





[underground]

PK

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abstract

This essay aims to combine the pieces which constitute the contemporary underground design. An exploration linked with the conditions prevailed in the western societies by the expansion of the new technologies. A whole new environment elevated from obscurity and infused the urban and electronic infrastructures with such characteristics that disable and appropriate parasitic cultures (such as the underground cultures) as parts of the dominant mode of production.

Now that the industrial infrastructures are becoming immaterial¹ clouds of information and the noise² is reduced to minimum. What kind of mutation in the genetic code of the parasite is needed? Where are the cracks on the digital matrix for it to inhabit? The underground is a product of industrialism of the last century. Flourished among the interstices of the urban construction, is now watching itself helpless to evaporate, waiting for its Darwinian evolution to fit the network. The last part of the essay, discusses the direction of the new underground and the role of the designer involved.

¹ 'By the conceptual figure of the immaterial parasite I name precisely the exploitation of the biological production through the semiotic and technological domain: material energy and economic surplus are not absorbed and consumed by digital machines but simply allocated. The immaterial flow extracts surplus from the material flow and through continuous exchanges (energy-commodity-technology-knowledge-money). The immaterial parasite functions first as a spectacular device: simulating a fictional world, building a collaborative environment or simply providing communication channels, it accumulates energy through and in favor of its physical substratum. The immaterial parasite belongs to a diverse family, where rents seems to be the dominant form of metabolism. It survives in different kinds of habitat. Its tentacles innervate the metropolis (real estate speculation through the Creative Industries hype), the media (rent over material infrastructures and monopoly of online spaces), software (exploitation of Free Software to sell proprietary hardware), knowledge (revenues on intellectual property), financial markets (stock exchange speculation over collective hysteria)

and many other examples.' Matteo Pasquinelli, *Immaterial Civil War, Prototypes of Conflict within Cognitive Capitalism*, Barcelona 2006, p.3.
² 'Noise is any information in a message that was not intended by the sender.' Mulder Arjen, *General Media Theory, V2* /Nai Publishers 2004.

introduction

Since 'art' as a category has been projected back to the religious icons of the middle ages, it is not surprising that those who oppose it should situate themselves within a 'utopian current' that they, in turn, trace back to medieval heresies.
Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture*, 1991

In 1864 Fyodor Dostoyevsky's short novel *Notes from the Underground* introduces us with the underground man. In St. Petersburg, Russia in 1860, a retired veteran of a Russian civil service is the anonymous narrator of the *Notes from the Underground*. This man writes his 'notes' from the 'underground', a confused and often contradictory set of memories describing/explaining his alienation from the modern society. The 'underground' is the dark cellar from which the underground man claims to be writing and it's the symbol of his isolation. As he feels rejected from society he adopts a nihilistic view and imagines that he is viewing the city through cracks in the floorboards. The underground in this novel is used as a symbol of his alienation from society, a safe place to observe and attack the 'artificial' city (St. Petersburg) and its people with his nihilistic menace.

The underground culture belongs to the industrialism of the last century and although it took many forms,

all forms share some common characteristics and consequently, a common tradition. A part of this tradition can be traced back to the 'ragtag sub-cultures'¹ and the vagabonds of the early years of the industrial revolution. However, the tradition of the utopian art movements of the 20th century seems to be more relevant. While drawing the line from Futurism to Surrealism the aesthetics, the tricks, the hoaxes and finally the shape of the underground are revealed.² Of course the 'utopians' were not the only influence, but the material and soul which gave birth to the underground. These pre-war movements created a tradition of merging art with politics and every day life. They blurred the boundaries of artist and public, they provoked and hoaxed. Disputed all forms of art and performed them all, while being trapped in their own contradictions.³ They formed loose groups or just a bunch of friends, were from their secret 'underground' counter attacked society. Later on, they were institutionalized by the cannibals of the bourgeoisie and their critics.

Used to describe the state of secrecy for resistance movements against Nazi occupation, the term 'underground' was infused by their self-publishing and oppositional qualities. Then, it passed through the samizdat in Soviet Union and the counter culture movements of the 60's (such as 'weather underground') to diffuse in a wide range of activities. In modern literature and the conversational language is used to describe: modes of life/attitude, small range illegal economical exchanges, radical politics, urban guerillas, porn subcultures, music sub-genres, independent comics publications, independent/law budget films, avant-garde/street/other artists and some subcultures (like punk), their style, attitude or their media.

¹ Turning back to sixteenth-century we are confronted with the emergent genre of vagabond writing in England. John Awdeley in *The Fraternity of Vagabonds* identifies some of the vagabond 'types' of the English society in 1560's. While entering the industrial revolution vagabonds were increasingly gathered in the city centers. At this period along with the vagabond literature, with John Tomas publishing *Vagabondiana* (1817), Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1851-52) refers to the ragtag subcultures of Paris as the lumpenproletariat: 'Alongside decayed roués with doubtful, means of subsistence and of doubtful origin, alongside ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, sere vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped gelled-slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, Lazzaroni (Italian idlers and beggars), pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, maquereaux (procurers), brothel-keepers, porters, literati, organ-grinders, rag-pickers, knife-grinders, tinkers, beggars, in short the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass thrown hither and thither, with the French term *la Bohème*'. Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis*

Bonaparte, Marxists Internet Archive, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch05.htm>.

