off the cable so that you don't have to drag the washing machine up the stairs, try if it's working, see it's not working and then bring it back. So there's this culture already, in Holland, in general, but specifically in the circles where I was, which was more the hip[ies], and the anarchists, and the squatters, who had this attitude "yeah, we are not going to just buy new things just because we can", and yeah, that was something that was dear to me.

I: I find very interesting what you just told me, because in fact, I am Romanian, and I was born immediately after the revolution. And I find it very interesting, this great divide between people who go to the supermarket as a leisure activity, just because they can, and people like me - and I think this is why I felt so connected with the hacktivists I previously met, who think that there were so much better things that could have been done.

VM: Yeah, I'm not going very often to Serbia, the situation there is not as good yet as in some other countries, but for example, in Croatia, and Hungary - that was first, and then it also happened in Croatia, the most things that have been built recently are shopping malls. And it's just totally amazing for me to see that, every time I go there on vacation, and also, I go there with my kids, and we have to go shopping there, because that's where you go shopping. So then we go there and they ask me: "Mamma, why don't we have this in Holland?", and then I'm like.. "Uhhmmm, I don't know" [laughs] but it's completely the opposite. Here, you should have shopping malls in Holland, but I never go to shopping malls, there is no space for them here. There are only, you know, small shops and I don't have a car, so you know, even if there are shopping malls, I can't go to shopping malls, I don't have a car. But in Croatia, you know, we go there on vacation, we go with our cousins, so they also want to show off a little bit, so we go to the shopping mall and my kids are totally confused, "What is this? Why are there thirty shops in the same building somewhere, outside of the city?". And yeah, now there is so much consumerism in the ex-communist countries, it's just scary and I'm happy I'm not there.

I: OK, now I will go back to the questions related to your work. Can you explain to me briefly what your work is trying to achieve?

VM: Hah [laughs], well, in the most general way, making the communication between different groups of people easier, and bringing in contact various groups of people that don't have much in common, but they have me in common. That would be just in general, so you know, organising events, in which people can talk to each other, and make presentations, or like this project about the mailing lists, hackerspaces exchanges, stuff like that, so bringing groups of people together.

I: Would you say that your work has a specific political cause?

VM: No, not very specific, no. I'm not politically active, actually in Holland I can't even vote, but my sympathies would go to the pirate parties and green parties, but I don't have any specific political agenda, except for the anarchist and utopistic one.

I: How come you arrived to have a preference for this type of activism which is computer-mediated?

VM: Yeah, it's my education background, so yeah, I was studying computer sciences, I was exposed to the computer networks, and yeah, it started from there. So I like technology because I can understand it and I can also explain it to other people, and in my professional life that helped, because I was a trainer for twelve years and I like giving presentations, and talking to people and teaching, and that also helps. Technology, for me, is more of a medium, a tool to enable communication.

*****COMMENTS: Like Paolo Cirio, computers are just the medium *****

I: You already mentioned altruism and the capacity of sharing, but are there any other qualities that you may think they are necessary in hacktivism as a practice?

VM: For me, what is important is tolerance for other people's opinions and the attitude that no topic is out of bounds, that means that no topic is forbidden, we should be able to talk about anything, and the other attitude, which is in fact a quote from the start of one of the books, a very interesting book that I also want to recommend, it's called Barefoot in Cyberspace, and there, there is a quote which I am not sure if I can repeat exactly, I would like, or I see the future society as the one in which you have to make every issue your own business. So there isn't anything that you can say, "Oh, that's really none of my business. So everything should be everybody's business".

I: OK, I have one more question before we end this conversation. You said that in your case, hacktivism is not a full time job, but how important is it in your life?

VM: It's very important and especially because I've been involved with that for such a long time, and it influenced a lot of decisions that I was making in my life, for example to move to a different country, which friends to have, what are the important activities for me, like I don't go on vacation to exotic islands, I go to the hackers campings every two years. And yeah, it is a very very important part of my life.

I: Any future projects that you would like to mention?

VM: Let me look at these projects, see what I haven't mentioned yet... Oh, yeah, so there is a new one, it's part of the Hackerspaces Exchange, it's called Hackers in Residence. And so it's actually an exchange of people, so there are several hackerspaces that want to make this programme together, so that we can say "OK, somebody can come to our hackerspace in Amsterdam, and we can offer this, this and this, and you can get a place to stay with one of our people, and you can get access to our tools that we have here, and these are the projects in which we would like the person who arrives to take part in, to contribute" - for s; and then there would be such a description for several other hackerspaces around the world, so that they could make this kind of exchange programmes, something like artists in residence, but actually called hackers in residence.

I: Thank you very much, I think I am done. I was wondering if you could give me some pictures, maybe of the quilt you made.

VM: Yes, I will send them to you in a minute, let me just find them. There you go.

I: Thank you very much again, it was a very interesting conversation!

VM: You are welcome, and I would like to see a copy when you have the final version.

I: Yes, of course! Thanks again.

RYBN.ORG

<http://rybn.org/>

Date: 19 March 2013

Interview Duration: 48:50

Language: French

BIOGRAPHY

RYBN is a multi disciplinary art collective, founded in 2000 by artists based in Paris, Barcelona and Berlin. It is specialised in installations, performances and interfaces which make reference to codified systems and to the artistic representation - painting, architecture, countercultures, but they are also interested in human and physical phenomena (geo-political, socio-economic, sensorial perception, cognitive systems). The collective's field of research is concerned with the construction of a "convergence semantic", through combining, diverting, corrupting the formalisation linked to communication, information and sensorial technologies: networks, data fluxes, captation, surveillance, audio-visual, interaction, etc.

SUMMARY

RYBN.ORG is a collective entity, which works principally with the Internet medium. They describe themselves as a research corpus, interested in issues of economy, politics and security, with a particular preoccupation for legislative, political and social infrastructures. The group has been active for more than ten years, and over the past five years they have consecrated their efforts entirely to the field of finance.

When asked about the role of art as a political tool, RYBN declared that for them, art is a field of reference, but it is not the only field of production, they are also interpellated by the fields of hacking, pure programming or research. In their case, art is just a tool which allows them to articulate a discourse, particularly in the case of a critical discourse. This takes place particularly in the case of technology. Thus, art is a field of reference, of articulation which allows them to realise critical reflexions related to technology.

When asked to define hacktivism in terms of their practice, the group declared that they didn't really ask themselves that question, as they don't perceive themselves as

hacktivists. Their work is more about producing reflective pieces. Hacktivism is about trying to achieve a political goal, but in their case, political reflection is found across the integrity of the piece, it is not an end they try to achieve.

More specifically, RYBN takes interest in two interrelated phenomena. The first one is the tendency of the society to reflect in economical terms, as all social interactions are based, at a given moment, on this principle. Their main interest is to explore how technology is functions according to the concept of finance and economy. Therefore, parts of their research are concerned with the direct translation of the accounting technology. This is closely related to another phenomenon, the social implications. The diffusion and dispersion of personal computers shows as a consequence, the will to format our way of thinking. The economic structure sustains the social edifice, which is visible on all the layers of the society.

