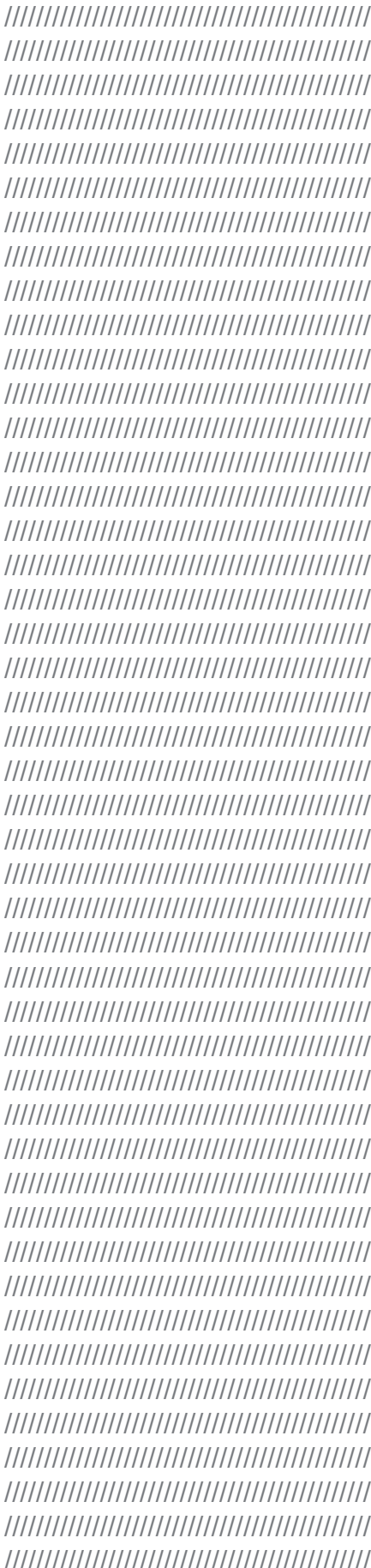


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into virtual material when I started learning and experimenting with computers at about age 15 or 16. One example might be the building of 'bicycles'. In the neighborhood of Rochester, NY (which is basically an old industrial town economically built from the Eastman Kodak business) there would be 'trash day' every Wednesday in which people would put their trash on the curbside. We (either me and neighborhood kids or my grandfather and I) use to cruise around looking for old junk that we could make things out of. Our favorite was old bicycle parts in order to make these weird 'monster bikes'. They were totally hideous, always painted different colors and made of parts that seemed to be just forced together. We once made an 3-wheel bicycle that we named the "Cow 900" that we outfitted with an old lawnmower engine. It was painted bright yellow and had these really long banana bars for steering. We had to put a 100 pound steel plate on the front because there was one speed either on OR off and when you started it there was such a strong torque that the bicycle would do a wheelie. Without the steel the thing would have just flipped over!

When I started really getting into making art I still wanted to retain what I always loved about art making—uninhibited experimentation. The problem I had in art school was that the institution was always trying to fit artists in little boxes almost as a 'marketing' strategy of sorts. This artist paints little pictures of birds; this artist paints abstract imagery etc.—totally modernist crap. It took me a while after I left art school to regain a sense of childhood 'play' that I always enjoyed in art—obviously though, I now became aware what I was doing was more serious than just 'fucking around'.

To now answer your question, I just have these ideas in my head that I just cant resist. I basically use my personality (mark edward grimm and megrim.net) as an 'online' portfolio site to highlight any work I'm currently doing or completed. Unfortunately it is partially gear toward academia because I am currently (and sometimes desperately) looking for employment but I guess that is one of the regrettable consequences of being an artist—we are always looking for funding! And what is interesting is that this is also part of the artwork—if we consider these sort of 'life-practices' as culturally significant and as artwork.