² 'From the 1920s onwards Utopians were conscious of belonging to a tradition that stretched back at least as far as Dada and Futurism, and were aware that in previous centuries similar 'beliefs' had been manifested in certain 'religious' heresies. There is a samizdat (self-publishing) aspect to the tradition, that enables it to remain - at least partially - autonomous of the cultural and commercial institutions of the reigning society... In the twentieth-century, those adhering to Utopian principles have worked between 'art', 'politics', 'architecture', 'urbanism' and all the other specialisms that arise from separation. Utopians aim to 'create' a 'new' world where these specializations will no longer exist'. Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture, Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*, AK Press.

³ Utopian/avant-garde movements, although opposed consumer capitalism, emerged out of societies based on capitalistic economy and thus were unable to avoid entirely the market.

Societies are experienced through the authorized codes, to which subcultures represent the noise.¹ The underground probably inhabits the deepest frequencies of this noise, the lowest level of this violent vortex which transgresses the codes, producing enough energy to provoke and disturb the social world. Part of a historical continuum that includes the utopian/avant-garde tradition from Futurism to Dada and Surrealism, the Russian samizdat (anti-bolshevik underground publications), the 60's underground press, the Situationist detournement, the outlaw hacking technics of the hackers underground and the subcultural bricolage of the punk. If this historical line is sufficient enough to explain the form of the contemporary underground cultures, that is only because academic analysis is highly concerned on relating it with the whole avant-garde tradition. Probably it's because they can construct in that way a coherent story on 'high-culture'. That is correct if one points only to the direction of lumpen intellectuals and of 'academic' roots underground artists. Usually they are aware of a historical tradition on radical art movements, but probably what they do is already formed by that knowledge. From the 70's though, and the heyday of the punk, the non-intellectual street cultures such as skinheads and football hooliganism start to infuse the underground sphere.² It is no wonder that Punk became the basic music genre per-

formed by the Skinheads nowadays, in the form of Hardcore/oi – punk.

While the Futurists praised the new massive technological era, punk and the next generations worshiped the gradual disintegration of the Fordist industrial model. They inhabited the relicts of the urban construction, forming parallel spaces in a parasitic relation to the big city. From the Kreuzberg area in Berlin and Lavapiés square in Madrid, to Eksarcheia Athens and the ghetto 93 in Paris the underground exist in a dialectic opposition to the popular culture. And it is exactly that relation, which necessitates subversive techniques, self-publishing tactics and provocative action. It seems though, that there is something like a collective memory, for the reason that there is obviously an evolutionary process of techniques even there, where the historical acknowledgement is absent.

The underground culture's importance derives not just from its aesthetic value as a product of human intelligence but mainly from innovation, due to its position in the fringe of society. The lack of means and its oppositional condition led not to the creation of new alternative media, but to innovations on the relicts of the already existing mainstream media. Innovations which were unnecessary for the popular culture to develop, but were truly valuable while already existing. It is exactly this value which the mainstream extracts and accumulates from the underground, thus integration is not a habit or some kind of technique of the mainstream culture. It is the process of a dialectic relation between the two poles, where the spectacular aspect is only the distorted idol of the social world when looking at the subcultural image, or the opposite. The Sex Pistols and many more were only the prism through which each pole could see its own image. Both images are distorted: the popular symbol becomes a drug addict wearing his weird psychedelic costume and the subcultural, a fashionable bohemian. The existential paradox of a single entity.

¹ 'SUBCULTURES REPRESENT 'NOISE' (as opposed to sound): interference in the orderly sequence which leads from real events and phenomena to their representation in the media. We should therefore not underestimate the signifying power of the spectacular subculture not only as a metaphor for potential anarchy 'out there' but as an actual mechanism of semantic disorder: a kind of temporary blockage in the system of representation...

Violations of the authorized codes through which the social world is organized and experienced have considerable power to provoke and disturb.'

Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The meaning of style*, London: Methuen.

² 'It is therefore not surprising that both he and the semiologist Dick Hebdige in his book "Subculture: the meaning of style" ignore the influence of Richard Allen on the blank generation during their pubescence. Allen authored a series of skinhead novels for New English Library during the early seventies. His books, which chronicled the violent activities of the white working class youth, circulated widely under school desks and the belligerent attitude they exposed was a central element on the punk

sensibility. Allen's books are ignorant in academic analysis of punk, precisely because his writing lacks an intellectual pedigree.

...Dada might have socked the bourgeoisie but at least its products were more than hurriedly written hack work glorifying hooliganism. One need only to compare the cover of the first Clash album, or almost any posed publicity shot of a punk band, to the covers of Allen's books to see the extend of their influence. Whereas only a tiny minority of the punk milieu had heard of Futurism or Dadaism, and even fewer of the Motherfuckers or spectro-situationist theory, the vast majority would have encountered Richard Allen's work in one form or another - and were just as likely to have experienced the culture he depicted directly on the football terrace. The fanatical Stretford End of Manchester United's 'red army' were chanting "We hate humans" in the early seventies, years before the blank generation appropriated hate and misanthropy as themes of their own.'