When they refer to art in their projects, they make reference to a less formal type of art (the type of ideology that can be found in squats and other institutions), the type of art which is more difficult to define, which does not exist according to the socio-political field, but which can be found across this context. In terms of evolution, they foresee an evolution in precarity and captation. The majority of ideas found in this less formal art scene are systematically re-integrated in larger and more established intermediary structures, which exploit artists and their ideas. Thus, there is a transfer of an informal scene with ideas that are not necessarily developed in order to be integrated in an economic, business environment. So there are two forces which oppose, a force which is well established, centered around the market, but quite quantifiable, opposed to a force which is vague, badly mediated and which exists by its own means, which is the Internet.

The purpose is to position themselves in rapport with a history, this is why they actively seek other peers with whom they can engage in a conversation, in order to contribute to the evolution of critique. It is a scene that's not exactly formalised, it's very close to the scientific sphere, it is a free culture, there is a broad range of intellectual influences.

Recurrent elements to be found in their practice are humour, irony and a certain casualness. Another one is amateurship, as competence is very important. It is important to break the concept of "expert" and prove the competence of amateurs.

The relationship with technology is quite a distanced one, they declared. It is rather about a critique of the technology, as nowadays we all make use of this technology (for instance, sending an e-mail), but nobody questions how this functions. And this is also the case with institutions, in general, people do not ask themselves how their countries work, how different laws are implemented, etc.

Their last project consists of a robot, an algorithm they created which has been exchanging stock for almost two years, and millions of actions have already been transacted. It represents a critique to finance, to an entire economy dedicated to speculation, which, in their view, shows a certain degree of absurdity. Although the project was

implemented as a playful action, it has received a great amount of feedback - which was the most important to RYBN, as the collective managed to get people interested in finance.

RYBN talks about the success of their conferences they have been organising for over a year. They declare that it is very amusing to attend these conferences as they invite people from different areas of expertise, such as programmer, philosophers, etc., and in this way, there are lot of perspectives highlighted during these talks. The main idea of these 48h format is to invite four different people belonging to different universes, such as artists, mathematicians, philosophers, etc. Although very often tensions are produced, they allow for different articulations of the same idea. They declare that they enjoy quite a lot to see these people arguing.

For them, the comparison of successful and not successful project is not very relevant, as they are not part of a marketable system, and their activities do not represent any type of competition. They emphasise the importance of conferences as their projects usually need mediation so that people can understand the actual nature of their projects. Moreover, the purpose of the conferences they organise is to bring people from different fields of specialty together (such as artists, scientists, philosophers), and who adhere to different political ideologies and who are part of different schools of thought. This allows for different articulations of the same discourse.

UBERMORGEN.COM

<http://www.ubermorgen.com/2010/index.html>

Date: 19 March 2013

Interview Duration: 50:28

BIOGRAPHY

UBERMORGEN.COM is an artist duo created in Vienna, Austria, by lizvix and Hans Bernhard. The duo has been described as one of the most unmatched identities – controversial and iconoclastic – of the contemporary European techno-fine-art avant-garde. Their work deals with conceptual art, drawing, software art, pixel painting, computer installations, net.art, sculpture and digital activism (media hacking). The computer and the network are exploited to create art and combine its multiple forms. The permanent amalgamation of fact and fiction points toward an extremely expanded concept of one's working materials that for UBERMORGEN.COM also include (international) rights, democracy and global communication (input-feedback loops). "Ubermorgen" is the German word both for "the day after tomorrow" and "super-tomorrow".

I= Interviewer

UM

=

UBERMORGEN.COM

I: I would like to start by saying that I did my homework, I tried to look at as many interviews as possible so that I don't ask you the same things over and over again.

UM: OK.

I: My first question is related to the fact that I read somewhere that you hate the term hacktivism. Why would that be?

UM: We think it's not specifically the correct term, because we like to separate our work from the what we see as conventional activist work, which works with certain goals, with searching agendas and certain types of objectives. So usually in hacktivism people define what they want to reach or what their goal is, or what their mission is. And in our field, we don't do that. We are more experimenting, and drawing from the actionism, this is our heritage, because we are Vienna based artists, and I studied with Viennese actionists, and as you may know, they experiment a lot with the body, so a lot with excrements, and a lot with violence, or physical stuff. And for us, doing the online, or the digital performances, the actions- we call them, we felt pretty much the same way, we're just using a different medium. So we are not doing a happening in a room, where we shit and piss and ejaculate all over each other, but we use a broader room, but it's still very physical. So you feel fear, you feel excitement, anxiousness, adrenaline, and stuff like that. So it's actually real, so that's why we prefer this terminology.

I: Speaking of physicality, I saw that after projects like Google Will Eat Itself, you usually materialise them in exhibitions. Why is that important in your practice?

UM: Basically, it's not important, the idea mainly and the action itself are derived from the net, or from ourselves, from interactions, from ideas, networks, concepts, it's usually conceptual in the first place, or actionistic conceptually, and just later on, we experienced that... First of all, the very practical reason, is that people ask you to do exhibitions, and then you have to think how to start to materialise this stuff. We could have decided to say no, we don't do that, to say it's a radical approach, but we are interested in a certain way of communicating the work into other medium, converting the work, or transforming it into another medium, 'cause it's a challenge, it's an artistic challenge as well.

I: Do you think this physicality might relate to a legitimisation of your practice?

UM: No, no. For us, we know what it is, and we know it doesn't get more or less important. It just another... It does add another component, but the best way to... It changed in the past few years, in the early years, it was really... It added another layer, it added another component to the representation of the project. Because usually, the projects they were over, at a certain time, when the exhibition started, so then you kept on working on the transformation, you kept on working on the topic- which I found pretty much good, because I wanted to do that, but as I said, it wasn't necessary. A much better way to actually to communicate or explain a project like ours is by talking about it. That's why we held a lot of lectures, because that's the best way, to talk about it and to explain a project that has many layers and took part over a long period of time. Then, in the last years, we started to actually do exhibitions, that are based on online projects, but sometimes, it's just research, so it became more of a... Maybe more of a classical fine arts approach in certain projects, and in other projects we would stay completely online.

***** COMMENTS: Talking about our projects has an important role in producing knowledge *****

I: I read in one of your interviews that you named the artistic process as freestyle research. Could you explain to me a bit more what you meant by that?

UM: Can't talk for Liz, but I can talk for myself, for me the whole thing is about basic research. So it's about looking at things, developing things that are maybe even unthinkable, or maybe unforeseeable, things that are not obviously to be connected, and most important, to go where the research leads you. So you're not... That's why I told you we don't like hacktivism, we don't have an objective, we don't have a goal. We don't say... whatever, "this and this is bad, and now we're gonna do something about it". We say "this and this is happening, there's some merits going into it, and then we go into it, and then we start to look at it, then we start to think and communicate. And then, suddenly, it leads you to another place. And it's not necessarily connected with the topic you initially started, or your main interest, but it leads you to completely different ways, and then suddenly, you start to look at things in a different way, and suddenly, you start to believe things, even. Which is separate - the private and the work are separated. And suddenly it starts to change your personal view about things, because what you believed initially, maybe, is completely turned around. And you start to think things that were unthinkable before, and do things that you thought you didn't want to do, or that you couldn't do. And that's for me the basic research aspect. So for me, it's kind of a religion, it's kind of a faith in science. But not in R&D, not in development, not in research and development, but in basic research. And this is why science and art are completely intertwined. It's the same thing, basically.

I: In the same interview, I read that you prefer to name yourselves as commercial artists, could you explain a bit in more depth what that term represents for you, for your practice?