'Socialmediagroup' (see <http://socialmediagroup.org>), on the other hand, materialized as a need for working as an artist collective with my wife Amy Cheatele (see <http://happyhousewife.org/>) and others who wanted to be involved—friends, collaborators, family etc. We were looking to create a self-funded, autonomous system of art where we could run a multimedia business as 'socialmediagroup' (see <http://socialmediagroup.com>) in order to fund our artistic endeavors. Many of the ideas come from Amy's research into ecology and environmental systems. 'socialmediagroup' has really become the prime method for us for create large scale installations. Because there is a ton of work involved in these projects (especially CoHabit where we had to enlist people to disassemble an old fruit barn) we really needed a way to get many interested collaborators involved and socialmediagroup was a good semi-anonymous way to do this.

The writing I'm doing lately has been just another method for art creation. There are visual works that we can see as in a gallery but also written works that can have just as much of a cultural impact. In this area I was really influenced by the surrealist writer Andre Breton, the Situationist Guy Debord and of course the philosopher Gilles Deleuze. They showed me how writing can be just as much of an art form as anything else and just as legitimate as an artistic 'piece'. It really took me a very long time to learn to write and it was something that I think I will always struggle with—especially to be actually coherent! I think visual thinkers tend to think in a very 'non-linear' manner; writing is such a linear process—there is always a 'beginning' and an 'end' at least in a traditional sense and not including recent literary endeavors that are taking place on the internet with hypertext.



To finish answering your question—yes, I do feel that there is something that ties everything I do together, even loosely. The computer has the potential to create a real gap between artists—those that work traditionally and those that work electronically. This is a real shame—contemporary art (cutting edge art) seems to be relying more and more on electronic environments. What I have always understood is the similarities between these materials that are looked at as very different—physical material and electronic materials. When I teach, I try to teach artists that have been grounded in traditional materials that there is really nothing but similarities! The computer (code, images, video, graphics) is just another material that can be manipulated in the same ways as physical materials can be manipulated. You have to know what you are looking to do, you have to know the tools you need to do what you want to do, and then you just have to do it! 1) It always has to start with a concept—no matter how simple that concept might be. 2) There is always an experimental aspect of realizing that concept where one discovers something that they did not know before through the intimate processes of working with something new (or old for that matter). 3) There is that act of completing these processes—at least in the idea that one takes a work as far as they are willing to take it. 4) And then those ideas that are learned and the created ‘piece’ that is generated emerges into new concepts and ideas that must be tackled.

Writing for me is a very similar process. What is seldom understood right away is how time-consuming it all is!

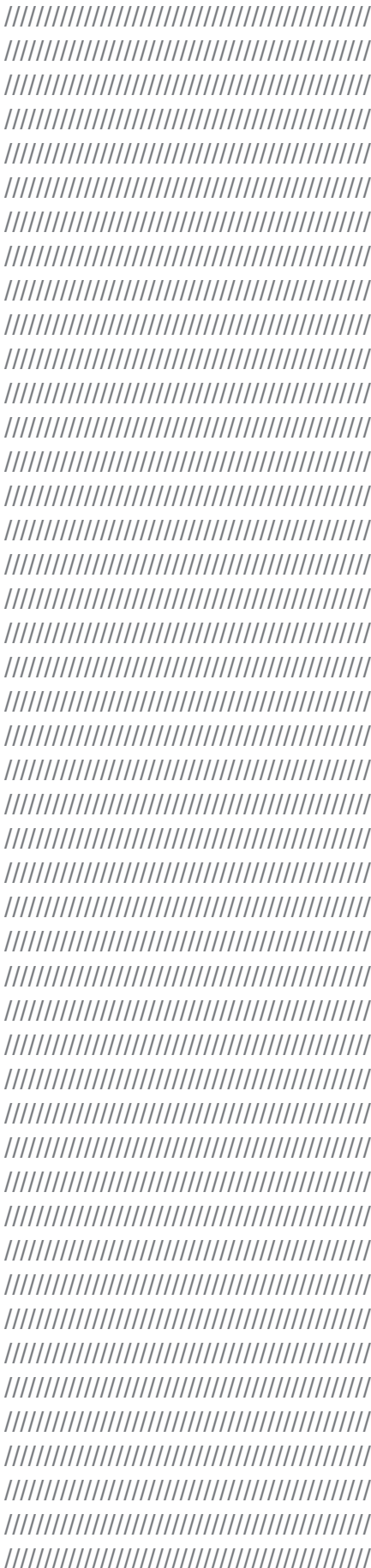
So, to put your work in a tiny, little box again: would you say this approach could be subsumed under the term ‘hacking’? And if so, is hacking an essential modus operandi for artists nowadays?