Stewart Home, *The Assault on Culture, Utopian Currents from Lettrisme to Class War*, AK Press.

the underground /the European node/

Underground cultures accommodate a multitude of design practices and hacking¹ techniques. Music and counter culture activism are probably the two most important cores around which we experience the contemporary underground. The design artifacts of musical subcultures marked the underground aesthetics. They incarnated a chaotic matrix of aesthetic influences, from the avant-garde and the underground/independent comics, the splatter/cult horror movies and tattoo art, the pornographic/BDSM² with anarchist spectacular rioting imagery, to the provocative use of the pirate, satanist and fascist symbols. The appropriation and subversive use of the mainstream cultures symbols, the theft of aesthetic artifacts from their contexts and their diversion into contexts of one's own devise along with violent realcore³ imagery.

The musical situationism of the Punk/Hardcore with the self-published xerox printed publications, the subversive surrealist collages with handwritten or distorted/exaggerated and (underground) comic style typography, combined with street culture deviant attitude, still forming a strong community in Los Angeles. The hedonistic dark ritualism of EBM ('dark electro') combined with gothic, bondage pornography aesthetics. The fascistic-satanist symbolism of dark, splatter, sadomasochism pornography combined

with the 'realcore' imagery of the Norwegian Black Metal. The technological deep minimalism of the underground techno in Berlin. The 60's psychedelia blended with the alien/space imagery and kaleidoscopic graphics is still the core of the design at the remnants of the psychedelic trance underground circles in London. The Underground resistance still produces afro-indigenous and anarcho-pirate activist imagery for their Detroit techno releases. Atari punk and game boy beats with hacked game machines producing computer noise accompanied with pixel/game graphics.

Maybe the most important design intervention of the musical subcultures was in typography. All the mystical signs and codes were translated into dynamic and very symbolic typographic elements. The physical cracks reflected the urban decay on their 'bodies', transforming text into symbolic imagery.⁴

¹ 'Defining exactly what 'hack' means is not easy since the concept involves many various fields of use and is also commonly used outside computer contexts. It is usually an activity of making technology work the way one wants by direct intervention into the functional systems and operations of a machine or device; the conscious 'trickery and manipulation of a system.'

Cramer, Florian, *Social Hacking, revisited*, http://cramer.plaintext.cc:70/essays/social_hacking_revisited_sollfrank/social_hacking_revisited_sollfrank.html, 2003.

² BDSM is a type of role-play or lifestyle choice between two or more individuals who use their experiences of pain and power to create sexual tension, pleasure, and release. The compound acronym, BDSM, is derived from the terms bondage and discipline (B&D, B/D, or BD), dominance and submission (D&s, D/s, or Ds), sadism and masochism (S&M, S/M, or SM). Wikipedia, *BDSM*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/BDSM>.

³ 'Realcore... is pornography that's grittier than traditional hardcore, even, 'striving to portray the reality of the (amateur) scene and the true desires of the participants.'

Katrien Jacobs, Marije

Janssen, Matteo Pasquinelli, *C'LICK ME: A Netporn Studies Reader*, Naked Lunch: Talking Realcore with Sergio Messina, Institute of Network Cultures, p.17.

⁴ Christophe Szpajdel, *Lord of the Logos, Designing the Metal Underground*, Gestalten.

the underground /the American node/graffiti

By 'graffiti' is generally understood that we mean any form of unofficial, unsanctioned application of a medium onto a surface.

Cedar Lewisohn, *Street Art*, 2008

Although graffiti pre-dated the hip-hop culture, it took shape as a part of it along with skating and rap. Graffiti and hip-hop sprang from the creativity of the dislocated and alienated urban communities of America during the second half of the twentieth century. This new community could not be demolished and it was impossible to control. The 'parasite' was fed by the once fatal ruins of urban development. 'Bombing' (graffiti writing) is a highly aestheticized form of vandalism consisted of the writers tag (signature), who usually spent years on cultivating their personalized alphabet. Graffiti writing revolves around typography and letter formation in a continuous cursive gestural tracing. There are three ways of 'bombing' with spray cans, markers and stickers. Its non intellectual origins leave no space for any relation with the avant-garde tradition. Its aesthetic values and forms can be traced on the comics typefaces and coloring, especially when they are rarely combined with imagery. As tags represent the writers themselves, by their use they reduce themselves to a minimum. They distill their content to its essence, the very basic form and then

they enlarge the tags to massive proportions with delicate type designs. 'Writers' don't communicate a message, they form autonomous uncontrollable communities, they perform vandalism and their actions are only known by their traces. Contrariwise to a minority of 'writers' the community operates in the underground (many times literally). Graffiti is probably the most successful product of the underground cultures, as it operates through out the world and is still expanding.

It has no much to do with it's context or position, it is fixed and stubbornly refuses to take on any conditions of its placement.

Cedar Lewisohn, *Street Art*, 2008

The type of graffiti to be found in urban environments influenced by the western world trends takes little into account of the spatial organization of its support.