UM: Yeah, as you know from the biography, both Liz and me, we come from the net.art, in which Heath is also a leading character, in this net.art avant-garde movement of the 90's, it's basically mid-1990's, and at that time, everything was collaborative, I didn't even consider myself an artist, I didn't give a shit, I just wanted to do things, and we worked together, we didn't even think about it that way, it was some sort of a flat structure. So we just exchanged, and worked, and we didn't give a shit. And then, a little bit later on, at the turn of the millenium, this avant-garde movement was kind of dispersing and we started to do more actionist stuff, so like the [V]ote Auction, and then the Nazi-Line project, and then stuff like that, and probably all that had something to do with...sorry for just a second [...]. So yeah, I remember that until about 2003 we didn't give a shit, I didn't care. And then, in about 2003, I remember long conversations about the transformation of digital art or conceptually digital art, into a commercially... or into a commodity, into a commercially valuable and marketable work. And this was motivated by the the lack of, not the lack of acceptance, but by the lack of presence of digital art, or however we want to call it - media art, digital art, net.art... we stick to net.art, we think it's a valid term - because of the lack of it in the contemporary fine art world. It was ignored, like video art in the beginning, it's completely ignored. So we started to create a strategy, strategically, we used affirmation, we said "OK, we're gonna all re-affirm in commercial ways; we will find our way in order to move from art into the art market, and initially, the idea was to kinda set a

firewall between production and marketing and commodification, because intuitively we knew that it was gonna interrelate and it was gonna affect the production, and we didn't want that, today I know it's impossible, but I was kind of naive, and also enthusiastic about it. So yeah, that's when it happened. And from there, we started to do that. At the moment, I have to say that we failed, from my point of view. It's not what we should do, and it's not what we want to do, maybe we will continue, but if I had the choice, I would not do it.

I: OK. Can you make an evaluation of the net.art practice?

UM: You're asking the wrong guy. There are so many new movements now, there are so many new young movement, like the whole new tumblr movement, this whole glitch movement, people doing this kind of stuff. Then there is the old dudes like us, and the people from the 90s, completely deriving off in different directions. So you have the superstars, who actually made their way into the contemporary art world, represented by major galleries and who has major solo shows in museums. So you have a kind of a sphere head who represents a commercialisation of this type of work and aesthetics and thinking. My evaluation if I look at it in a general way, is that The paradigm shift went from us artists working avant-garde wise and innovatively with digital media, from the convergence of the digital platforms, of the computers and networks, it kind of shifted over to a more generally used by any artists, who are not just simply putting paint on the wall or canvas, everybody is working with this, because it is convergent, everybody works with this platforms, and so it's kind of melting together. Today there's no differentiation necessarily, I think. And this is good and this is bad at the same time. so we're going to see really exciting stuff that doesn't require any type of categorisation or genre in the traditional... or maybe there will be genres, but they will not be defined by technology use, but more by thinking, or by the group of people we are working with, or we are thinking with, and maybe by the medium you perceive it - such as installation, or yeah, tumblr art, but this is different - channels of our media.

I: Can I ask you also about a particular author that influenced your work?

UM: I don't know, you tell me. I don't read theory, so I don't have... So we don't use theoretical authors to work ourselves off or to contextualise our work. I'm coming more from the literature, so for me, influential people were Charles Bukowski, James Ellroy, the crime writer, his compressed way of language, then here is for example a filmmaker, Leni Riefenstahl XXX (19:10), a very influential German filmmaker from the 1970s, then there are, and for sure people like Andy Warhol and there's a certain undeniable connection between this groundbreaking work of Warhol, Marcel Duchamp's always an important reference, DADA, and or me, personally Joseph Beuys, but not from a theoretical point of view, I have no idea what he thought, but from a real, purely artistic point of view, so installations and stuff like that.

I: Are there any elements that you think they are recurrent in you work, except for the utilisation of software?

UM: Yes, one thing is what we developed ourselves, we call it media hacking, it's the intrusion into the mass media, with low technology, we call it low-tech, but we use social media now, mobile phone SMS, e-mail, websites, Twitter, Tumblr. So using these technologies, and a good story. It's always the combination between the two. And the good

story is much more important, it's like a viral, the viral component that will drive itself, that will live itself, like a memetic, like a meme travelling around the world and creating imagination in people's heads. So we try to work on this level and what I just discovered is that actually, basically we are conceptual artists. So even if we produce a lot of work, actually, in terms of programming things, designing things, creating installations, still the absolute base of everything we do is conceptual and it combines instructional thinking, it combines instructions with a certain narrative. And that's the common denominator in all the projects that we do. So that's one recurrent theme, hmmm, yeah we have one visual theme, that's the pixel, a pixelated painting or image, because we believe the pixel to be the basic, the core of the digital, at least in the visual field, then... And then certainly, we are always interested in power relations and larger structures, that's also always recurrent through a certain... So we are looking at corporations, governments, technical infrastructures, even intellectual infrastructures, or intellectual components, where you look at the surface and you intuitively feel that there must be a weak point somewhere, there must be something to explore about it, there must be something that you can apply. And that's also something that makes it recursive, a kind of affirmative and dialectic approach towards things. So you overstretch things in order to test, to see what happens if we say Nos, and see what happens if you say very strong yeses, and we just overstretch it and kind of abuse the system in a way that's not designed to cope with, it doesn't know what to do.

I: Would you say that these recurrent elements are patterns that you have in common with the other artists from your generation?

UM: I don't know... certainly not the pixel theme, as that's something very specific that we do, there are a couple of other artists, but I don't know how old they are. The conceptual level, I think, it's a very common theme. But I wouldn't specifically say that this is something that our generation has in common, or the artists in the generations before, I see a lot of it, today as well, holding together very different things, for example, visuals, holding it together under a conceptual level, which is what I really really like in this type of art, that you can just have a description or an idea that you can basically collect a whole variety of things under an ethos, you are then free to do whatever the fuck you want, you just have to kind of package it, you know, it's kind of a marketing approach as well... No, I don't think so.

***** COMMENTS: eclectic community, no governing rules*****

I: Could you please explain to me a bit more in depth your slogan "It's different, because it's fundamentally different"?

UM: We use it as a slogan, but it was derived from the video from the CNN video that was produced to discuss, this twenty seven minutes video that you might have seen, the [V]ote Auction project, where we bid off votes during the 2000 election, and that was actually the answer of the Bureau Secretary to the, I think to the Secretary of States of California, and he asked what the difference was between just pure votes -selling and buying, and kind of the corruption of the voting process, so he answered that "it's different, because it's fundamentally different", which has no... It doesn't say anything, it just tried to make a differentiation by linguistically reinforcing... Basically, it's nothing, really, he tries to point out a difference with a language that obviously is not able to make a difference, because there isn't really a difference, but he says, "It's different, because it's

fundamentally different”, so much different. So we use that as a slogan for UBERMORGEN, but it’s just a... For me, it’s an aesthetic thing, it’s again conceptually and contextually bound to the project, but then it’s basically also just an ironic comment maybe about... I don’t fucking know, you kind of have to understand that we work, on the one side we work super conceptually and we really know what we’re doing, in a very structured way, and on the other side, we’re just pure punk, we just fuck around, we don’t give a shit, we just take things intuitively and put them on top of other things, and then we just see what happens, that’s what we mean by experiment. So with this slogan, we didn’t intend to say that much, it was just a beautiful saying by a stupid person, and we just re-contextualised it on to of UBERMORGEN, to screw around with the perception of what we do, and what we want to be and say. And it’s kind of a state of constant insecurity and ambiguity that people, they are not supposed to know, and that’s really important for us, they’re not supposed to know what we think, and how we do things, and what we want them to think - because we don’t, we don’t care. We’re just experimenting. And then, it comes back, and it comes back immediately, or with questions like yours, and you think about it, “what the fuck did they mean with that?”, does it actually have any kind of context, and then you say well, no, actually no, I mean, it has a context to the project, but then that’s about it. And maybe that’s more along the line of more traditional of whatever, DADA, or something like that.