Yes. I do rather like the term ‘hacking’. I enjoy the ambiguity attached to it. Artists understand it in a positive light - to take what is available and ‘make it one’s own’. BUT we cannot forget the subversive qualities attached to the term either! The term is twofold: it is at once the practice of alterations—to hack code, to hack education, to hack a material, to hack a social organization AND the knowledge that those alterations can have a potential cumulative effect that specifically targets the dominant organizational methods of top-down homogeneity in favor of more heterogeneous elements.

I think artists really have the potential to interject using creative methods (hacks) in many other places and areas traditionally not associated with the ‘art world’, per se. This is a new quality of the contemporary artist because we are not as bound to the ‘image’ as we once were. Artist interjections OR ‘hacks’ become the artworks themselves and can now be documented via the digital image and text, subsequently displayed on the Internet. The gallery is pretty useless in this regard because it only gives some final ‘results’ at an end-stage and seldom documents the processes that were involved (mental, physical) and the struggles that ensued (economics, social pressure, networks of collaborators etc)—which are all very important.

One of my recent works conceptually addresses this. It’s rather long title tentatively is: “For Demonstrating the Automated Targeting of Any Individual That Poses a Threat to the Security of Those With Authority OR For Use in Deceptive Action Against Security Forces Using Gunfire Simulations Based on Motion Tracking”. It is basically a small program patch written in PD (puredata) that tracks movement from a web-cam and simulates the firing of an AK-47 when any movement is detected. I imagined that it could have multiple uses such as any technology always does. Hypothetically I imagined it being used as a security demonstration at some security conference in Las Vegas: “Target the Intruder To Your Estate Before They Target You!”—a sort of pre-emptive weapons system for private property where parameter guns would be automated and would not distinguish friend from foe.

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It could also be used by 'insurgents' OR criminals, subversives etc. as a real-world simulation. All they would need is a computer, web-cam and some speakers. When the police or military enters the property the motion detection would trigger the AK-47 gunfire. The police, marines etc. might think they were being fired upon and would give some time to the people in the house to make their escape OR just create an overall simulated illusion as a distraction/smoke-screen with computer synthesis.

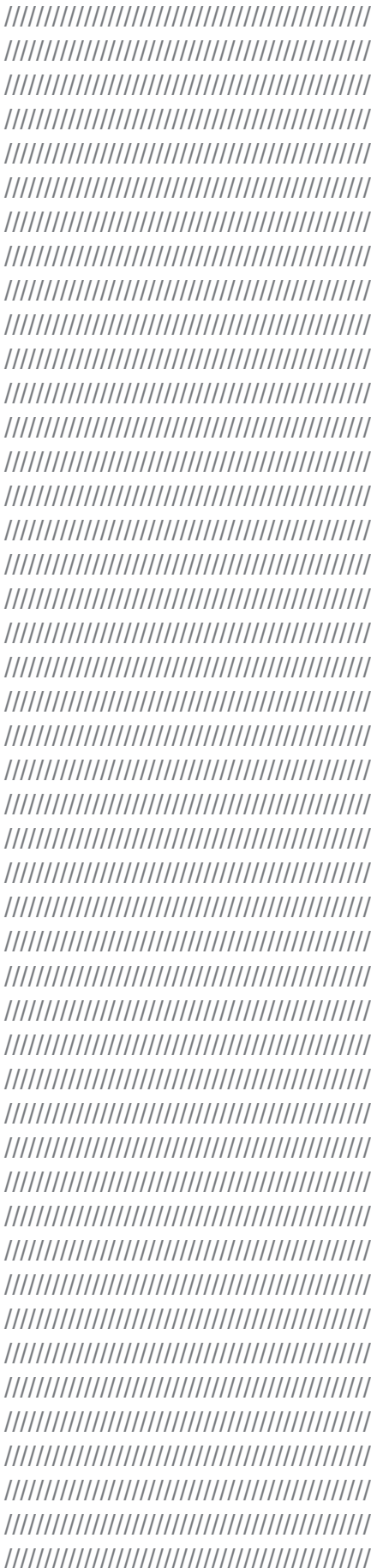
Computer hacks are great. Taking a piece of code and altering to fit ones needs. BUT this teaches a lot about reality hacks too and how computers can enter into the picture. It's fascinating to me that people/institutions discard all this old technology that they deem 'useless' and replace it with the 'newest' without really understanding the potential of what they just discarded. Artists have an interesting opportunity here because computers are being discarded at a very high rate and replaced with 'the new'. Artists can take these old materials and do really amazing things with them other than create just 'trendy' visuals or sounds. They can replicate military technologies! OR become scientists and record environmental data! We all must now strive to hack 'the real' using the methods/pedagogy that we learned from hacking 'the virtual'—a call for a pedagogy of the hack. McKenzie Wark's book "A Hacker Manifesto" is a good resource in this regard. It's a kind of (to paraphrase in his words) a "Communist Manifesto 2.0" for the hacker practice, theory and aesthetic.