François Chastanet for Eye magazine #56, 2005

Contrarywise, I would suggest that graffiti takes much into consideration the spatial organization. It is just that as a proper vandal appropriates not only the space but also the structural elements. It escapes from the rigid lines of architecture by reforming or eliminating all useless grids and baselines. Only when taking much into consideration the architectural structure one can subvert it that way. I would suggest that graffiti do not obey the spatial organization.

the underground /the American node/street art

Street art is more about interacting with the audience on the street and the people, the masses. Graffiti isn't so much about connecting with the masses; it's about connecting with different crews, it's an internal language, it's a secret language. Most graffiti you can't even read, so it's really contained within the culture that understands it and does it. Street art is much more open. It's an open society.

FAILE¹

If you had a degree you did 'street art' as opposed to graffiti.

John Fekner²

Street art is the intellectual fruit of graffiti. Although one can trace conceptual and sometimes aesthetic (Obay, 3TT Man and Sixeart) resemblance with the anti-dictatorship left wing wall paintings in Latin America, it is the graffiti the reason why it emerged. Street artworks are almost entirely products of artists coming from academic education, even those shifted from graffiti usually did that after graduating or while studying. Thus they share qualities with studio-based fine artists, such as preparing even to an end point their artwork in the studio. More importantly, although they draw from many diverse sources, Situationism,

Pop art and radical art movements such as Punk are their key historical references. Street artworks are very dependent on the location and their context, they fit and interrelate. Many times there is an emotional relation with the environment (like Banksy's drawings on the Palestine wall). Cartoon figures, stencils, collages, black and white photocopies and sometimes even projectors, are some of their global design techniques and tools. Street art is usually performed by individuals or small groups/collectives.

Street art in its deepest and more obscure form blends with the most radical squat and anarchist movements. The radical movement tradition and its political and provocative graffiti slogans are blended with the most radical components of the street art culture. Many graffiti writers are connected with counter culture and anarchist movements -but in contrast with the street artists- it is like emerging from the underground and socialize, while losing their most radical characteristics.³ Political activism, comic imagery, rioting spectacle and ironic slogans in an explosive mixture, inhabit the squat architecture and the streets, mainly around areas that underground cultures spring. Recent riots in Athens resulted to a wide range of street artists attack around the areas where riots took place. This tendency is highly visible by the emergence of the new media where the mixture of counter cultures and graffiti-street art is easily traceable. Fauna Nocturna Underground media center⁴ is actually a net platform, aiming to promote all aspects of the underground culture. Along with news about Greek anarchists occupying the national TV station and the squat congress in June, there are also news about rap underground concerts, photos of graffiti from around the world and providing support for recordings and video clips for graffiti/hip-hop artists.

¹ Faile began their collaboration as A-Life, consisting of long time friends Patrick Mcneil & Patrick Miller. Mcneil would later meet Aiko at one of his early exhibitions in a NY club, and soon the three got together to join the emerging underground movement called street art. They soon needed a name change as their popularity grew, more so because there was already an apparel brand called A-life. So, while sitting in their temporary jail cell after being arrested for fly posting (what else!) they came up with Faile, which is actually their former name rearranged. Pretty ingenious, really. They started wheatpasting their designs, catching wind from Obey, who had generally started wheatpasting as pretty much a form of generating interesting, awareness and to make their mark. Faile started doing this initially in different cities in the U.S. and soon expanded far and beyond, to Europe and Asia. They funded these trips by taking on design jobs. They then began to realize that stencil art was more permanent, and gradually moved on to painting and stencilling all over the world.' Alan Bernard, *Faile: Collective Geniuses*, <http://alanbernard.com/mayhem/reviews/faile/>, 2007.

² John Fekner is a street and multimedia artist, who created hundreds of environmental, social, political and conceptual works consisting of stenciled words, symbols, dates and icons spray painted outdoors in the United States, Sweden, Canada, England and Germany.

³ It would be wrong to assume that the activity of a person putting up a tag is less politically aware than someone putting up a sticker or a fly-poster. In a way, graffiti writers, by making their activity harder for the public to understand, are more extreme.

There's no concession to the audience, so the statement is purer. It could be argued that people who go out and graffiti public transport vehicles are making a stronger statement against society than street artists, who often act in a more decorative fashion.¹

Lewisohn Cedar, *Street Art: the Graffiti Revolution*, TATE Publishing, p.116-117.

⁴ Fauna Nocturna Underground media center, <http://www.faunanocturna.net/>.

the underground /the American node/pixação

'Like termites, they come to a place that is rotten. They show that this place stinks; this place is dead, is a dead corpse. We are now the flies around this dead corpse. People hate to see that their city is full of dead corpses.'