I: It’s just that it’s difficult, when you see the massive impact that your projects have had, it’s difficult to imagine that there are no particular political goals.

UM: I was just in Zurich, at a conference, a really interesting conference about the practice of, about cases that have been in front of the court, so it was a conference about artworks and the legal consequences, and I was talking about the [V]ote Auction Project, and what struck me the most was that the lawyer I was working with, he couldn’t understand that we didn’t even read the legal documents we received, and then it came to my mind that... I mean Liz has a more capable brain in terms of grasping things, she has a very... She is very analytical, so she can actually process and do things, but sometimes we don’t even talk about it, she just does her thing, and I do mine, and then, sometimes it’s really by chance, sometimes it’s kind of chaotic, and it’s by chance, whether she puts her stuff out or I put mine, we can even put out contradictory things, one time we actually did that. And I didn’t read the stuff, I had no idea, and later, the way it came out, is that actually, it was on purpose, but I didn’t know, it was an intuitive thing, and we were not accepting the American courts, who were ruling over us, because actually, on a juridical level, they had no jurisdiction over us. Now, if you think about the project with the vote auctions, it’s two people running a media operation that reaches five hundred million people, that costs American taxpayers million of dollars in legal fees because all these judges had to work, and realising junctions and stuff like that, and everyone has to work and find out what the fuck this project is. And we had to fight on legal levels, as our domains were taken away from us, we had to fight against potential extradition to the U.S, so that we don’t go to prison. We had to steer the project in a way, we had to finance the whole thing, we had to do collaborations, we had to put out press releases, the websites, the code, everything, and it was just two people on a period of four months, it’s not possible. That’s also something that you have to learn as a human being, I think, that at a certain level, that’s why I like alcohol, but because I’m an alcoholic, I can’t drink anymore so that’s one thing, that alcohol can reduce things to a more intuitive level, you don’t think, but you act, according to your emotions, but because you use alcohol, the emotions are not blocked, you can actually feel them. Because if you don’t use alcohol, you are completely detached from your emotions, and your intelligence. So there, we were able to use, because it’s the only thing, imagine, we are like computers or network nodes, and there is a massive overload of information, so I don’t know how many millions of pictures we have to process per day, I

mean information, feelings, emotions, etc., you can't rationally process them, it's impossible. So there is no strategical way to deal with it, so what you have to do is that you have to go down, and that's why we are really intelligent beings, because we can go to a level where we mix rational stuff with emotional stuff. And that's kind of an intuition, because you know exactly what you have to do. Sometimes you make mistakes, but you would do that too on a rational level. But then, at an intuitive level, it's so much quicker! You can just do things, you can decide, and you can do things. And this is how we operated this specific project, we didn't know, we never knew what was going to happen next day, we didn't even plan two days ahead, because it was not possible. Too many parameters. How do you wanna judge? How do you want to calculate? You can't. So we'd wake up and we'd say "Hey, let's do that", and that was also the fun of it, having fun was very important, for a project to be a very dynamic and a very interesting project. And that's where it kicks in, and we know, that's what we knew, no political agenda. We were not interested, why the fuck should we be interested? Why? It's obvious, from a personal point of view that the American elections, the actual elections system is corrupt, incredibly corrupt and fucked. I mean, why even talk about it, why even bother about it? We all know. But the conclusion for me was much more interesting. So after four months of crazy shit, I came to the personal conclusion that vote selling and buying is absolutely OK. I'm in favour of it. But that's my personal view. And then, to conclude my longer answer now, then two days ago, the lawyer asked me, because he was really really interested in why we were not giving ourselves up as artists, in the whole project, why were we posing as Eastern European business people. And it was absolutely necessary, otherwise the project wouldn't have worked, from my point of view. And then he asked me: "What if you were in front of a court, would you have claimed the freedom of art and speech?", and I said, "No", because before the electoral day, we started our promotion from the business side, and after November the 7th, we would have changed our strategy and go to the art defense. But that, I could only say it afterwards, at that moment, I could have not known.

I: Was this your favourite project?

UM: I have different favourite projects. This is the most famous one, and this is the most... I mean it was the most intense, on a media level, because we really wanted to research the media interaction, the global media, and how much you can hack into that. No, I think that Liz really likes the Nazi-Line project, for example, where we did the reintegration of neo-nazis and it cast neo-nazis, and also for the both of us, the Super-Enhanced project, about torture, special forms of torture, that was a thing personally really important. Then for me, personally, conceptually, Google Will Eat Itself is an absolute highlight, because I know how much time it required to come up with the most simplistic conceptual frame, and that's the beauty of it. So you work year after year on two sentences, basically. And the way it worked was really really rewarding. Because it's just beautiful. It's like the most essentialised form of literature, or something like that, where the whole book is like just one sentence. It's perfect, it's just beautiful. Yeah, so then I have done work in the 90's, with other people, and Liz too, and I think that was also really important for us, individually. So yeah, there isn't a most important project, but [V]ote Auction, with Google Will Eat Itself have been the most successful ones.

I: May I ask you about your least successful project?

UM: Oh, there's many of them. There's a lot of failure, projects you don't know about, because they completely fail, there's many, many of them. I know that Liz really,

really doesn't like the Amazon Noir project. Not from a visual point of view, it's beautiful, it's really nice, but from a conceptual point of view, and the whole thing, I think she detested. And I don't like... I don't know.

I: I was wondering, if you launch a project and you are not getting the feedback that you were expecting, do you still have the same commitment to finishing the project?

UM: It would be a misunderstanding to think that we expect anything from a project, we don't. Personally - yeah, sure; commercially- yeah, sure, you need, because you kind of made the investment, blah blah. But from an artistic point of view, this is not how we work; we do these things, because we think they are valid questions to ask, and interesting topics to research, and then... First of all, it would be wrong to, it would be strange if the projects created the same reactions, because then we would do something wrong, from our point of view, because we would do the same thing over and over, we really don't want to do that. So yeah, there are some projects which were designed to, you know, they basically came out, and it was pretty much obvious they would stir up a lot of attention, they were quite controversial, and actually, when they came out, nothing happened. And this is part of it, this is neither a negative, neither a positive thing, this is just how it is. That's what we were trying to say as well, you can't plan. I mean, you don't know, you can't and you don't wanna; you don't wanna know before that this is going to be, you know, talked about in this and this way, and that someone is going to hate you, and that it will be discussed in this way, it's not...

I: Did the e-toy project [first project] influenced your practice in any way?

UM: Yeah, it did. Especially in terms of knowledge, in terms of expertise and understanding of - especially of communication, of identity in terms of... With e-toy, it was corporate identity, so the representation... basically of the representation, it doesn't have to be a core of it. Yeah, I learnt how to communicate things and how to work with the media and how to work the channels where things happen. That, then it's also a conceptual thing, I was very strongly influenced, I would say, by our practice within e-toy, to never stop improving the thing, to never be satisfied with like 80% of where you are. Most artists I criticise, I criticise them for their lack of pushing through, of understanding that the last 5% require the same time and energy that you put in the first 95%, because that's where it all happens, that's where it all gets connected, that's where it gets perfect and intense, and that's where the art happens; before, it's just crap, you know, it's just a good idea, but that just you know, you can be stoned and do something. But in the end, that's where the difference is made, and that's what I took from the 90's.

