

LEA  
BOOKS

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The Leonardo Electronic Almanac is proud to announce the publication of its first LEA book, titled "Red Art: New Utopias in Data Capitalism." The publication investigates the relevance of socialist utopianism to the current dispositions of New Media Art, through the contributions of renowned and emerging academic researchers, critical theorists, curators and artists.



# RED ART

New Utopias in Data Capitalism

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LEONARDO ELECTRONIC ALMANAC BOOK, VOLUME 20 ISSUE 1

# Red Art: New Utopias in Data Capitalism

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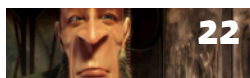
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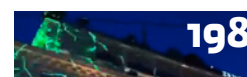
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# Commonist Red Art: Blood, Bones, Utopia and Kittens

**Does Red Art exist? And if so, who creates it and where can we find it?** This special issue of the Leonardo Electronic Almanac addresses these questions and collates a series of perspectives and visual essays that analyze the role, if any, that Red Art plays in the contemporary art world.

Red Art, these are two simple words that can generate complex discussions and verbal feuds since they align the artist to a vision of the world that is 'Red' or 'Communist.'

Nevertheless, even if the two little words when placed together are controversial and filled with *animus*, they are necessary, if not indispensable, to understand contemporary aesthetic issues that are affecting art and how art operates in the context of social versus political power relations within an increasingly technological and socially-mediated world.

Red Art could be translated – within the contemporary hierarchical structures – as the art of the powerless versus the art of the powerful, as the art of the masses versus the art of the few, as the art of the young versus the old, as the art of the technological democrats versus the technological conservatives, as the art of the poor versus the art of the rich... Or it could be described as the art of the revolutionary versus the status quo. In the multitude of the various possible definitions, one appears to stand out for contemporary art and it is the definition of art as bottom-up participation versus art as top-down

prepackaged aesthetic knowledge. And yet, what does Red Art stand for and can it be only restricted to Communist Art?

The contemporary meaning of Red Art is different from what it may have been for example in Italy in the 1970s, since so much has changed in terms of politics, ideology and technology. It is no longer possible to directly identify Red Art with Communist Art (as the art of the ex Union of Soviet Socialist Republics or of its satellite states and globalized Communist political parties which were and continue to be present in the West – albeit inedulcorated forms) nor as the art of the left, but there is a need to analyze the complexity of the diversification and otherization of multiple geopolitical perspectives. <sup>1</sup>

If today's Red Art has to redefine its structures and constructs it becomes necessary to understand who is encompassed within the label of Red Artists and what their common characteristics are. Red Artists – if we wanted to use this category – and their aesthetic production cannot be reduced to the word 'Communist,' borrowing passé ideological constructs. An alternative to the impasse and the ideological collapse of communism is the redefinition of Red Art as the art of the commons: **Commonist Art.** <sup>2</sup> If Red Art were to be defined as the art of the commons, Commonist Art, thereby entrenching it clearly within technoutopias and neoliberalist crowd sourcing approaches for collective participation, this would provide a contradictory but functional framework for the realization of

common practices, socially engaged frameworks, short terms goals and 'loose/open' commitments that could be defined in technological terms as *liquid digital utopias* or as a new form of permanent dystopia. <sup>3</sup>

The XXIst century appears to be presenting us, then, with the entrenched digitized construct of the common versus the idea of the Paris Commune of 1871, thereby offering a new interpretation of the social space and an alternative to traditional leftist/neoliberal constructs. The idea of the common – as an open access revolving door, is opposed to the concept of the commune – as a highly regulated and hierarchical structure.

The 'semantic' distingo between commons and communes becomes important since both terms are reflections of constructions and terminological frameworks for an understanding of both society and art that is based on 'likes,' actions and commitments for a common or a commune. The commitment, even when disparagingly used to define some of the participants as click-activists and armchair revolutionaries, <sup>4</sup> is partial and leaves the subject able to express other likes often in contradiction with one another: e.g. I like the protests against Berlusconi's government and I like the programs on his private TVs.

I find the idea of the commons (knowledge, art, creativity, health and education) liberating, empowering and revolutionary, if only it was not expressed within its own economic corporative structures, creating further layers of contradiction and operational complexities.

The contradictions of contemporary Red Art and contemporary social interactions may be located in the difference between the interpretations of common and commune – the commune upon which the Italian Communist Party, for example, based its foundations in order to build a new 'church.'

The relationships in the commune of the Italian communists (oxymoronically defined Cattocomunisti or Catholic-communist) rests in faith and in compelled actions, in beliefs so rooted that are as blinding as blinding is the light of God in the painting *The Conversion of Saint Paul on the Road to Damascus* by Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio.

*[...] and from the leadership an aggressive unwillingness to allow any dissent or deviation. 'That time produced one of the sharpest mental frosts I can remember on the Left,' the historian E. P. Thompson would recall from personal knowledge of the CP... <sup>5</sup>*

It is this blind faith that has generated the martyrs of communism and heretical intellectuals, accusations from which not even Antonio Gramsci was able to escape. The vertical hierarchical structure of the commune and of the Communist Party produced heretics and immolations, but also supported artists, intellectuals, academics and writers that operated consonantly with the party's ideals: people that sang from the same preapproved institutional hymn sheet.

**Stefania:** *This young generation horrifies me. Having been kept for years by this state, as soon as they discover to have two neurons they pack and go to study, to work in the US and London, without giving a damn for who supported them. Oh well, they do not have any civic vocation. When I was young at the occupied faculty of literature, I oozed civic vocation. [...] I have written eleven novels on civic duty and the book on the official history of the Party.*

**Jep Gambardella:** *How many certainties you have, Stefania. I do not know if I envy you or feel a sensation of disgust. [...] Nobody remembers your civic vocation during your University years. Many instead*

*remember, personally, another vocation of yours that was expressed at the time; but was consumed in the bathrooms of the University. You have written the official history of the Party because for years you have been the mistress of the head of the Party. Your eleven novels published by a small publishing house kept by the Party and reviewed by small newspapers close to the Party are irrelevant novels [...] the education of the children that you conduct with sacrifice every minute of your life ... Your children are always without you [...] then you have - to be precise - a butler, a waiter, a cook, a driver that accompanies the boys to school, three babysitters. In short, how and when is your sacrifice manifested? [...] These are your lies and your fragilities.* <sup>6</sup>

To the question, then, if Red Art exists I would have to answer: YES! I have seen Red Art in Italy (as well as abroad), as the Communist Art produced in the name of the party, with party money and for party propaganda, not at all different from the same art produced in the name of right-wing parties with state or corporate money – having both adopted and co-opted the same systems and frameworks of malfeasance shared with sycophantic artists and intellectuals.