Mariana Ribeiro¹

Graffiti is at war with the urban construction, urban planners, architects and the police. It disputes ownership and authority by appropriating the city walls. If graffiti seems vandalistic to some, pixação is 'barbaric'. A uniquely Brazilian form of tagging stylistically influenced by 80's heavy metal and hardcore bands logos, such as Slayer, Dead Kennedys and Sepultura, which were obviously influenced by the rune typefaces. The pixadores have developed a sequence of strokes that are more concerned with structure than outline. They have developed a singular calligraphy which is the product of human capability and the architectural rhythm of the city. The letterforms are integrated into the urban landscape and can be seen as two-dimensional architecture. The architectural elements of the building are translated into grids, baselines and the building itself to a blank page waiting to be filled. Pixadores are cruel, *'Sao Paulo streets and walls are a concrete example of how cruel an ink-smearing delinquent is – not*

sparing the historical monuments, works of art, and much less, innocent residential walls. Quenching the thirst for vandalism, picadors uglify the city with aggressive, vulgar, incomprehensible scribbles... The image of the house located in an avenue in Vila Marieta, portrays what goes on inside the minds of these tireless destroyers. As if the city's pollution were not enough, these anonymous vandals contribute for the look of filth and abandonment which stereotype underprivileged communities, where frequently these transgressors live.¹²

Pixadores have developed an innovative calligraphy which breaks the conventions of the standardized graffiti letterforms. It is probably the most dangerous kind of underground art,

*'If he gets caught, he'll go back home spray painted: marked by the police... if he doesn't get beaten up by a cop... if the picador gets caught by a resident, he might get shot, and die. There's also the risk of falling when he climbs up huge skyscrapers to write his name up high without any safety equipment.'*¹³

The importance of pixação for this essay is that it represents the purest, aesthetically unique form of underground art nowadays. It represents almost all qualities of the avant-garde tradition and the graffiti era in the most pure and unconscious form possible. It provokes, disputes authority, innovates, merges the urban space with typography and poetry, invades the mainstream art world, hit and run. It is anarchistic by nature, it subverts and brings chaos to the city. An extremely harsh visual language.

¹ Baixo and Mariana Ribeiro are the founders of the Choque Cultural Gallery São Paulo.

² Sa Xico, Wainer Joao, Wainer Pinky, tsss... pixação, *the vastest art*. Sao Paolo, Brazil, Boleta, p.15.

³ Sa Xico, Wainer Joao, Wainer Pinky, tsss... pixação, *the vastest art*. Sao Paolo, Brazil, Boleta, p.21.

the underground /epilogue/

During the 50's, the western big cities saw a development of new towns on their outskirts where large numbers of poor families and immigrants were rehoused. These new towns were infused by the ideal of social architecture, the so called modernism. The result was a massive concrete jungle of cheap buildings badly designed, which condemned the population to exclusion and isolation. Modernization and property speculation laid waste to these communities forcing them into unlivable house blocks. Both in Western Europe and the United States various subcultures emerged out of the ruins. The underground as we know it, is a product of these conditions. Its predecessors already existed but the contemporary underground was born out of this period. It is actually not one but two nodes, one coming from the european avant-garde tradition mixed with the 70's street cultures and the other coming from the non intellectual street youth subcultures of the New York ghettos. The overlapping was inevitable, so that in 2010 there is a great deal of mixing. Nevertheless, it seems that they maintain some differences, where for the one the best ground to flourish is that of the 'creative city'¹ and the other the ghetto. The underground hip-hop culture in the suburbs of Paris found the relicts of modernization to inhabit while on the other hand its more intellectual cousin seems to feel fine among the soft urban bohemia in Berlin. In his essay Ruins of the

creative city, Matteo Pasquinelli in a basic genealogy of electronic music grasps successfully the essence of the underground in relation to the 'creative city' such as Berlin. I would suggest though, that 'creative cities' such as Berlin and Barcelona touch only one side of the underground, because on the other side the underground inhabits the 'creative ghettos' of Paris and Sao Paolo.

*'In a city like Berlin the underground has become a factory of value,'*² while in cities like Paris the underground extracts value. A walk in Kreuzberg (Berlin) is a must, but a walk in ghetto 93 (Paris) is a must not. If the underground is a product of two different nodes deriving from similar circumstances in two different points on the map, is it possible to define the underground as a single entity?

Probably not. Mainly because the underground, as a parasitic form of life, is in a constant state of flux rather than a fixed entity. Graffiti, punk, techno, black metal, hackers and many more are not underground as a whole. They are in a dual condition, where the underground (and its parasitic characteristics) exist in dialectic opposition to the mainstream (where the parasite transforms into an independent form of life). Usually one prevails the other, resulting a phenomenon (like graffiti) to be labelled as underground or mainstream. That also depends on topological conditions, where street art becomes a trend of popular culture in London, while at the same time remains deeply underground in the streets of Teheran.³

¹ 'The new coordinates of the underground in the age of cognitive and financial capitalism can be found along these intangible vectors of value, along these invisible 'ruins' of the Creative City, just as once the music underground started to colonize the industrial relicts or to the invisible architecture of the first microprocessors. The punk underground grew out of the ruins of the suburban factories and now we experience a so-called creative economy parasitizing the underground itself: it is time to imagine the factory of culture getting organized within the ruins of value that the 'creative cities' are ready to leave behind.' Pasquinelli Matteo, *Beyond the Ruins of the Creative City: Berlin's Factory of Culture and the Sabotage of Rent*, Berlin 2008, p.08.