I: I know that you have a background in art, but I was wondering how you came to perform this specific type of art.

UM: Actually, Liz she doesn't have an MBA, so she's not a trained artist, and I can't talk for her, but for me, it was very simple. I was very computer illiterate until about 1993, I was just writing, very very weird experimental texts, on my first Mac laptop I bought in '91 or in '92, and then I learnt how to work and how to think with computers, in 1993-94, and then we were just lucky. It was just that we were there, at the right time, at the right place, and we were introduced to the Internet by some weird engineer in Vienna, who took us and said: "Hey, there's something really interesting you should see" and we were like:

“Yeaaaahhh!”; and then he showed us at like 8 o’clock in the morning at the technical university, in some small chamber, where there was one computer, and said, “This is it”, and I said, “What the fuck, did you wake us up for this shit?”. Then it took me about fifteen minutes, and that changed my life completely, I mean, I understood, suddenly that “this is it, this is gonna change the world”, and I knew that, and in the next twenty minutes I knew that was going to be what I was going to do for the rest of my life, work in this kind of networks, and computers, and with these platforms. And then the art, I wasn’t even interested in art, we were interested in becoming pop stars at the beginning, we wanted to be music internet pop stars, and we didn’t give a fuck about art, we just wanted to do things, and we were doing things in very strange way and this is how it turned out to be art. And we were art students, so we learnt a lot about history, and about how artists have done things in the past, but that only helped me later on to understand and contextualise what we do. So that was more the financial thing, because my parents were paying for me to do what I do.

I: OK. And this is my last question for you, do you think there are any certain qualities that are required in this type of practice?

UM: I think one of the qualities which is the most important in what we do, and it didn’t apply when I was twenty, twenty five and even thirty, but actually later on, to pull through with staying radical, punk in a way, but that’s not a skill, it’s just who you are. I am willing to take risks, huge risks, and I don’t give a shit about a career, or other people, or whatever, the FBI, or neo-nazis, or migrants who are pissed off because you didn’t say the right thing, or don’t care if you offend “correct” people, corporations going after you, anything like that. I think that’s the most important thing. You don’t have to stick to yourself, that’s not important, you don’t have to have any kind of moral or you don’t really need any fucking pompousery in knowing where you’re heading yourself. But you just need to be willing to take certain risks. And also, you have to be able to deal with the freedom you have, which is kinda difficult. It sounds so super nice and cool, that you are completely free to do whatever the fuck you want, but it’s the when what and how, and everything, and it’s also - I don’t say it’s a burden, because I love it - but I think a lot of people would find it difficult to deal with it, as they would have to define everything themselves.

I: OK, thank you very, very much for all your help. It was a real honour talking to you.

UM: No problem, it was my pleasure, I enjoy listening to myself talking!

ADAM ZARETSKY

<http://www.emutagen.com/>

Date: 27 March 2013

Interview Duration: 54:36

BIOGRAPHY

Adam Zaretsky is a bio-artist working as a research affiliate in Arnold Demain's Laboratory for Industrial Microbiology and Fermentation in the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Department of Biology. He received a master of fine arts degree in 1999 from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, where he studied and researched with "transgenic" artist Eduardo Kac. Since then, he has worked with such pioneers of bio-art as Joe Davis, Oron Catts and Ionat Zurr. Zaretsky will also teach an art and biology studio class in fall 2001 as a visiting artist at San Francisco State University. Besides his bio-art installations on which he is working, Zaretsky has created a large body of digital artworks, collage and photography. He lectured at Eyebeam's Digital Day Camp 06 (DDC06) which focused on the relevance of and issues surrounding biotechnology projects by artists and activists.

I= Interviewer

AZ = Adam Zaretsky

I: I've already stalked you on the internet numerous times, but I will have to start with a very general question: could you talk to me a bit about yourself and your work?

AZ: Hm, let's see... Wow, well, I'm mostly interested in... let's say my central theme is about what it means to make art out of living beings. That means to show and exhibit life, whether it's just a freak show or if it's about bringing humans and non-humans to become the same. Then my major sort of focus in this is genetic modifications of the human genome, which is quite unusual for me, considering I am also interested in things like ecology and food, in biotechnology and non-human relations, and the human body only comes in fifth, you know. But because people are so freaked out about the human genome being sacrosanct, and because they are so intimately involved with other organisms, genetically sequenced and these organisms are sacrificed for the good of the industry, I figured we should go ahead and figure out what we want to do with ourselves, instead of everybody else, or all the other bodies.

I: I think I lost you... are you there?

[Connection lost]

AZ: OK, so where were we?

I: So we were talking about your work, and how people freak out... [both laugh]

AZ: I don't know can I say that, they freak out about the human genome, they think it's sacrosanct and they think we shouldn't do anything but repair people genetically. So the goal is to find a cure for cancer and apply it to people after they get cancer. I'm pretty sure that there are people working on more perfect humans... And you know, I try to collect documents, like this one, here, from the European Parliament... This one is called "Making perfect life"... So one of my major things is to find out how to make transgenic humans, you know, even by using DIY biology, methodology, making transgenic humans, and the other one is to talk about, and even make... If people start being "made" perfect, I want to be the person who's able to make them strange, maybe a protest breed of humans. So that, if you are into issues of biopolitics, which is, if you are born under like a flag that you inherited [laughs]

I: Fair enough.

AZ: It's being born under and born within. Yeah, it's a difficult thing, and it's like "Dude, it's not that difficult, you can do it, for like \$2,000 and some volunteers". Do you want to volunteer?

I: Hmmmm, maybe... We'll see at the end of our conversation if you've convinced me! [laughs] You've already touched upon the fact that your work gets political. Could you describe to me a bit more broadly the role of art as a political tool? And also, what intellectual sources are particularly influential for you, as I saw in your PhD that you draw from sources ranging from Freud to Snoop Dogg.

AZ: Hahah, yes. Well, I have arguments with people who are really interested about politics, I don't think that there is such thing as art that is not political. So if you have a beautiful picture, you know, of a bottle of water by your window, you are basically supporting the status quo. I mean, it's nice to have sunlight on my bottle of water, so let's go, this is beauty. And if there might be a cause for alienation in the world, and maybe the division of wealth is unfair and especially if you are hahaha [laughs] on the wrong side of division of wealth... So for these chosen few, that really know how to play ball they are still pretty much representing self employed and depressed, that come from the middle class, and some of them maybe aspire to become real stars, but some of them actually know where they come from and where they go, which is pretty much, you know, lower class, that's what it's like to be really honest. Anyhow, if there isn't such a thing like political art, then making perfect humans by genetical engineering art, the jazzy -jeezdo-geno, actually, is a form of conceptualism, a form of minimalism. I actually include most acts of science as art projects. And I also think that artists, strangely, are a subset of pornography. So we have science, which is like conceptual, minimal art, then art is always political and all that falls under the umbrella of being a form of pornography, which is like showing off to get status, you know, making spectacle and in particular, performing something that hides some sort of politics, letting the politics hide behind this process. That being said, I'm weird, 'cause I'm into tactical media and political art, but I also find that what's behind my politics is also interesting. In other words, it's not just political art. You may have to deal with completely other things, like oral fixations, like I want to put my wallet, see if I can fit it in my mouth. So that's not necessarily... It depends. If you're into multitudes, that might be politics, you know, if you are into let's say, not just panacea, but into pluralism. But I say that because I've been noticing that my politics aren't seamless, I may even be hiding behind politics sometimes.