In order to understand the misery of this kind of Red Art one would have to look at the Italian aestheticization of failure – which successfully celebrates failure in the *Great Beauty* by Paolo Sorrentino when the character of Stefania, and her ‘oozing civic duty,’ is ripped apart. It is a civic responsibility that is deprived and devoid of any ethics and morals. <sup>7</sup>

This is but one of the multiple meanings of the concept of Red Art – the definition of Red Art as Communist Art, is the one that can only lead to sterile definitions and autocelebratory constructs based on the ‘aesthetic obfuscation of the lack of meaning’ as a

tool for the obscurity of the aesthetic to act as a producer of meaning when the artist producing it is inept at creating meaning. <sup>8</sup> Even more tragically, Red Art leads to the molding of the artist as spokesperson of the party and to the reduction of the artwork, whenever successful, to advertising and propaganda.

Commonist Art, founded on the whim of the ‘like’ and ‘trend,’ on the common that springs from the aggregation around an image, a phrase, a meme or a video, is able to construct something different, a convergence of opinions and actions that can be counted and weighed and that cannot be taken for granted. Could this be a Gramscian utopia of re-construction and re-fashioning of aesthetics according to ‘lower commons’ instead of high and rich ‘exclusivity,’ which as such is unattainable and can only be celebrated through diamond skulls and gold toilets?

Commonist Art – the art that emerges from a common – is a celebration of a personal judgment, partially knowledgeable and mostly instinctive, perhaps manipulated – since every ‘other’ opinion is either manipulated by the media or the result of international lobby’s conspiracies or it can be no more than a reinforcement of the society of the simulacra. Conversely, it may also be that the image and its dissemination online is the representation of a personal diffidence towards systems of hierarchical power and endorsement that can only support ‘their own images and meanings’ in opposition to images that are consumed and exhausted through infinite possibilities of interpretation and re-dissemination. <sup>9</sup>

If Commonist Art offers the most populist minimum common denominator in an evolutionary framework determined by whims, it is not at all different from the minimum common denominator of inspirational/aspirational codified aesthetics that are defined by the higher echelons of contemporary oligarchies that

have increasingly blurred the boundaries of financial and aesthetic realms.

Commonist Art – if the current trends of protest will continue to affirm themselves even more strongly – will continue to defy power and will increasingly seek within global trends and its own common base viable operational structures that hierarchies will have to recognize, at one point or the other, by subsuming Commonist Art within pre-approved structures.

Red Art, therefore, if intended as Commonist Art becomes the sign of public revolts, in the physical squares or on the Internet. It is art that emerges without institutional ‘approval’ and in some cases in spite of institutional obstacles. Gramsci would perhaps say that Commonist Art is a redefinition of symbolic culture, folk art and traditional imageries that processed and blended through digital media and disseminated via the Internet enable Red Art to build up its own languages and its own aesthetics without having to be institutionally re-processed and receive hierarchical stamps of approval.

Red Art can also be the expression of people whose blood and tears – literally – mark the post-democracies of the first part of the XXIst century. Non-political, non-party, non-believers, <sup>10</sup> the crowds of the Internet rally around an argument, a sense of justice, a feeling of the future not dominated by carcinogenic politicians, intellectuals and curators, that present themselves every time, according to geographical and cultural spaces, as Sultans, Envoys of God, or even Gods.

Red Art, the Commonist Art that perhaps is worth considering as art, is the one that is self-elevated, built on the blood and bones of people still fighting in the XXIst century for justice, freedom and for a piece of bread. Art that rallies crowds’ likes and dislikes based

on the whims of a liquid Internet structure where people support within their timelines an idea, a utopia, a dream or the image of a kitten. <sup>11</sup>

This piece of writing and this whole volume is dedicated to the victims of the economic and political violence since the beginning of the Great Recession and to my father; and to the hope, hard to die off, that some utopia may still be possible.

**Lanfranco Aceti**

*Editor in Chief, Leonardo Electronic Almanac  
Director, Kasa Gallery*



## REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Larry Ray, "At the End of the Post-Communist Transformation? Normalization or Imagining Utopia?" *European Journal of Social Theory* 12 (August 2009), 321-336.
2. Commonism was used by Andy Warhol. In this essay the word is rooted in Internet 'commons,' although similarities, comparisons and contiguities exist with the earlier usage. "Thus Warhol's initial preference for the term 'Commonism' was as ambivalent, and ambiguous, as the oscillating signs 'Factory' and 'Business.' Although it flirted with connotations of the 'common' with the 'Communist' (from cheap and low to 'dignity of the common man'), the term betrayed no hidden, left-wing agenda on Warhol's part." Caroline A. Jones, *Machine in the Studio: Constructing the Postwar American Artist* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 205.
3. "For one thing, utopia has now been appropriated by the entertainment industry and popular culture – what is termed the contemporary liquid utopia – as a kind of dystopia." Anthony Elliott, *The Contemporary Bauman* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007), 17.
4. The blurred lines between real and virtual do not exempt click-activists or armchair revolutionaries from the persecutions and abuses of the state police. The sitting room within one's home becomes the public space for conflict and revolts. One example of many around the globe: Alexander Abad-Santos, "Turkey Is Now Arresting Dozens for Using Twitter," *The Wire*, June 5, 2013, <http://www.thewire.com/global/2013/06/turkey-twitter-arrests/65908/> (accessed January 10, 2014).
5. David Kynaston, *Austerity Britain, 1945-1951* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 342.
6. The English translation from the Italian is from the author. *La Grande Bellezza*, DVD, directed by Paolo Sorrentino (Artificial Eye, 2014).
7. "Anti-communism was never accepted as the moral equivalent of anti-fascism, not only by my parents but also by the overwhelming majority of liberal-minded people. The Left was still morally superior." Nick Cohen, *What's Left?: How the Left Lost its Way* (London: Harper Perennial, 2007), 3. La questione morale or the 'moral issue' in English is the problem identified by Enrico Berlinguer and that questioned the role of the Communist party and the Left in general in Italy. The moral issue has not been resolved to this day and is at the core of the current impossibility to distinguish between the ideological frameworks of Left and Right – since both political areas are perceived as equally and intrinsically corrupt as well as tools for an oligarchic occupation of democracy. For the original interview in Italian of Enrico Berlinguer see: Eugenio Scalfari, "Intervista a Enrico Berlinguer," *La Repubblica*, July 28, 1981 available in "La questione morale di Enrico Berlinguer," Rifondazione Comunista's website, <http://web.rifondazione.it/home/index.php/12-home-page/8766-la-questione-morale-di-enrico-berlinguer> (accessed March 20, 2014).
8. "Under the surface of images, one invests bodies in depth; behind the great abstraction of exchange, there continues the meticulous, concrete training of useful forces; the circuits of communication are the supports of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge; the play of signs defines the anchorages of power; it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it..." Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in *The Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture Reader*, ed. Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004), 78.
9. There are those who think that the image is an extremely rudimentary system in comparison with language and those who think that signification cannot exhaust the image's ineffable richness. Roland Barthes, "Rhetoric of the Image," in *Visual Culture: The Reader*, ed. Jessica Evans and Stuart Hall (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 33.
10. Non-believers stands for skeptics and does not have a religious connotation in this context.
11. Lanfranco Aceti, *Our Little Angel*, Lanfranco Aceti Inc., personal website, January 10, 2014, <http://www.lanfrancoaceti.com/portfolio-items/our-little-angel/> (accessed January 10, 2014).