To finish your question—yes I do think that hacking is an "essential modus operandi for artists today". I would love to teach a class on 'Artist as Hacker' in the university but I'm not sure how well that would really fly locally. The larger the organization the longer it takes to change and in the area that i live, art, unfortunately, is still considered in a traditional sense as something that is 'made and displayed' rather than the often complicated processes involved in even the most modest of alterations OR 'hacks'.

I just wanted to add that I just saw the brilliant film by Martin Scorsese, "The Departed". Pop-Hollywood sometimes produces great things. What was interesting about it is that it had no perspective as far as its characters were concerned. The characters were sort of neutral—they were neither good nor bad. Many times such films try to 'demonize the other', this film on the other hand was about the relationship between two contrasting views—the 'state' represented by the police organization and the 'autonomous zone' represented by the criminal organization. Both are fighting for the right to exist, both are corrupt, both are viral in that decisions transcend individuality, and both strive for their own peace.

'Hacking' is similar in that it comes with all this negativity—hacking mainframes, hacking into government organizations etc. but it is also a change in organization which is really threatening to those who are use to being in control of the hierarchy. The police organization is a top-down system that is dictated by the 'chief' OR 'captain' or whatever. 'The mob', al-Queida, hippy-communes, artist collectives are much more viral and in this sense posse a threat to more establish organizational systems. "The Departed" shows what happens when opposing organizational methods refuse to recognize 'the others' right to exist—huge shifts in perspectives begin to occur, wars ensue etc. We are in one of these massive organizational shifts right now brought on particularly by the side-effects of the technology of the computer. New forms of organization are occurring and beginning to emerge—established systems are not so happy about this.

As artists we must be participants in this new organization but also be educators in creating a new pedagogy that addresses these changes so that transitions from one organizational method to another doesn't have such a dramatically frightful effect as it has been having on world populations as they are trying to cope with these swift changes. A pedagogy of the 'art hack', as an institutional



method, is important in educating new artists (those that use the institution as a primary access point for learning) in the significance of everyday activity as artist methods for 'life hacks' and how cumulative effort can inject a new organizational shift into local, national and international systems that for the most part have historically privileged the wealthy and powerful.

In this context I would like to quote from an essay by Mirko Schaefer (4): "A community, which we consider functioning as collective intelligence (Pierre Lévy), can be much more productive and innovative than a company's research and development department" (5) Speaking of institutional methods—can there ever be something like a "hacking class"? Isn't the structure of an institution completely different to the methodical organization of "hacking"?