² Pasquinelli Matteo, *Beyond the Ruins of the Creative City: Berlin's Factory of Culture and the Sabotage of Rent*, Berlin 2008, p.03.

³ Charlot Noruzi, *Urban Iran*, Mark Batty Publisher.

Definitions usually lack of the interpretation element, moreover they are like fixed products. This is it, take it or not. Thus, it is more reasonable to define a set of coordinates so that to track the values, which in various combinations can point to the underground design. It seems that in both nodes we can track parallel paths of aesthetics and practices which characterize the contemporary underground.

The underground now experiences a shift towards the new digital era. By that we are experiencing an anomaly, a paradoxical situation. The rough, shocking and oppositional characteristics, a kind of aesthetic shock to the social codes is now becoming more linear and smooth. The technological progress offered to self publishing techniques powerful cheap, free or hacked software and printing techniques, so that even the xerox printers produce great quality photocopies. Media attach their own aesthetic values to the design products and the underground is no exception on that. Self publishing techniques are the core of the underground aesthetics and the noise of imperfection in the production of the design artifacts became the fundamental aesthetic value which conceptually reflected the physical environment were it was produced. The irony for the contemporary scene is that this state of being is reduced to a fake design technique. The noise has become just another artistic play filtered through the liquid crystal screens, into a slick and smooth product. The amateurish craftsmanship of the designer is replaced gradually by the ready made structures of the new digital products.

the coordinates /hacking/

Hacking techniques and appropriation of the dominant structures is more than a game. It is even more than an oppositional behavior to the system. It is the necessary means for survival and expression under the dominant state of the mainstream media. With the introduction of the interactive media and their flatness, along with the free software we see the conditions which necessitated hacking to evaporate gradually. Pirate radio stations are moving to the digital sphere where their signal is not pirate/illegal at all. They become a part of the multitude of individuals in contrast to the individuals in the age of masses of the last century. The hacker underground and the international hackers are in a state of decay,¹ they still don't realize that their problem lays not on the traitors moving to the internet security and software industry or their organizational secretiveness, etc. But on the contrary, it lays on them enforcing the predominance of the new immaterial industries by targeting the obsolete industries like the music industry. By cracking the products of the software industries, they are producing a massive new market for them. Therefore, instead of being product of the need to hack your way through the digital landscape, they became a 'guerilla marketing' channel for the cognitive capitalism.

'There is little doubt that the explosion of the security industry has directly coincided with the decline of the hacking scene. The hackers of the eighties and nineties became the security professionals of the new millennium, and the community suffered for it.'

'This was a hacker exodus. What really mattered was not the loss of any individuals, but the cumulative effect this had on the underground. The more hackers that left the underground for a corporate life, the fewer that came in. And those who stayed became entrenched, increasingly disconnected.'

'Collaboration in this new age of career hackers has all but ceased to exist. Individuals are now obsessed with credit. For their career, for their standing in the community, it must be absolutely clear who this research, this vulnerability, or even this opinion belongs to.'

'There is no creativity, no sense of arcana anymore.'

'Despite all of the issues facing the underground, if hackers had managed to get this one aspect right, if they had recognized the importance of those who would come after them, if they had given them something to aspire to be, if they had directly or indi-

rectly taught them the accumulated wisdom that so often separates a hacker from the crowd; then perhaps there still would be a hacker underground.'

'The hacker underground has been systematically dismantled, a victim of circumstance. There was no reason for this, no conspiracy, no winner. A conquered people, but with no conqueror, no enemy to fight. No chance of rebellion. Conquered by circumstance, if not fate.' Anonymous, *The Underground Myth*, Phrack (online) Magazine, issue # 65, <http://www.phrack.com/issues.html?issue=65&id=13#article>.

the coordinates /shocking value/

Subversion of the social codes provokes and produces a shock value accumulated by the underground itself. The shock value is produced by bringing into contact the common viewer with an aesthetic code which subverts the authorized/ethical codes and at the same time exists in such an internalized language that he cannot fully appreciate. This esoteric behavior causes an obscure environment for the viewer and often the misunderstanding that the underground is something furtive. This is also a fundamental difference with the activists and revolutionary movements. That's because it either activates negative reflects to the massive audiences or they just cannot relate with it. In that sense it is unable to endanger the system but it is there where its power springs from.

Web media introduces us now more than ever, with imagery that resembles to what used to circulate only as amateur fetish pornography. In an aesthetic resemblance with underground films (low resolution, unsteady camera and unedited footage) what was situated in the underground belly of the massive web data circulation, is now a basic category of the mainstream pornography. This fetishization of reality began in web but was realized on the TV news and then dropped back again by the personalized media such as cellphone cameras.

*'The novelty of the images of Abu Ghraib and Nick Berg (whether fictional or not is not the point) consists in the fact that they forged a new narrative genre of collective imagery. For the first time, a snuff movie was projected onto the screen of global imagery; and Internet subcultures, used to such images, suddenly came out of the closet: rotten.com finally reached the masses... drawing out... a new genre of image that forces us to upgrade our immunity system and communicative strategies.'*¹ By upgrading its immunity system the popular culture enervates parts of its social reflects, producing less shock value for the underground to consume.