## Changing the Game: Towards an 'Internet of Praxis'

There is a new spectre haunting the art world. Not surprisingly, it has been put forward in recent articles, panel discussions and books as the 'ism' that could, possibly, best describe the current dispositions of contemporary art. The name of the spectre is "post-internet art."<sup>1</sup> Unlike, however, its counterpart that was released in the world by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in 1848,<sup>2</sup> this contemporary spectre has not arrived in order to axiomatically change the established order of things; conceivably, it has arrived in order to support it.

Post-internet art refers to the aesthetic qualities defining today's artistic production, which is often influenced by, mimics, or fully adopts elements of the Internet. At the same time, the term incorporates the communication tools and platforms through which contemporary artworks reach their intended (or non-intended) audiences. Notably, in his book *Post Internet* (2011), art writer Gene McHugh suggests that regardless of an artist's intentions, all artworks now find a space on the World Wide Web and, as a result, "[...] contemporary art, as a category, was/is forced, against its will, to deal with this new distribution context or at least acknowledge it."<sup>3</sup> Quite naturally, this would seem like a strong oppositional force directed against the modus operandi of the mainstream art world. Yet, further down in the same page, McHugh characterizes this acknowledgement as a constituent part of the much larger "game" that is played by commercial galleries, biennials, museums and auction houses.

Thus, there are inevitable contradictions and challenges in the role that post-internet art is called to fulfil as a movement and/or as a status of cultural production. Firstly, there is an easily identifiable 'anxiety' to historicize a phenomenon that is very much in progress: the Internet is changing so rapidly, that if we think of the online landscape ten years ago, this would be radically different from our present experience of it. Furthermore, the post-internet theorization of contemporary art runs the danger of aestheticizing (or over-aestheticizing) a context that goes well beyond the borders of art: in the same way that we could talk about post-internet art, we could also talk about post-internet commerce, post-internet dating, post-internet travel, post-internet journalism, etc. Therefore, the role and the identity of the post-internet artist are not independent of a much wider set of conditions. This false notion of autonomy is quite easy to recognize if we think, for instance, of 'post-radio art' or 'post-television art' or, even, 'post-videogames art,' and the inherent structural and conceptual limitations of such approaches.<sup>4</sup>

Most importantly, however, any kind of aestheticization may readily become a very effective tool of depoliticization. The idea of distributing images, sounds and words that merely form part of a pre-existing system of power, inescapably eradicates the political significance of distribution. The subversive potentiality inherent in the characterisation of a network as 'distributed' was systematically undermined over the 1990s and the 2000s, due to the ideological perva-

siveness of neoliberalism during the same period. Distribution – not to mention, *equal* distribution – could have enjoyed a much more prominent role as a natural fundament of the Web and, accordingly, as a contributing factor in any investigation of digital art. Last but definitely not least, one cannot ignore the crucial fact that apolitical art is much easier to enter the art market and play the ‘game’ of institutionalization (and vice versa).

To the question: could the Internet and new media at large become true ‘game changers’ in the current historical conjuncture? What does ‘red art’ have to propose, and how does it relate to the previously described ‘post-internet condition’?

Interestingly, the term “post-internet art” was born and grew parallel to the global economic crisis and the Great Recession of 2009. One of the most important objectives of the social movements that were engendered by the crisis has been the effort to “reclaim” and “re-appropriate.” This aspiration referred not only to economic resources, but also to social roles, democratic functions, human rights, and – of course – urban spaces. Syntagma Square in Greece, Puerta del Sol in Madrid, Zuccotti Park in New York, as well as some of the most iconic public locations around the world saw diverse, or even ‘irreconcilable’ in some cases crowds demand change. Within the reality of Data Capitalism and its multiple self-generated crises, people increasingly felt that they have now been totally deprived of a place (“topos” in Greek).

It is worth remembering that the coiner of “utopia,” Thomas More, chose an island as the location where he placed his ideal society.<sup>5</sup> Any island constitutes a geographic formation that privileges the development of individual traits through a natural process of ‘appropriation.’ This encompasses both the material and the immaterial environment as expressed in the landscape, the biology of the different organisms, and – most relevant to our case – culture. Notably, when it comes to connecting utopianism with the cultural paradigm of new media art, we should not focus merely on the lack of a physical space (as articulated, for instance,

through cyberspace); rather, we should address the juxtaposition of “topos” with a potentially ‘empty’ notion of “space.” The transcendence of space in a ‘digital utopia’ absolutely necessitates the existence of a ‘topos.’ In a similar way to the one that Marx sees capitalism as a stage towards a superior system of production (communism),<sup>6</sup> the construction of a ‘topos’ is a prerequisite for the flourishing of utopianism.

‘Red Art’ can be understood as a tool for the creation of such ‘topoi.’ The lesson that new media artists can learn from the political osmoses catalyzed by the economic crisis is that, in order to be effective, cyberspace should become part of a strategy that combines physical and online spaces, practically and conceptually, whilst taking into account the individual traits of both. The necessity expressed through this combination constitutes (at least partly) a departure from the developing discourses around the ‘Internet of Things’ or the ‘Internet of Places.’<sup>7</sup> Alternatively, or additionally, what is proposed here is the formulation of an ‘Internet of Praxis’ (including, of course, artistic praxis). This approach is vividly reflected in several of the projects examined in this publication, as well as in the theoretical frameworks that are outlined.