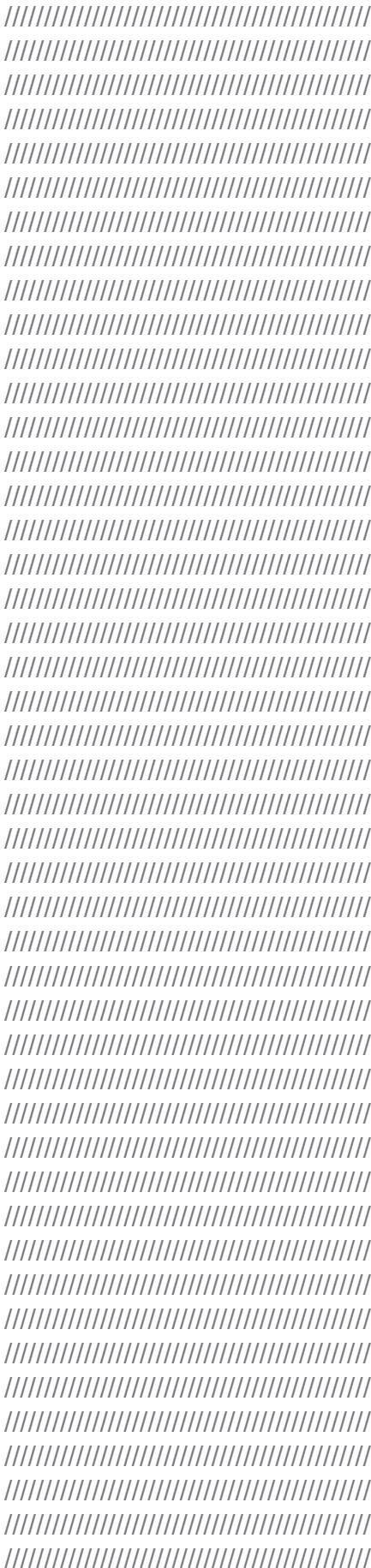
Yes. I agree with you that there are particular problems associated with the juxtaposition of seemingly conflicting organizational methods such as "the institution" OR "hacking" in the same location/territory. Let me just clarify really quick that there are many variations of institutional organization. Educational institutions vary greatly as well as governmental organizations, corporate organizations and even community organizations: all have desirable as well as undesirable traits associated with how they function within the larger assemblage. Here I'm assuming we are really talking about education institutions of higher education.

When we talk about 'hacking' in terms of under or within these institutional structures we are really talking about emergent organizational methods at the micro level that have the inherent ability to modify top-down structures, even at very subtle intensities, from the bottom-up—sort of like bubbles emerging from the bottom of carbonated beverages. This doesn't mean that these 'hacking' methods don't exist or shouldn't exist within more traditional institutional structures such as 'higher-education', it just means that these emergent methods have been historically repressed in favor of a top-down structure for the last century or so.

We can already witness forms of 'hacking' that are—and have been—available in education that are often overlooked. An example of 'hacking' classes that are already in existence, even at the primary and secondary levels, although obviously not defined as such, might be found in high schools across America. 'Shop' classes OR even 'Home EC' usually fit in this category. There have been some teachers of 'shop' for instance that are teaching students how to run diesel vehicles off of alternative fuels. This is definitely an engine 'hack' because it takes something that is available, something that was commercially produced, and creates something new from it—a car that can run off of alternative fuels that it was not specifically designed to run from. Through these processes of manipulations, students begin to learn acts of modification as well as the properties of energy and energy consumption—for me the 'modification' part being the most interesting. In 'Home Ec', for another example, students are taught how to create and cook food. They are learning properties of creation rather than those of consumption and they are also learning about energy transference—energy for creation, energy for consumption and energy renewal. These methods for learning are strategic in learning about micro-levels and the ability to retain autonomy over other areas of learning which prepare an individual for the larger 'economy of scale'.

For the most part these subjects (or even anti-subjects) are looked down upon and are usually considered downright laughable comparatively to more 'serious' subjects and disciplines such as the math and sciences (cold war mentality still in existence?).

Obviously, there is the prevalence of memorization and regurgitation that these subjects so often really upon in their educational methods. They are dominant



as legitimate forms of how one is educated. These methods are for the specific purpose of insertion within the larger assemblage that is for the most part hierarchically formed around economic interests.

I think art is also in a predicament that is indicated by this same problem. It may be a broad generalization but I always have this image, probably from my own experience in high school, of the high-school art teacher as some 'foo-foo', big hair with bad glasses and kinetic earrings that gets his/her students so play with paint and clay—it always feels like some joke to me and other students and teachers treat it as such. 'Art' is a joke subject—there is just no extended economic interest involved in its pursuit, at least as an interest for the 'masses'. And I really have no hope at all for their to be a drastic methodological change in curriculum or legitimacy. That's why a lot of these 'new media' departments that are popping up in colleges across America are so diverse in pedagogy.