¹ Pasquinelli Matteo, *Warporn Warpunk. Autonomous Videopoesis in Wartime*, Sarai Reader 2005: Bare Acts, p.496

the future

At the moment the parasitic economy of rent is more clouded and dense, through surplus value extraction from immaterial assets such as intellectual property (ex. software). Rent can also, *'be extracted dynamically along mobile and temporary micro-monopolies, skipping the limits of intellectual property. Digital technologies have opened new spaces of communication, socialization and cooperation that are only virtually 'free'. The surplus extraction is channelled generously along the material infrastructure needed to sustain the immaterial 'second life'. Technological rent is the rent applied on the ICT infrastructures when they established a monopoly on media, bandwidth, protocols, standards, software or virtual spaces (including the recent social networks: My-space, Facebook, etc.)'*¹

The emerging immaterial economy for the moment is in a rapid growth and not yet formed; if we point into another direction we can probably see another aspect of this situation. Along with the porn industry, the game industry innovates in another field of the net. While Google shapes the chaotic digital space into dynamic hierarchies² as a parasitic apparatus capturing the value produced by the common intelligence, game industry produces immaterial products. By immaterial product I don't mean the game itself, but products used as commodities by the avatars in

this parallel digital worlds (like second life, or world of warcraft). In China, companies already produce 'magical products' for the millions of world of warcraft gamers. These are probably the signs of a new immaterial industry about to emerge, producing commodities for our digital 'second life'. The feudal colonization of the net by the immaterial machines of Google is just the childhood, which is going to be put back in its position when the massive immaterial industry emerges.

Whether this is going to be the future or not, the questions are still persistent. What kind of mutation in the genetic code of the parasite is needed? Where are the cracks on the digital matrix for it to inhabit? Pasquinelli introduce us with the notion of sabotage on rent: *...the sabotage is shown as the specular gesture of the multitudes to defend the commons against the parasitic dimension of rent.*³

However, the underground was never a revolutionary force fighting to appropriate the means of production or to sabotage the capitalistic accumulation. Although inhabited nodes of resistance and radical political movements, the underground attacked the structures of the urban construction, while inhabited its ruins. Subverted the authorized codes and hacked its way through the system. Formed autonomous loose nodes attached on the interstices of the big western cities.

The new digital era demands for this parasitic form to mutate into a virus and attack the new constructions of the net 'modernization'. Now that the emergence of the broadband connections and the new interactive technologies shifted the digital space into a massive construction, the new digital towns are infused by the ideal of social interaction/media (like the post-war social architecture, modernism). The result is a massive 'concrete' jungle of identical, clean (like the modernists love for white clean walls), places of exclusion and isolation (probably more efficient than the

¹ Pasquinelli Matteo, *The Ideology of Free Culture and the Grammar of Sabotage*, Amsterdam 2010, p.10.

² The PageRank algorithm introduced a revolutionary break in the Information Retrieval technologies and in the search engine panorama of the late 90s: for the first time the apparently flat data ocean of the internet was shaped by Google in dynamic hierarchies according to the visibility and importance of each website. The ranking of a web page is quite intuitive to understand: this value is determined by the number and quality of incoming links. Particularly, a link coming from a node with a high rank has more value than a link coming from a node with a low rank.¹

Pasquinelli Matteo, *Google's Page Rank Algorithm: A Diagram of the Cognitive Capitalism and the Rentier of the Common Intellect*, p.03.

³ Pasquinelli Matteo, *The Ideology of Free Culture and the Grammar of Sabotage*, Amsterdam 2010, p.01.

apartment blocks). Facebook and other social media reduce us into identical nodes of information, condemn us to the boredom and isolation of the new 'digital modernization'.

the conclusion

The uncontrollable forces of the expanding underground graffiti and the pure vandalism of pixação are of much relevance at this point. Their tags can also be seen as 'avatars' of which identity they adapt while being on the streets 'bombing'. The more they 'bomb' and the more difficult/illegal/spectacular the 'bombing' is, the more fame they gain. From the very beginning of graffiti (while 'bombing' the New York subway), media such as photography were the only documentation of their short existence. The emergence of the new media on the one hand introduced behaviors that already existed within the crews and on the other hand enhanced the acquisition of fame (faster and international). This dialectic relation where the digital side triggers the physical and the opposite needs to be the core of the underground tactics.

The sabotage of the new media is shown as the specular gesture, to attack the social codes against the new digital mainstream.

The role of the designer is to subvert the new social codes and provoke a new shock value, to attack the notions of 'social' and 'trust' capital, to vandalize and provoke the private data property (instead of private property). The new generations learned to socialize within social media; they adopt their values and formed their aesthetic qualities. So, let's sabotage

these values! Let's sabotage the 'clean' css design! The amateurish craftsmanship of the xerox printers and the fanzines self publishing era needs to be translated into new tools to hack the way and vandalize the digital private property. A similar approach can be found in the radical and subversive course of the Black Mask collective¹ where, although with some luck of focus, one can notice a gradual shift from traditional forms of political/cultural underground to digital hoaxes.² The long tradition of the manipulation of the media³ shows the way of 'how to', but with different objectives.⁴ The hoax⁵ of the 0100101110101101.ORG in the chatroulette⁴ gives as a clue of how to hack our way while at the same time proves that the shocking values of the old days are more or less gone.