Digital art is today in a position to capitalize on the participatory potentialities that have been revealed by the socio-political events that defined the early 2010s. The reconceptualization of cyberspace as a ‘cybertopos’ is a constituent part of this new ground on which people are called to stand and build. Accordingly, the emergence of a culture of ‘post-net participation’ in which digital media transcend physical space by consolidating it (instead of ‘merely’ augmenting it), may allow us to explore “concrete utopias”<sup>8</sup> to a greater extent than ever before in recent times. It is by actively pursuing this objective that we would expect to change the rules of the game. Artists are often the first to try.

**Bill Balaskas**

## REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. The term ‘post-internet art’ is attributed to artist Marisa Olson. See Gene McHugh, *Post Internet* (Brescia: LINK Editions), 5.
2. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels published *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* in London, on February 21, 1848.
3. Gene McHugh, *Post Internet*, 6.
4. The etymological comparison between the terms ‘post-internet art’ and ‘postmodern art’ could also highlight this context. Notably, in the case of this juxtaposition, ‘post-internet art’ puts a tool (the Internet) in the position of a movement (Modernism). If we were to consider the Internet as a movement, then, the natural historical link that would be established through the term ‘post-internet art’ would be with net art. Nevertheless, such a decision would assign net art to a status of ‘legitimization,’ towards which major museums, curators and art fairs have shown a rather consistent hostility. In this instance, historicization becomes a foe, since it would refute a ‘neutral’ relationship of the Web with art. This perspective is closely connected with the formation of an abstract notion of universalism, to which I refer further down (see endnote 8).
5. Thomas More’s *Utopia* was first published in 1516, in Belgium. There are several translations of the book.
6. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, with an introduction by David Harvey (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 51: “What the bourgeoisie therefore produces, above all, are its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”
7. The Internet of Things represents a vision in which physical items become ‘smart’ objects by being equipped with sensors that can be remotely controlled and connected through the Internet. The Internet of Places focuses on the spatial dimension of the capacities that Web 2.0 offers. For an account of the Internet of Things, see Mattern, Friedemann and Christian Floerkemeier, “From the Internet of Computers to the Internet of Things,” in *Informatik-Spektrum*, 33 (2010): 107–121, <http://www.vs.inf.ethz.ch/publ/papers/Internet-of-things.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2014). For an account of the Internet of Places, see Giuseppe Conti, Paul Watson, Nic Shape, Raffaele de Amicis and Federico Prandi, “Enabling the ‘Internet of Places’: a virtual structure of space-time-tasks to find and use Internet resources,” in *Proceedings of the 2nd International Conference on Computing for Geospatial Research & Applications* (New York: ACM, 2011), 9.
8. For more on the concept of ‘concrete utopias’ see Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, tr. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight, 3 vols (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986). Bloch differentiates between ‘abstract utopias’ and ‘concrete utopias,’ associating the latter with the possibility of producing real change in the present. ‘Concrete utopias’ should not be confused with seemingly similar theorizations such as Nicolas Bourriaud’s ‘microtopias,’ which structurally aim at preserving the existing status quo. Bourriaud asserts in *Relational Aesthetics* (2002) that “it seems more pressing to invent possible relations with our neighbours in the present than to bet on happier tomorrows.” Quite evidently, this approach stands far from the universalism that he advocates in his *Altermodern Manifesto* (2009) as a direct result of new technologies and globalization. At a time when neoliberal capitalism was entering its worst ever crisis, Bourriaud chose to largely ignore this context and build on a concept that – in the end – is apolitical and counter-utopian. ‘Post-internet art’ appears to follow a comparably dangerous trajectory.



# Suggestions for Art That Could Be Called Red

**What is Red Art? Or rather: what could Red Art be in today's post-communist, post-utopian world, a world shaken by conflicts engendered by contrary beliefs and ideologies which have little to do with communism?** A world in which countries and societies are disrupted by territorial disputes, and by bloody fights about questions of religious identity, national identity, and ideology? Where communism has been overrun by capitalism with rare exception; where the European left movement is weak. Where the post-industrial era has produced an economic reality that is orders of magnitude more complex, transnational and therefore more difficult to control or change, than history has ever seen. In this situation, can there (still) be art that deals with ideas of communism constructively, or does contemporary art look at communist ideals only with nostalgia?

And let's be clear: is art that simply speaks out against capitalism, globalisation and neo-liberalism from a leftist position – is this kind of art 'red' per se? Do we expect Red Art to be 'red' in content, for instance, in directly addressing topics such as class struggle, the negatives of capitalism and a new neo-liberal world order? And if it does, is it enough to be descriptive or do we want art to be more than that, i.e., provoking, forward-thinking or even militant? In 1970, Jean-Luc Godard drafted a 39-point manifesto *Que faire? What is to be done?* that contrasted the antagonistic practices of making political films and making films 'politically.' It called unequivocally for art that actively takes up the position of the proletarian class and that

aims for nothing less than the transformation of the world. With his legacy, what kind of objectives do we request from Red Art? Do we really still think that art can change the world or is that another idea from the past that has been overwritten by something that we like to call reality? Can art that is for the most part commercialised and produced in a capitalist art market be 'red' at all, or does it have to reject the system established by galleries, fairs and museums in order to be truly 'red'?

Decades ago, when artists started to use new media such as video and the computer, their works were 'new' in the way they were produced and distributed, and changed the relationship between artists and their collaborators as well as between the artworks and their audiences and 'users' respectively. Most of this new-media-based art circulated outside the ordinary market and found other distribution channels. The majority of works were inspired by a quest for the 'new' and consistently broke with old aesthetic principles and functions. Much of it was also driven by a search for the 'better,' by overthrowing old hierarchies and introducing a more liberal and inclusive concept of the world, based on self-determination and active participation. Last but not least the emergence of the Internet brought us a fertile time for new and revisited utopias and artistic experiments dealing with collaboration, distribution of knowledge, shared authorship, and appropriation of technologies. Today we know that neither the Internet nor any other new technology has saved us, but that the hopes for a more demo-

cratic world and alternative economies sparked by it have come true, if only to a minor degree.