I: OK. And how would you describe the evolution of the art sphere since you started up to the present moment?

AZ: Well... The art sphere itself, the whole thing?

I: Yes...

AZ: It's a giant sphere! I guess it's proliferating as a business of art buyers all over the world, Miami, London, Beijing. We have a lot of people in this industry that produce series of works that sell for ever, hopefully, increasing prices. I think that a lot of people consider it as a dark, closed market, to choose a couple of artists with some friends and up their price, or down their price and take a tax shelter from it. So a lot of this is just hard shit. You know, they're so many styles, and there are so many investors, and there are small investors and then, I guess, they run their own market. And they also have problems with insider trading and stuff like that. And it's a mockumentary on the global stock market, which is also just a farce, you know. We need money, where does this keep coming from? It comes from making art, it's like a performance thing. These coins, they keep coming! So as far as global performance goes, I think that art is like a subset, I would say it's a mockumentary of the performance called market capitalism. It shows it for what it really is, which is insider training and fluff, a lot of bullshit. As far as the tactical media art scene... is that what you are aiming at?

I: Yeah, that was my next question!

AZ: Well, I mean, a lot of tactical media artists have trouble in actually taking seriously their role as artists, as you can see, but it is a venue, you know, a lot of people also prefer to have a very public venue, a street-level venue, an accessible interface, so a butterfly effect, some really good documentation and online access, they want to be accessible to more than museums. But I would say, hmmm, I'm gonna start with my trouble with tactical media art aesthetics, and I'd like to pick up on Heath Bunting a little bit, there is a tendency, most tactical media art is colourless and cheap and that's partially because of a feeling that we shouldn't waste money on art, because real people and real politics have real sufferings, so it's a grim topic, and we shouldn't make a display on stage that's colourful and exuberant, because that's not the issue. The issue is not that I'm a peacock, the issue is that people need fairness and justice. But having travelled around the world a couple of times, I noticed that the protest art of a particular some sort of non-protestant countries is a lot less austere. In other words, if you go to Haiti and you look at their protest art, it's filled with colours. Maybe because they're in the tropics, but maybe it's because art *provera* doesn't have to be poor looking, and it doesn't have to be like literally, like a bucket on a pedestal with a fluorescent light over it, it actually is allowed to be festive, even if the issues are painful. There is no reason to make things look inceptual and minimalist, just because you're critiquing capitalism. That doesn't mean it shouldn't happen, I just noticed a sort of pattern in tactical media, where aesthetics are torn down and there is a thick sort of art *provera* that's trying to gain a kind of solidarity, but actually, although the points are clear, the invitation is not. But there are plenty of exceptions as well. The Yes Men are loud, they are quite colourful, they spend a lot of money on their outfits, because they think it's worth it, and they have this crazy eye shit. But there is a lot of this DIY biology look, an amateur science look, there's also this look of what the scientists like the best, which is, "I did this for two bucks, and I made an MRI with two dollars with spare parts", and that's cool and everything for engineering, but actually that's not the correct example of how momentary inequality is spilled out in these states. That's my grief, but other than that, I don't know, I live in the U.S., I've been, you know, working with this biowork stuff since 1999, something like that. And once Steve Kurtz had been taken on a trial by the FBI, you know, really, seriously, that's XXX (15:40), and you, know, in a court case that was, it was shown to be mismanaged, as they dropped the charges, but after four years and much litigation... After that, the FBI asked most of the DIY bio and DIY bioart people to identify themselves and report on themselves, which is very 1994-ish, and the FBI seem to like that kind of fluff... And self reporting is... That would be great, but I know that there are some DIY biology places, like Drum Space in New York that have around their own FBI agent,

who's there whenever he wants to be, and who's kind of mingling. And because of that, people are a little more scared of techno-free thinkers, and the green bio-tech, and you know, there's this worry that activism equals terrorism. Because we're loopy-goopy, we don't support the status quo, and we actually want to push the limits of society, the border of... and to walk the lines sometimes, but... It's interesting, if you're giving, like, you know, if you're working in research, your job is actually to go to the edge of the known and go fishing. But if you're doing it without funding, it's perceived as being social distortion. And that, I wish it was true. I mean, I'm not sure that it's true, or if it's just another, you know, artificial enemy created. I would hope that there is some social distortion caused by agitation propaganda, but I don't know, I looked down at some cases such as Steve Kurtz, I looked down at some activists environmentalists and some activists animal rights people, and I thought "animal rights, environmentalism and bioart, this is like the new unholy trinity for homeland security". Certainly, the climate in universities and the climate when interfacing with corporate scientists is a little bit strange, there is like a... For instance, I sent you the talk from one of the lectures on Superplants, and this guy came up to me before my talk and said "You're not arrested yet? I thought you'd be arrested by now", so yeah, that's friendly fire, so I would say there was the wanted effect. The main effect was that there is a greater fear of becoming tactical media DIY biologist, because you would have to be looking over your own shoulder, even if you're not informing on yourself. There is a bit of fear of having a home raid, or just setting up a studio and not telling anyone, if you're like a small collective, instead of working independently... That being said, I do think, I'm hopeful, you'd think that one of the reasons they picked at Critical Art Ensemble is that they are really, really, really effective and work hard to infiltrate and turn into a more direct action group that sometimes grassroots are an alternative read on the Western Civilization, without a bunch of talk on, you know, anything more than civil disobedience, it can actually be quite effective, and it needs, and the Government may view that they should strike unjustly against these people because they are getting swayed, or people don't give them the reading and they're getting inspired. Anyway, I grew up in Woodstock, New York, so I have like activist parents and I have some resistance, to some just feel-good-hippie activism, and I don't need to have this sort of post-industrial new wave primitive modern formation to, like, some sort of feel-good flower thing from the '60s, you know. But my dad, asked me, when I was a pre-teen, "Oh, if ever you want to join one of these groups, fighting for social change, and somebody that's recently joined your group just happens to have a bunch hand grenades, that person is working for the government". OK, so this is like, it's not a conspiracy theory, but we do live like in a pre-X-files conspiracy hemorrhoid, and actually a lot of those conspiracy theories happen to be real, you know, like the government runs drugs, you know, in order to get money to supply guns to Iran, to get the hostages back after a couple of days extra... You know, it's paid for the hostages to be held a few days later. So it's things like this that are concerning, to say, the least... And on the bright side, I guess, what I am trying to say is that there may be some fear of justice, of effective information and revelation opening, you know, through this kind of art. And maybe for a good reason, maybe it's a fear of positive progress towards, you know, a future of, at least of awareness. Is that alright?

I: Yeah, very good. I was wondering if you could describe and recurrent elements that can be found in your practice.