Whatever the new shift of the network is going to be and whether this is going to be what some call 'web 3.0, the underground will probably inhabit the ruins of the current 'digital modernization'.

¹ The Black Mask collective is a collaboration between activists, visual artists, Djs and lecturers. Their actions revolves around revolutionary radical theory, culture jamming, street actions, demonstrations, public space installations, performances, free concerts and parties.

² A spoof webpage, identical to the one selling tickets for the games appears sometime during May 2004 (tickets.forathens2004.gr). The visitor can login and buy tickets immediately using a credit card. The tickets show Foivos and Athina the mascot figures of Athens 2004 Olympic games in nasty positions. Of course the website did not have any access to any information given by the users (card numbers,etc.), but as long as it returns weird results, the user is terrified for credit card fraud.

Giorgos Kiouisis, *Anarchists against the 2004 Olympic games*, Eleutherotypia, http://archive.enet.gr/online/online_text/c=115,id=6880600

³ During the first half of the 80's a mail artist Vitore Baroni launched his own multiple named project. The "Lieutenant Murnau project"...was an attempt to study how... musical myths are built...today, all these cult-underground bands, how far you can

push an Image without a Sound." He mixed and manipulated Beatle and Residents records, he released cassettes in different countries, made compilations, played in radio saws and even made a concert.

As we move on in the 90's and the emergence of the new technologies in the media and the network, the projects find new ways to disseminate. Hoaxes that confuse and spread like fire through the media. In 1994, hundreds of artists and activists adopted a common identity, that of Luther Blissett and "waged a guerilla warfare on the cultural industry". Luther became famous by media hoaxes such as: The Harry Kipper, a British conceptual artist who disappeared while touring Europe to trace the word 'ART' on the map of the continent. The victim, a famous Italian show, went seeking to London and spent a lot of money only to make fool themselves, when Luther project claims responsibility for the hoax.

Darko Maver a Serbian sculptor and performance artist, is one of the most enigmatic figures of the art world. Living in motels and deserted buildings in the declining Yugoslavia, he works mainly with wax and fabric making sculptures. The sculptures are actu-

ally plastic imitations of abused and tortured people. After a new law in Yugoslavia he is accused of anti-patriotism, prosecuted and finally end up to prison. Solidarity exhibitions are organized, now Darko is already one of the most disturbing and mysterious characters of the underground art scene in Europe. During the NATO intervention in Yugoslavia, Darko is found dead in the Podgorica prison. The only evidence is photo of his corpse which was rapidly circulated on the Internet. A theatre performance, activists attack at the Venice Biennial, a retrospective exhibition in Forte Prenestino (Rome), with his writings, installations and his early works. A successful installation in the Contemporary Art Biennial of Venice marks the end of the hoax. Responsibility for the hoax is claimed by two members of the Luther Blissett project who later formed the 0100101110101101.org group. A spoof Vatican website, a false Nike campaign, unusual signs appears overnight, a computer virus are some of their next projects.

⁴ The use of provocation and the manipulation of the media had been in the core of the utopian/avant-garde tradition tactics. From the 70's and on we notice a

gradual shift, were manipulation turns from a supportive element (to attract attention to the movement/group) to an end goal.

⁵ 'No Fun' (2010) reveals how Chatroulette enables socially perverse responses to horror. On one half of the screen, Franco Mattes hangs from a noose, body limp and facial muscles distorted, aping rigor mortis. In the corner, the alleged suicide victim's computer screen serves as a blank letter, an indication that the performance is happening in real time (and a visual quote of the volley of gazes in 'Las Meninas'). The screen within the screen is not the crux of the artists' artifice but a telling clue of an uneasy spectatorship. So long as we watch we cannot preside as moral authorities, but become subjects of an artistic play on voyeurism itself. On the left side we witness a rotating cast of anonymous spectators looking at the webcam image on the right. Two girls scream, and then one expresses concern while the other can barely suppress a smile. Teenage boys give the finger, spout profanities, or click off. As expected on Chatroulette, one man is obviously masturbating, indifferent or perhaps aroused. None of the viewers on the web fully trust the reality of the

simulation of which they are now part, and many express their extreme skepticism, or a resistance to being hosed, typing 'this isn't real.' One lone exception alerts the police despite his uncertainty, motivated by personal discomfort.

Cora Fisher, *Eva and Franco Mattes aka 0100101110101101.O RG Reality is Overrated*, The Brooklyn Rail, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2010/06/artseen/eva-and-franco-mattes-aka-0100101110101101.org-reality-is-overrated>.

⁴Chatroulette is a website that pairs random strangers from around the world together for webcam-based conversations. Visitors to the website randomly begin an online chat (video, audio and text) with another visitor. At any point, either user may leave the current chat by initiating another random connection.

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