So how do artists respond to this post-communist, post-utopian condition? What can be discussed as Red Art in the recent past and present? In this issue of Leonardo we have gathered some answers to these questions in the form of papers, essays and artworks, the latter produced especially for this purpose. Bringing together and editing this issue was challenging because we decided from the start to keep the call for contributions as open as possible and to not pre-define too much. We were interested in what kind of responses our call would produce at a moment when the world is occupied with other, seemingly hotter topics, and it is fascinating to note that the resulting edition quite naturally spans decades of art production and the respective 'new' technologies as they related to ideas of social equality and empowerment – from video art to net art to bio art. This issue shows that the search for alternative ideas and perspectives, and an adherence to leftist ideals is neither futile nor simply nostalgic. But that this search is ever more relevant, particularly at a time when European politics is seemingly consolidating and wars around the world are establishing new regimes of social and economic inequality.

**Susanne Jaschko**

# Why Digital Art is Red

**The divide between the art shown in major museums and art fairs and that associated with the new media scene has been deep and durable.** Many critics have puzzled over it, particularly because there is much that the two realms share, including the desire to put people into unusual social situations. <sup>1</sup> Yet some of the reasons for the divide are plain enough, and they are about money, power and social distinction. The economic divide is across competing models of capitalist activity: the exclusive ownership of objects set against the release of reproducible symbols into networks with the ambition that they achieve maximum speed and ubiquity of circulation. The social divide is between a conservative club of super-rich collectors and patrons, and their attendant advisors, who buy their way into what they like to think of as a sophisticated cultural scene (Duchamp Land), against a realm which is closer to the mundane and more evidently compromised world of technological tools (Turing Land). <sup>2</sup> Power relations are where the divide appears starkest: in one world, special individuals known as artists make exceptional objects or events with clear boundaries that distinguish them from run-of-the-mill life; and through elite ownership and expert curation, these works are presented for the enlightenment of the rest of us. In the new media world, some 'artists' but also collectives and other shifting and anonymous producers offer up temporary creations onto a scene in which their works are open to copying, alteration and comment, and in which there is little possible control of context, frame or conversation.

This description of the divide has been put in extreme terms for the sake of clarity, and there are a few instances of the split appearing to erode. <sup>3</sup> Yet its persistence remains one of the most striking features of the general fragmentation of the fast-growing and globalising art world. That persistence rests on solid material grounds, laid out by Marx: the clash of economic models is a clear case of the mode and relations of production coming into conflict, and is part of a much wider conflict over the legal, political and social aspects of digital culture, and its synthesis of production and reproduction. <sup>4</sup> Copyright is one arena where the clash is very clear. Think of the efforts of museums to control the circulation of images and to levy copyright charges, while at the same time surrendering to the camera-phone as they abandon the attempt to forbid photography in their galleries.

So where is Red Art and the left in this scenario? Amidst the general gloom and lassitude that has beset much of the Left in Europe and the US, the development of the digital realm stands out as an extraordinary gain. It allows for the direct communication, without the intermediary of newspapers and TV, of masses of people globally – who turn out to be more egalitarian, more environmentally concerned and more seditious than the elite had bargained for. Alexander Cockburn, with his long career in activism and journalism, remarks:

*Thirty years ago, to find out what was happening in Gaza, you would have to have had a decent short-wave radio, a fax machine, or access to those great newsstands in Times Square and North Hollywood that carried the world's press. Not anymore. We can get a news story from [...] Gaza or Ramallah or Oaxaca or Vidarbha and have it out to a world audience in a matter of hours.* <sup>5</sup>

It is hard to ban social media, it has been claimed, because it entwines video fads, kittens and politics (and banning kittens looks bad). So the insight attributed by some to Lenin – that capitalists will sell us the rope with which to hang them – is still relevant. <sup>6</sup>

In an era in which the political and artistic avant-gardes have faded, the affiliation of the art world that is founded upon the sale and display of rare and unique objects made by a few exceptional individuals – in which high prices are driven by monopoly rent effects – tends to be with the conspicuous consumption of the state and the super-rich. <sup>7</sup> Here, the slightest taint of the common desktop environment is enough to kill aesthetic feeling. The affiliation of at least some of new media art is rather to the kitsch, the populist, and to the egalitarian circulation of images and words, along with discourse and interaction. New media artists who push those attachments work against some of the deepest seated elements of the art world ethos: individualism, distinction, discreteness and preservation for posterity (and long-term investment

value). It should be no surprise that they are frequently and without qualification denied the status of 'artist.'

It is also clear why the death of leftist ideas in elite discourse does not hold in new media circles, where the revival of thinking about the Left, Marxism and Communism is very evident. <sup>8</sup> The borders of art are blurred by putting works to explicit political use (in violation of the Kantian imperative still policed in the mainstream art world). <sup>9</sup> Very large numbers of people are continually making cultural interventions online, and value lies not in any particular exceptional work but in the massive flow of interaction and exchange. In that world, as it never could in a gallery, the thought may creep in that there is nothing special about any one of us. And this may lead to the greatest scandal of all: think of the statements that artists who deal with politics in the mainstream art world are obliged to make as their ticket of admission – 'my art has no political effect.' They have to say it, even when it is patently absurd; and they have to say it, even as the art world itself becomes more exposed to social media, and is ever less able to protect its exclusive domain and regulate the effects of its displays. So at base, the divide is economic, but at the level of what causes the repulsion from digital art – that puts collectors and critics to flight – it is deeply and incontrovertibly political. <sup>10</sup> They run headlong from the red.

**Julian Stallabrass**

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# Artists as the New Producers of the Common (?)

by

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## INTRODUCTION

According to Paolo Virno post-fordism is the era of the “communism of the capital.”<sup>1</sup> This notion, which may sound as a political (pseudo-) paradox of our times, describing a capital based on communality, is not a new form of utopia however; it rather implies a new kind of accumulation and creation of value based on the expropriation, or even ‘cannibalism’ as Matteo Pasquinelli would put it, of the common.<sup>2</sup> It refers to the enclosure and capitalization of knowledge, information, affects, codes and social relations that constitute today’s ‘artificial’ common wealth.<sup>3</sup> Produced by the multitude and formed in the contemporary metropoleis as well as in the networked spaces of an interconnected world, the common is multitude’s strength and its Achilles’ heel at the same time. Being abundant, dynamic and diffused, it can only be understood as a derivative of a life in excess, a life open to appropriation and control. The “communism of the capital” can, therefore, be read as an

## A B S T R A C T

*This paper examines a new form of creativity based on the commons, using as a starting point two projects commissioned by the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Athens in 2010. It aims to define the features of this emerging creativity, to locate the challenges it brings to the art world and to discuss its potentiality to influence change in a wider sociopolitical scale. It introduces artists as a new generation of commoners and it examines the role they can play not only by producing the new artificial common – which can be based on knowledge, information and affects – but, also, by introducing new ethics and values.*

oxymoron expressing certain controversies and questionings arising in relation to today’s common wealth. Can multitude’s capacities to think, to produce and exchange information and knowledge escape capitalization? How can this potentiality be reclaimed and by whom? How can a change based on this potentiality derive from within?