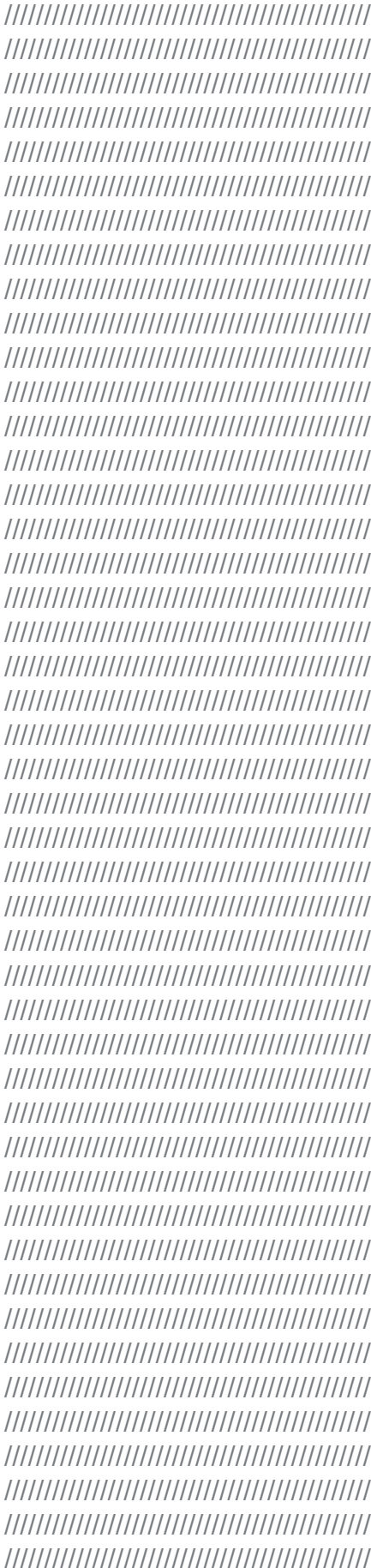
Many are not associated with 'studio art' but are often grounded in Information Technology, Photography, Film, and Communications -very often placing the same constraints that their traditional counterparts did. The institution, as far as higher-education is concerned, is very slow in response to external technological and theoretical change.

I think what I'm trying to say is that there is and there should be a place for 'hacking' classes in the institution (there always has been and there always will be) but we can not have a specific hope that there will be some quick and drastic change in organization because of the slow response time that is inherent within these organizations. Any class in 'hacking' as such will always have to be called something else. I'm pretty prone to say that an 'Art 101' for non-art majors can be an interesting experiment because there is no 'preconception' in the student to what art OR 'hacking' actually is! BUT even within other subject there is opportunities to learning from the 'hacking' community. Hacking is experiments and experimental processes in creating something new out of something that is already in existence. Right? Lets maybe make slow changes in how student can create and evolve materials and code through experimental processes rather than just simply studying what has already be learned and taking a test on it. Students need to be able to take something, a material (biological, chemical) OR a piece of code and change it just a little—alter it and make it their own. It think this approach has the ability to alter top-down hierarchical structures such as 'the institution' from within and from the bottom-up—through emergent processes at the micro-level and NOT through he economic interest of external sources.

Other than at institutional levels I think that you are right with your Levy quote in that 'communities' themselves have a lot of fluidity and ability for self-organizational and self-education. Obviously we cannot rule these out but we also have to make sure that the community and institution can have a proper relationship and that the artist can create interjections that allow these formations to evolve and new organizations and relationships between organizations to emerge.

The concepts you are talking about seem to mix the ideas of 90ies relational aesthetics (Nicolas Bourriaud) and a post - millenium diy approach. What do they mean to your current development as an artist especially under the influence of the economic pressure emerging artists (and not only they) have to bear?

