Leonardo

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New Media as Resistance: Colombia

Alejandro Duque

Many strategies have been conceived for getting the Establishment to cease its intrusive, abusive and unjust actions for maintaining control and power. How can we find ways to use new media to resist oppression, to spread the word of intellectual independence and resistance, and to take a stand against the strategies of the "global market" and the internal, absent-minded parties of the conflict in my country, Colombia? We must find ways to stand against their selfish methodologies of chaos, disinformation and terrorism as means to maintain their hegemonic control of all the different sides in the war (the post-romantic guerilla groups, the hypocritical right-wing armies, the crooked politicians, the military, the CIA or DEA . . . the whole gamut of institutions bent on maintaining their selfish, "sacred" power using Colombia as a backdrop for exploitation).

The Electronic Disturbance Theater from Critical Art Ensemble [1] has given plenty of examples of how to resist this "maladic" oppression. Art has been used for making political statements that if put in a more direct way could only be expressed in violent, un-intelligent aggressions. Art can be used as a guerrilla war of the symbolic, through the committed actions of artists/cultural activists.

Colombia's artists must work for new ways of getting across other perspectives on our country's reality. We need first to claim our place on the geopolitical map, and afterwards, by all means possible, to call to the attention of both sides of the networked space the critical aspects of our local situation.

We do not want to create more confusion (although in some cases that may be the perfect strategy—Colombia and confusion are often synonymous). So artists might create a common site for gathering diverse points of view that can share the same web server, even the same web page (hopefully without crashing the computer, as happens in Colombian reality every single day). Internet technology in Colombia is rapidly growing, thanks to the international interest in "opening and reaching" new markets. Now we have Internet access "gratis" straight into the globalized .com[munist] world, offering nothing other than Sony, Hollywood or Nike values. "Entertainment" takes the form of hungry-to-starving youngsters who kill, kidnap, deal and die in service of the unquenchable appetite for cultural-colonization-as-screen-image. Who put the guns in their hands? The same powers who paid for the bullets and pulled the trigger in the name of keeping power and control. There is no difference, when compared from the ground, whether they be the government, the guerrilla groups, the military, the right-wing armies or E.U./U.S. military/economic aid.

Recalling my country's memory and drawing attention to content focused on our cultural and historical past and crude present in an open way, will not, I believe, feed the hurricane of confusion. A media campaign should therefore go on not only for a day but for a long enough period of time to get some strong and independent ideas into the air. Dreaming about politics! It may begin in the virtual domain (safe from bullets and hopefully out of the range of war) and spread into new social forms in public, everyday life—a future social network that grows from its roots and allows the sharing of thoughts fundamentally in binary code.

My country is not for sale . . . although that seems to be the only way the Internet is "useful" in my country. To the rest of the world we are no more than new markets . . . that, plus extreme "fantastic, romantic or sensationalist" stories.

We have a "war" on, and one of its faces is the "drug war" created in a very real sense by the international media and U.S. policies in South America. This drug-war story causes real-life victims, maybe more victims than drugs actually produce in Europe or the U.S.A., where most people are not even conscious of what is happening in Colombia. But the victims are not only military casualties—the victims are the countryside dwellers, the indigenous, the farmers, the middle class and, finally, now also the upper class.

So what about a site that sells drugs for rave parties in Europe (a .com of course)? (Just as an idea, to see how many people would get involved.) Or a site with hacker info, with advice on "how to" get drugs into Europe or the U.S.A.? That would catch everyone's attention, for sure. The traffic in illicit drugs is clearly a transnational and complex threat, bringing profit to a few far away from where it all begins (bankers, the military and bilingual politicians).

Another way in which a web site could be useful would be to create a database to document the positions of all parties to the Colombian conflict—the guerrillas, the government, the civil population, journalists, or just Colombian exiles—all this information could be shared via a mailing list. For example, with regard to Occidental Petroleum Company (OXY) and its proposed drilling of sacred Uwa lands: streaming a video art piece made by Bill Viola in 1983 called *Anthem* would be a new way to make a statement about this situation

ABSTRACT

The author proposes possible ways for artists and cultural activists to use the Internet and other new media to help counter the currently devastating situation in Colombia.

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and the values that seem to matter in our actual world order.

While the structure of people and technology may already exist, now my intention is to collect those people interested in building a diverse site, a diverse network open to diverse values, different from portals that strike us down "to a controlled and regulated mediocre status" [2].

The main content of the site would be first, obviously, focused on Colombia, in hopes of creating new social and political concepts over the net using basic and free access to server services like IRC Channel (chat), mailing lists and streaming audio/video. This may permit a flow of communication—artistic content for our purposes, to be shared with others over the net in this interconnected world. Experiments should be done with other cultural islands (not only South American but also Eastern European, Asian or African, for example). We might get better, healthier information in this innocent flow of data blocks that may in the future alter and—why not?—change our present reality. Believe in culture jamming [3]!

References

1. See <http://www.thing.net/~rdom/ecd/ecd.html>.

2. See Geert Lovink's references to "controlled communities" in various of his texts published online <http://www.nettime.org>.

3. See, for example, <http://www.re-lab.net> for information about the Art & Communication 4 Festival, Riga, Latvia, August 2000.

LMJ CALL FOR PAPERS

LMJ 12 (Year 2002): Pleasure

From its naughty lyric content to the pounding physicality of its sound, Pop music is unabashedly driven by the pleasure principle. "Serious" music, however, is usually perceived as more refined, genteel, or to put it another way, repressed. And the avant-garde has traditionally found itself in the peculiar position of accompanying bohemian, hedonistic lifestyles with defiantly itchy and uncomfortable music. But are pleasure and thoughtful invention necessarily at odds? Can there be no "bump and mind"?

What of the Maryanne Amacher fan who spent 2 hours at The Kitchen, body pressed close to subwoofer? What of the delight experienced by virtuosi in particular finger-tickling passages (and what of the rewards they can shower on composers able to score for muscular glee on a regular basis)? What of the trance-like state induced by the Perfect Fifth of the tambura, and all its Western imitators? What of the gratifying, sternum-thudding din of Rhys Chatham's guitar pieces or the heaving, well-oiled muscularity of Gordon Monahan's swingers?

For nigh on a half-century, journalists have tried to raise Pop out of the gutter and convince us of its intellectual merit, but there has been scant critical attention paid to the feel-good factor of "serious" music. The time has come to think of libido and Ligeti in the same breath: for LMJ #12, we encourage the submission of articles and personal reflections on the role of pleasure in all genres of music.

Deadlines:

15 October 2001: rough proposals, queries

1 January 2002: submission of finished articles

Contact Editor-in-Chief Nicolas Collins <TallmanCollins@Compuserve.com> with proposals.