In the networked era, and especially in the last decade, a great number of artists in collaboration with theorists, programmers and cultural workers have started developing their work and research on the basis of the common. Providing tools, platforms and modes of collaboration, artists today are contributing to the formation of a contemporary common wealth, which points towards a new definition of the notion. The commons today are not only what we inherit from the previous generations and safeguard for the next ones to come, but also what we produce together and share; for this

reason, this emerging creativity lies at the very heart of the commons. Taking into consideration the growing examples of artistic initiatives and projects being currently developed, a double-sided observation will be attempted in this paper: the focus will be not only on how forms of art encourage a shift of mentality towards the commons, but also on how the art world itself changes through this process.

The starting point for this positioning will be two projects initiated and curated by myself and organized by the National Museum of Contemporary Art of Athens in 2010, the year when Greece started losing its financial independence. Seeking for alternatives in the impasse of late capitalism, *Esse, Nosse, Posse: Common Wealth for Common People* and *Mapping the Commons, Athens* aimed to examine and locate the commons in their two main reservoirs, the internet and the city.

## Esse, nosse, posse common wealth for common people

about / projects / platforms / resources



activism add-ons affective labour ASCII attention economy cinema cognitive capitalism common intellect common knowledge COMMONS communication community copyleft copyright crowdsourcing detaming ephemerality exploitation extension fordism free culture free media free software google identity information society internet distribution labour MTurk net art network news open SOURCE P2P PageRank playbour Post fordism precariat real time recycling self organisation sharing Shipping Social Networks statistics stock market sweatshop Tools Trade transactions video games Virno virtual economies Web 2.0

**Figure 1.** *Esse, Nosse, Posse, Common Wealth for Common People*, 2010, screenshot from the online platform [www.emst.gr/commonwealth/](http://www.emst.gr/commonwealth/). © National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens, 2010. Used with permission.

### ESSE, NOSSE, POSSE: COMMON WEALTH FOR COMMON PEOPLE

*Esse, Nosse, Posse: Common Wealth for Common People* is an online platform that was launched in April 2010, as an open comment to the growing common wealth of the connected society.<sup>4</sup> The title is a reference to the Latin triad “I am, I know, I can,” which having constituted the core of Renaissance’s humanism, today interestingly reappears in order to describe the features of the contemporary multitude;<sup>5</sup> what is important is not only the knowledge itself but also the potentiality for its production and the formation of one’s subjectivity through it, at the same time. Taking this into account, the online platform aimed to refer, through a rich variety of artistic creation, to the motivations and capacities that form the new common wealth and to discuss the controversies and risks lying behind it. To achieve this, *Esse, Nosse, Posse: Common Wealth for Common People* hosted: (a) projects critically commenting on the new forms of networked wealth and (b) initiatives and open platforms based on

free and open software, which encourage exchange and collaboration. Selected texts were also uploaded as resources to provide a context for further discussion.

The issues that were particularly discussed through the projects were the following: the passage from the fordist to the post-fordist society and the transformation of labor (*First of May* by Marcelo Expósito), the immeasurability of the immaterial work conducted in the networks (*User Labor* by Burak Arıkan and Engin Erdogan, the new forms of online labor based on virtual sweatshops (*Invisible Threads* by Jeff Crouse and Stephanie Rothenberg, *Gold Farmers* by Ge Jin aka Jingle), or on crowdsourcing (*Bicycle Built for 2,000* by Aaron Koblin and Daniel Massey, *re\_potemkin* by .-.-.), the necessity for a free exchange of knowledge (*Free Culture Game* by Molleindustria, and *Perpetual Wall* by Dimitris Papadatos), the interweaved charac-

ter of the networked economy (*All over* by Samuel Bianchini), the imbalance of the information society (*Internet art for poor people* by Carlos Katastrofsky, and *MAICgregator* by Nicholas Knouf), and the value of attention economy (*Falling Times* by Michael Bielicky and Kamila B. Richter).

While the above works were discussing the capitalist character of the networked condition, the initiatives and platforms that were introduced invited users to join efforts of collaboration, co-production and sharing of knowledge. Different collectives with significant work towards this direction were listed with representative projects. Such cases were: the *Zero Dollar Laptop* by Furtherfield, which encourages people to recycle their old laptops by offering them to the homeless; the *Bank of Common Knowledge* by Platoniq, which proposes a platform of exchanging services; and Mediashed’s *Gearbox*, which invites people to communicate their low cost products through their database. At the same time, projects with a more specific orientation and goal were also included. Such initiatives were the *P2P art* platform of Anders Weberg, which invites people to participate in the creation of an ephemeral common artwork based on a peer-to-peer logic, or Brett Gaylor’s *Open Source cinema* that invites users to upload and remix their videos online. The Artzilla team has also been included for its web browsers’ modifications and subversions that support freedom and openness, along with the Shiftspace group who, in a similar approach, propose the placement of open source layers above any website. Additionally, the *Feral Trade* network by Kate Rich was also presented as well as the platform of the *Telekommunisten* network, which offers tools and services that can be owned by the ‘workers’ themselves.

A new utopia or a breakthrough in the networked world? This body of projects is only part of an emerging creativity found on the web, which is based on the

idea of the commons and is driven by the will to reorientate users’ capabilities and disposal towards open, liberated environments. The selected works were presented as distinctive examples of a new stance that creators today take. Escaping capitalization, control and appropriation, such efforts propose to users a different mode of engagement and production in the networks. What lies behind them is a call, an urge for a new system of values that can empower the growing common wealth and can be found not only on the Internet, but also within life itself and, especially, in its most lively terrain: the contemporary metropolis.