AZ: Oh, man... I just send you this video, there's another one I'll send you, it's like a discussion, at the end with me and this guy from Russia,... You know, I was talking to you about what's behind the politics, there's a woman, she's a famous science / technology studies person. She teaches at Harvard law, she had dinner with me once and she said, "Alright, I understand you're into bioethics, and you're going to question the industry and

you're going to look at, you know, at regulations and all these legal things, but if you weren't doing all that, would you still be making these moving organisms?". And I said "Yeah, I probably would", and she said "Oh, you know, maybe you might want to take a look at that" [laughs], she was like, you know, like she was about to arrest my kids. So a recurring theme is that I'm sort of torn between looking at the hypocrisy built into the biotech industry and the desire, the need, the understanding of other scientists, the need mutate, to become mutagenic, to become a focus point of mutagenesis, to basically become a chunk of uranium, alright? Some humans are more radioactive than others. Some humans can cause more mutations on Earth. And maybe that means they are doing a lot, you know, like people have implants, maybe doing more than the wild beauty genesis that stays in the lab, as far as it would totally fuck up the environment and the metabolism of the planet, etc., but you understand, an urge to create things and I'm not anti-difference. I like difference, right. I have this feeling that transgenic organisms to me represent like a new mutant world, and that's pretty naive, because I don't think that our environment is holding up the immune system of the planet, it's not holding up to our attacks so well. It seems that's a very anti-ecological statement, but I guess that what I am representing here is that I'm a little torn. I'm unsuited, I'm not an easy read to myself, much, I'm not sort of like, I'm pretty open-ended. And some of that is actually confusion. But hey, confusion is sex, that's what Sonic Youth says, so... Some of the stuff that I said about political actions, like hiding there, you know, when I was a kid, I was put in a BF Skinner, my parents had me in like an air crib for children, BF Skinner air crib, which was a really nice environment compared to a crib, that seems a bit formal, so a lot of my artworks seem to be this urge to get back to my air crib. Like beeing in a credo, making triple containment for GMOs. I basically learnt how to make GMO containment over this last trip to Europe and all I can think about while I'm punching out rubber washers for like corkscrews, and making gas kits and sealing everything with glue, and inside a tube I put another tube and I knew that that was my metaphor for a human. Like a human is a tube inside of a tube, and then I put it inside of a box. And then you cut put it in water, and heat, and air... And I was just think that I was making like a home for myself. That being said, let's see... What was that question again, 'cause I got carried away?

I: I was asking you about recurrent elements in your practice.

AZ: OK, I'm going to say another personal one and then I'll say something that's less personal. I noticed, especially if you look at P-farm... Actually, a lot of my work is hysterical neurosis portrait, which is sort of like this neo-ego bubble persona, which is at best, a fractured ghost of hysteria. And then I have oral fixations, I actually have this need to stick things into my mouth. And maybe that relates to food politics and maybe that relates to non-human relations, you know, because I'm an omnivore and it relates to human, maybe we can make the humans' case more like peaches, or future cannibalism. That's delicious, a human fruit! And that would more like fruit, and human biotechnology, and I guess the non-human peachness and the non-human human, and you know, the question is whether we should we keep these peach humans in captivity, in containment, or whether we should let them in the environment, since they're foreign alien invaders, immigrants from the lab. So I kept talking about all these things to see if my argument could come together, and it comes together. So I tend to talk about biology, and food, and biotechnology, and non-human politics, and the non-human body as one problem.

I: OK...

AZ: OK. So if you can mash them all together in one art project, that's what I'm working on. And if you can see the issues in them, like the issues, I'm sort of saying, GMOs should be, should have their own entities, they should be respected as beings, and also represent a threat to the environment. So that's one thing. Then, food politics and human body politics, that deals more with what we are eating, what it is giving us, as far as disease and if it causes hulkness, and what is physiology? But that's what it means if you switch humans and food. Then, the relationship between technology and food. So what does biotechnology have to do with food? What does it have to do with alienation to non-humans? What does it have to do with our bodies? And what does it have to do with the environment? So I would have to say, and I would emphasise... a lot.

I: OK...Now I am going to ask you the more cheesy questions. What other artists do you appreciate and what do you think it's special about their work?

AZ: Oh, wow! That is a hard one! I tend to look at eco artists and see what they're doing. And see what is cheesy and what is not. So I tend to have a differential... between Andy Goldsworthy and the sort of pretty, having a bunch of leaves... And there are those who are actually into helping understanding biological issues. In the biotech arena, I would say that I am a big fan of the Critical Art Ensemble, I've had my time spent with Eduardo Kac ... And then... I don't know! Who's actually making good art?... I am interested in the real face, the unacceptable face of democracy when it comes to way out of photography, that you can actually find online. I don't fall for that type of art, like "that guy just put three apples in his butt! That's a new one!", you know. It's like excavation, you know, reverse excavation.

I: I told you, the next questions are going to be slightly more cheesy, so can I ask you about your favourite project?

AZ: In the world or that I did?

I: That you did.

AZ: Hmmm... That's confusing! That's really confusing. I don't know... But just that I don't waste your time, I'll go with the one that I'm working on right now, that's a quite exciting project. Because I did make some experiments that I have made before, and I've made a triple containing facility, for like a thousand bucks, I have my own biosafety officer, who's writing on me... And a lot of things led up to it, a lot of compulsivity in this, there was some genetically modified plant production, and I made a video and put it online, I had an interview with a scientist, that's very interesting, you know, I'm asking him "Are youuu a mutagen?"; he's like "Yes!"... And then we had this fish injected with chloroplasma, and I kind of liked that there a kind of in-depth process, from stuff decided in the Parliament, and we're doing stuff in labs, to the part you actually get to do the practical stuff... But actually, really, I've already mentioned these two videos that I gave you - that was really weird, because I authored these plasma lunatic fringe, with the class, and we kind of made these... we used a tattoo gun, to tattoo the plasma into the embryos, it's actually like, we were there, acting institution, but we were using tattoo guns to tattoo the embryo of this fringe lunatic plasma ... I kind of wasn't sure if I was on payroll... You know, like those fighting against or supporting the Defense department with my sort of.. what is it called?... with my continual moving unto the outside of the art status, or banker attitude, doing that wasn't

just, you know, jarhead military, and you know, you start to wonder - "how dumb am I?". But the video came out really well, and I think that I did all the paperwork so that I wouldn't get myself in trouble, still got in trouble, even though it was for different things, like, I fought really hard to make this lab legal in this place, because I thought it was a space that might eco. And I'll send you the video of it after we talk so that you can have a look at that... Yeah, OK, what's your next question?

I: Brilliant. Do you have a least favourite project?

AZ: Huh... That's actually funny. I'm not sure if I do. No, I'm like a hopeless optimist, it's not that I think that all my work is great, in that a lot of work I present to the public isn't totally sincere, but what I consider my total inclination to be... I mean, it's made for the public, and it's made with this purpose, but I don't think of it as my actual, sincere way existential mode, because that's too cheesy and romantic, it's like a display of a philosophy. So maybe that's why I don't have a least favourite one, but yeah, that's a weird way of saying "All my projects are fine!", but they are actually full of shit, compared to what I really feel, but, you know, I think you should reserve your own personal romance for certain occasions. Maybe if it's meant to come out, it will come out of my "authentic closet".

I: [laughs] And let's say that a project doesn't get quite the feedback you were expecting from your audience. Do you have the same commitment to take it to a good end?