### MAPPING THE COMMONS, ATHENS

*Mapping the Commons, Athens* was a cartography project that followed *Esse, Nosse, Posse: Common Wealth for Common People* and aimed to trace the commons in the urban environment, examining their role in times of crisis.<sup>6</sup> Conceptualized by the Spanish collective Hackitectura and commissioned by the National Museum of Contemporary Art in Athens, the project studied the Athenian metropolis at a particular historical conjuncture. At the end of 2010, when the project took place, six months had passed following the agreement of the first memorandum with the IMF and the EU and the implementation of the first austerity measures; it was the period that the Greek capital, confronted as the ‘beta’ city of crisis, seemed vulnerable and dynamic at the same time.

Formulated by Hackitectura and myself as a workshop, *Mapping the Commons, Athens* was based on the collaboration among post-graduate students and researchers from the School of Architecture of the National Technical University of Athens, the Department of Communication and Media Studies of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens and from the field of Social and Political Sciences of Panteion Uni-



**Figure 2.** *Mapping the Commons, Athens, Hackitectura, 2010.* Snapshots from the workshop at the National Museum of Contemporary Art, Athens. Photographer: Demetri Delinikolas. Used with permission via the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license.

versity. Theorists, activists and artists with a special interest in the field of the commons were also involved. The scope of the workshop for this interdisciplinary team was influenced by the Italian school of thought and, especially, by the analysis of Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri about the relationship of the commons with the contemporary metropolis. Considering the city as “the source of the common and the receptacle into which it flows,” a cartography of the commons for the city of Athens was attempted in order to highlight the city’s living dynamic and its possibility for change.<sup>7</sup> Participants were therefore invited to turn to multitude’s affects, languages, social relationships, knowledge and interests in order to understand, locate and emphasize commons, which to a great extent were immaterial and abundant, fluid and unstable.

During a period of eight days, the team succeeded in producing a documentation of the urban commons, as part of a research online map, and a number of short video case studies, as part of a video based cartography depicting representative commons found in the city. Under the four categories of natural commons, public spaces as commons, cultural commons and digital commons, different initiatives were mapped, based on the notions of collectivity, sociability, collaboration and sharing. The documentation presented online

is rich and, to a great extent, reflects the emerging and vivid potentiality of the period. Some of the most characteristic examples have been entries for self-managed parks, digital platforms for exchange of services and independent free wireless network providers while others focused on the fundamental commons of language and memory or turned to distinctive elements of the Athenian cityscape, such as the stray animals and the graffiti.

The maps produced are still on view online and remain open to further contributions to anyone interested. Seen by their creators as databases of exchange, the aim was – and still is – to inform the inhabitants about spaces where communities of commoners are formed and to empower the city’s ground for social encounters and experiences. The outcomes of the workshop as well as the progress of the work were documented on a blog and were also presented in the form of an installation at the National Museum of Contemporary Art. The most important outcome of the project however, as identified by the participants themselves, was the realization that a new ‘common’ was produced during the days of the workshop. And this was the knowledge which was collectively produced by the community of creators, students, artists and theorists, while also building a common experience and vision.

**LOCATING THE FEATURES OF A COMMONS-BASED ART**

Taking the works referenced above as examples, one can interestingly locate similarities that assist in recognizing the features of a new form of creativity that emerges on the basis of the commons. Although the works are diverse and might be categorized as net art, game art, software art or as documentaries, interventions, databases and maps, at the same time, they all share a kind of openness and collectiveness that opposes previous ways of perception and evaluation in the contemporary art or new media art scene.

In an attempt to locate and summarize some of the main features of this creativity, the following points could be mentioned as a start:

- » The works, in their wide variety, do not constitute art objects or art installations; they present no certain ‘aura’ and claim no art market value.
- » They, accordingly, do not aim for the awe of the spectator; they do not impress with their aesthetics, techniques or complexity.
- » They claim no authorship and no uniqueness; their power is in their distribution and diffusion.
- » They aim to be direct, understandable and reachable.
- » They address the citizens and users of the cities and the networks and not specifically the art audience, the art institutions or the art collectors.
- » They develop, use and share tools of an open and free culture.
- » They are works that, as Ruth Catlow and Marc Garrett have put it, are led by artistic sensibilities that might incorporate utilitarian or theoretical concerns, but are not governed by them.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of this growing entity of works ultimately seems to be no other than to socialize knowledge. They are works that, as Pasquinelli expressed it, belong to the age of “social reproducibility,”<sup>9</sup> which follows Benjamin’s age of “mechanical reproduc-

tion,” but goes beyond the unlimited reproduction of artistic objects and the loss of the aura of the prototype. Therefore, the challenge for the works of art now seems to be a new one: it is the challenge for a “unicity without aura,” as Virno put it, a “non-original unicity”, that is, “which originates in the anonymous and impersonal character of the technical reproduction.” Art’s new aim, as he explains, is no other but to find the relation between “the highest possible degree of communality or generality and the highest possible degree of singularity, the balance between the most general and the most particular.”<sup>10</sup> Works such as the ones mentioned seem to take a step towards this direction as they refer to the common wealth produced by the general intellect of the many, on the one hand, and underline the importance of the contribution of each singularity, on the other. They are works that overcome art’s ‘artness,’ uniqueness and non-utility, while opening up to spaces of communication, exchange and critical autonomy, in an attempt to find a new balance between collectivity and individuality.

This realization, however, leads to the need for a second definition: who are the creators that seek this new balance expressed as a ‘unicity without aura’ for their works and why?

**IDENTIFYING THE CREATORS OF COMMONS-BASED ART AS THE NEW COMMONERS**

When discussing works based on collectivity, openness and lack of authorship, it readily becomes clear that we mostly refer to creators who are leaving the role of the ‘artist’ and move towards the one of the initiator, the collaborator, the affective worker, the networked creator, or the hacktivist. Often, the creators might not even be artists. They are programmers, architects, lawyers, social scientists or generally people from different fields who see creativity as an

invaluable tool of expression, communication and resistance. This is a new generation of creators that wishes to merge with the 'audience,' blurring preexisting boundaries and hierarchies. Their knowledge might have been gained through collaboration and information exchange in hackerspaces or on online platforms and what they have in common is a form of virtuosity based on social competences and affective potentialities which shapes their virtual and urban interactions. But this virtuosity is an element standing far from notions related to art's unique and exceptional character. For Virno, who assigns to virtuosity a central role within the post-fordist way of being, "each and every individual is, at the same time, the artist performing the action and the audience: he performs individually while he assists the other's performances."<sup>11</sup> This is an element that can be easily recognized in the richness of communication found on the Internet today as well as in multiplicity and polyphony of independent initiatives happening in today's metropolises. Creators working on the commons are not the focal point of interest; they do not wish to be. But what does such a realization mean? Do artists still have a role to play, or do they step back in the name of a new form of creativity, which – by being based on the commons – needs to be rhizomatic and radical?

At this point, it is important to recall some of the fundamental ideas of common wealth, on the one hand, and analyze the actions of the creators being discussed, on the other. "There is no commons without commoning" Peter Linebaugh wrote, highlighting the fact that besides the common goods, the social practices of a community are also needed.<sup>12</sup> There is no commons without the commoners; these are the individuals who not only produce and share the commons, but also establish relationships of solidarity between them and fight in order to reclaim the commons that have been enclosed.<sup>13</sup> While Linebaugh refers to the Magna Carta, the commoners of the

medieval England and the land enclosures, one could, interestingly, juxtapose this sequence to the inhabitants of today's cities and networks with the enclosure of the common wealth produced. This point is also highlighted by Hardt and Negri in their *Declaration*, where they specifically discuss the notion of the commoner in the past and the present:

*The commoner is thus an ordinary person who accomplishes an extraordinary task: opening private property to the access and enjoyment of all; transforming public property controlled by state authority into the common; and in each case discovering mechanisms to manage, develop, and sustain common wealth through democratic participation.*<sup>14</sup>

And if the task of the commoner in the past was to provide access to the natural resources for all, then today as they explain, this task is being transformed to creating "a means for the free exchange of ideas, images, codes, music and information."<sup>15</sup>

The making of the common is, therefore, a process with an affective character and, as it will be argued in this last part of the paper, it is exactly what lies behind the aforementioned works and connects them. In this respect, artists may be considered as the new commoners who, through their actions and initiatives, turn to users' and citizens' potentialities in order to empower them and shape new forms of communities based on the ideas of understanding, collaborating and sharing.

The following acts of 'commoning' could be mentioned in support of this argument:

#### a. The formation of new common spaces.

Either online or in the urban environment, the territories that the artists create are new spaces of social

encounters. The online collaborative platforms, the databases of exchange as well as the workshops and the events being organized aim at offering to users and inhabitants spaces beyond exploitation and control. In an era of an increasing capitalization for both the public and the online space, they constitute counter-proposals for spaces where initiatives can be freely taken and actions can be collectively planned following solely the participants' needs and desires

#### b. The provision and empowerment of tools.

Creators assist users and citizens today by encouraging the use of the tools that they already have in their possession. These tools respond to the need to learn to work with language, codes, ideas and affects, while escaping the appropriation of these elements by third parties on the web and in the city environment. As Holmes notes, "artists, writers, actors, painters, audiovisual producers, designers, musicians, philosophers, architects, all have had to find ways to refuse to let their subjectivity become the mere medium of capital flows, a stepping-stone between money and more money."<sup>16</sup> This 'affectivism' of art, as Holmes names it, connects art to activism and affection and is needed to empower multitude's creativity and resistance.<sup>17</sup>

#### c. The emergence of a new ethos.

For the production of the common, a leap is required "from the individual to the collective," as Hardt and Negri mention. "Being with' is no longer enough"; a "doing with" is necessary, which can spread and teach people how to make decisions.<sup>18</sup> This "doing with" lies behind most initiatives taken by creators working on the commons today, with projects that are based on open processes of collaboration and sharing. Catlow and Garrett have specifically called this new logic as the new ethos of 'DIWO' (Do it with others), which follows the DIY culture of the early net art period. This ethos does not only resist the elitist values and infrastructures of the mainstream art world by developing

a new art context; it also deals critically with issues of monitoring and control of the networked world.<sup>19</sup> Especially for the creators working with free and open software, the fact that the work is complemented by a set of pedagogical approaches associated with the enabling of production by others is an integral part of their philosophy.<sup>20</sup>

#### d. The creation of a new system of values.

Finally and hopefully, through such a process, a new system and a new theory of value can emerge, which may express the desire of the networked multitude for a connectivity liberated from the exclusions of neoliberal capitalism. As life is in excess today, as work and life have become one, creativity is called to bring a new balance based on the ideas of sharing and co-producing. This is clearly stated in the *Telekommunist Manifesto* of Dmytri Kleiner, where he specifically refers to the goal "of a free society without economic classes, where people produce and share as equals, a society with no property and no state, that produces not for profit, but for social value."<sup>21</sup>

Utopian while they might seem, the aforementioned actions that are based on the commons do aim to build the ground for radical social and political changes. New tactics and strategies can be found through users' and citizens' participation in these creative and technical processes. Possibly, in this way, and as Bauwens claims, a new transnational culture can be born with communities based on a different set of values and on a discourse, which – starting from the commons – will respond to the urge for sustainability and solidarity.<sup>22</sup>

#### RECLAIMING A NEW FORM OF 'EXODUS'

Open, participatory and rhizomatic, the new form of art emerging based on the commons seems to have

some of the features that media art had not reached before. Facilitating communication, collaboration and sharing and making primary the potentiality that users and citizens themselves have, it encourages a socio-economic transformation that is possible really only when the many are involved.

Although this new form of creation could be related to earlier movements in the history of art such as Dada for its negation towards artist's authorship, Situationism for its refusal to copyrights, and the movements of institutional critique for challenging museums' and the art market's role, the creativity based on the commons still presents an interesting differentiation. Commons-based art is not necessarily anti-art or anti-institutional. On the contrary, it introduces a new stance for the art world. Museums' structures and hierarchies are not rejected or ignored; they rather are addressed with proposals for new forms of collaboration that need to stay beyond their control. A new condition of creativity is thus proposed, which based on openness and the diffusion of information, it surpasses constraints of ownership and authorship, something that for institutions might have been considered impossible before.

Facing the impasse of late capitalism, artists as commoners seem to ultimately aim for a new form of 'exodus.' This 'exodus,' however, can only come from within and by expressing a collective will for a change. As Negri puts it, the artistic paradox consists today exactly "in the wish to produce the world (bodies, movements) *differently* – and yet *from within* a world which admits of no other world than the one which actually exists, and which knows that the outside to be constructed can only *be the other within an absolute insidedness*." <sup>23</sup> The idea is, therefore, to "pursue a line of flight while staying right here, by transforming the relations of production and mode of social organization under which we live." <sup>24</sup> For this reason, the efforts of the creators to reach out and commu-

nicate ideas and to overcome art's 'artness' assist in the development of a multitude of commoners that can achieve direct experiences of cooperation. This is a value that is worth not only noting but also fighting for. ■

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