AZ: Oh, animosity... I actually think I don't get enough criticism... I think that I would actually have to fake my own assassination. 'Cause, you know, I'm playing pretty hard, but I also think that people can really, pretty well... In some ways I'm a bit caught between different tactical stances, although I know, I know that Critical Art Ensemble is honest. And they sometimes use parody, but they're actually also quite authentic, I mean, what they're saying is what they're saying, they're quite upfront. So like the Yes Men, I appreciate them a lot, they're doing high comedy, but they're also revealing a cause. You know, there is a question of, for me there is a question of whether or not I'm doing high comedy and parody, or whether I'm doing actuality, which is, let's say, that I am co-opted. So that this is like a question of... This is like the way that the politics of using actual biology in your art and tactical parody, one hit into each other, and collide and don't fit - it's actually one of my most uncomfortable and my most resilient places of cultural interpellation. And that's because if you do something as a high farce to make fun of, you know, the sort of corporate mega goofs, by basically, actually doing the same things as a scientist does, going to the lab and practice the procedures, and you do them but you do them for nonchalance, as supposedly, art is just frivolous, especially from a scientific standpoint, then you might just be mocking it up, making it worse, right? Like, we're worrying about making the technology more acceptable for the public, while trying to keep them more critical, you know, like normalising it through practice, and criticising it through your view. And then, there's... I mean, there is a rift between virtual crisis and experimental acceptance, right? And I like that line, when I talk to people, I say that sometimes I walk the line between being a devil advocate and being the devil. I was talking to someone last night and I was saying that I've been taking one step over the line and then one step over the other line, I took a step over them both. But by keeping walking the line between being a devil advocate and being a devil, I actually got one fifth firmly in both. And I don't know why, maybe I'm half corrupt, but I kind of like that, I like to take that stroll, to get over that line over and over, so... Yeah, I think criticism is due, but I guess it's not without

knowledge that I'm doing that, with that sense of playfulness, but it's also red in tooth and claw, I mean, that's one of the problems, that it's actually worrying, right? I mean, I met Donna Haraway and I think she thinks I'm a cynic. Even when they write back to me, they say "Oh, I love the work" and then be like [onomatopoeic sound], you know, if that was art, what I was saying, you know, and there's some truth to that too. So yeah, this is one of my themes, I have a powerful "whether pattern" of misinterpretation. You know, it might be actually activism in retrograde, you know [laughs]. We'll see, we'll see if I burn up and re-entry.

AZ: Do you think there are any particular skills or qualities required in your practice?

I: Well... I mean, it took me until I was thirty five to be able to actually sit in the lab and do a process, like a two, three-hour process, without fucking up and that was because I was pretty wild, I had a lot of energy, a lot of crazy dog energy, and drunken money energy, and i couldn't really sit down and do a sitting. Some people come to meditation, I came to the lab and I became vigilant. And if I have to do a process, that's like tic-tac, tic-tac, tic-tac, make sure it's under control, tip it in the fire, you know, put it back in the alcohol then put it in the fire, and you have to do everything right, to me that was like cachexia... So it's a ritual process and it took me to a certain age to be able to do it, and now, if you can learn basic lab skills, then that helps. Because most scientists aren't teaching you basic lab skills, you're actually going to interface with them as some equal and be like "I can do this", "I wanna learn how to operate that machine", you know, "I want to see what you're standing next to that machine all day long for, waiting for an answer". You know, what is it doing in there, what is that? The other thing I think is that if you're an anthropologist, looking to go undercover, you should become a biologist, because in the science world there's so much resistance to people that do science technology study critique... of, you now, of objectivity from the roots and up and all that sort of stuff. And there is so few, science technologists, people that actually go ahead and do the anthropological right thing, and do participatory observation and hang out in the lab. The best way to hang out as an outsider is to not be doing science, but to be doing art. And it's a way better cover for me, because that means I have something to talk to you about, more than does science really exist? It's much easier like that, you know. So I would say, there is something, some sort of acting, of course, I feel like I'm doing some sort of deep cover emotion reporting from the streets of the lab, you know. Other than that, I mean, you know, unfortunately, the problem with politics is that our politics can be represented in this media as others, right? So you can have like utopian voyeurists, competing with neo-fascists, competing with "extremofiles", or how do you say, exo-biological transhumanists, which is that they just want to get off the planet and not be human anymore, you know, I mean.. And then there's the perfectionists. These people who say [funny voice], "I made the world this with synthetic biology", and you're like, you know, howwww... So I don't think you need certain politics, unfortunately, to engage. You know what, it does help to really - this is gonna sound weird - at least to turn off an objective, you know, at least if you're going into a laboratory, don't go preconceived, actually. I guess it is like an anthropologist, actually going to talk to people, because, all scientists are people. And just as all art is political, so is all science, but also so are scientists, whether they know it or not. And I met quite a few political, off the bench, even if they think they're on the bench, because they think they're being objective and stuff like that, as soon as they walk to a bar, they talk to you about, you know, "This is fucked up", "we need a big revolution", and stuff like that. So, you know, it's not... Many of them have anti-corporate attitudes, you know, a lot of them are like "I didn't go into this to make shampoo!" or "I didn't go into this to represent Lukoil", or something like that. So, you know, just as there are like racists, go to the biology lab, there are people that are interested in what you may be saying, and you know, you can learn a lot.

I: OK. And now, I think this will be my last question.

AZ: Say something weird.

I: Other people that I've interviewed mentioned research and attending conferences as quite important elements. How important are these in your practice?

AZ: Wow! Well... I'm kind of a stand-up comedian, so it's really important for me to go up in the crowd and speak, I think that, you know, I think I like the awkwardness and disgust that comes from some of my ways of treating people. So it's pretty important, especially that a lot of my art isn't seen, you know, a lot of it has to do with weird litigation and paperwork, paper trails, you know, and it seems like a giant book, it comes eventually to like a two thousand page book. Yeah, I think it's pretty important, I just had one of the weirdest ones, the one I sent you this morning. It was almost as if... You know, I got hired by a consortium that was corporate funded, to be the artist that's critical of the idea of genetically engineered algae, in the name of, in cruising photosynthesis for sustainable biofuel. And I had to really wrap my head around it, and I couldn't just go up and make my comedy routine, because i actually kind of wanted to let people know where I stood. Like, people at home, like my mom, I kind of had to come out as being somewhat resistant to the idea of bioengineering of the planet with sustainable GMOs, as a way to alleviate the panic of people like... You know, part of the talk was, you know, when an oil company wants to switch to genetically modified oil that's made from green stuff, to make plastic out of it, too, is it actually green, or is it greenwashing - and I had actually talked about that. "Alright, I am talking about these issues right now!", and it was all awkward that I was almost forced into honesty. Maybe that was awkward, because I went there, but it was too painful not to. But yeah, I think it's kind of important to me... Yeah... Is that it?

I: Yeah, that's! Thank you very much!

AZ: Yeah, no problem! If you have any other questions you can contact me.

I: Great, thanks a lot!

APPENDIX 2: SAMPLE OF NOTE SHEET TAKEN DURING THE INTERVIEW

ADAM ZARETSKY (P.3)

problem with politics → have ^{utopian} boyenists,
 competing fascists, extremists
 + perfectionists → you are engaged
 with the politics → relate to Foucault
 power // resistance exist everywhere
 participate in the politics whether you want it or not

! walk the line between the advocate of the
 devil // cross that line all the time

↓
 again there is no DIALECTICAL OPPOSITION
 'good // bad' → he crosses the line is
 against & within the Empire (Hardt &
 Negri)

"maybe I am half corrupt" → blurred
 boundaries in the resistive act

→ purpose to normalize technology through
 practice ↔ regimes of practice
 (Foucault)