Yes—and we could also say that this is a flash back to the 1960's also. Hippy commune culture, craft movements, punk-rock—these can all be traced as historical lines of flight that diverge and converge in various ways forming the exoskeleton of, as you say, the new "post-millenium DIY" aesthetic, hacker culture, etc. Yet there is a distinct difference I think in what this 'neo-diy' attempts to ,do' (and I stress ,do' as in Gilbert Ryles difference between ,knowing that'



and 'doing that' (6)) ... it is much more material now comparatively to ,the '60's' which was for the most part very ideologically driven, at least in this country, with its 'drop out' cultural aesthetic and experimentation with individuality (LSD, psychedelics, etc.) rather than understanding social ecologies in terms of 'assemblages' such as Deleuze & Guattari understand it (7) and more recently Manuel Delanda (see 'A New Philosophy of Society') (8).

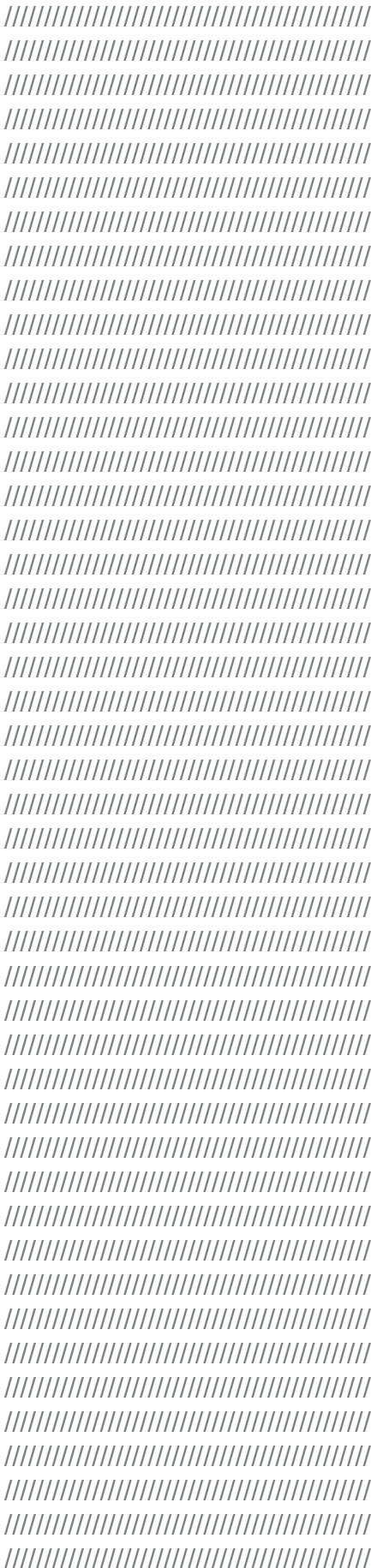
Punk moments had similarities in that they still retained a sense of ideology that was really grounded in cultural aesthetics (rock music, images, t-shirts, graffiti) but also brought in the political function of 'anarchism' rather than the politics of 'autonomatism' found in the "60's". This was a kind of forceful action that had the properties of 'bleeding' into general populations (in a different way than ,60's' ,counter cultural' trends) through a kind of 'viral' infection that was forced from the inside to the outside through radical acts - volume, violence, DIY, ripped jeans, whatever ... obviously I'm lacking complete detail here but we should have a 'vibe' of history before we can analyze the present ... to any extent.

What has emerged recently (post millenium? 9/11 is a pretty good political and social event reference point.) in philosophical and artistic thought that I think is new and very different than past movements—and I mean different in a sense that past movements were not 'failures'—but we have definitely learned what works and what does not. Artworks do not necessarily have to be bound to any form of visual or cultural aesthetics (clothing, music) nor do they have to be territorial (clubs, galleries, public-markets) but instead can function at a distance, through distance in the form of networks—either temporary and short in duration to very long term. The teaching of children can be a long-term artwork for example—especially if the children are your own! Children are extensions of our-selves and must learn to create through everything that they do rather than conform or submit to any type of pre-conceived 'societal' standard. Is the teaching of our children not a great artwork? Children will grow and ideas will eventually replicate themselves through new networks of social relationships. There are long term consequences—meaning an artwork continues to evolve through a system many years into the future—an artwork that is never completed but is continually in development. My question is—how is this (education) legitimized as an artwork? Does it need to be? How can we utilize research methods in order to document this form of art and create legitimacy for it? Does it really even need to be legitimized under some sort of institutional/academic pretense?

Actions can have aesthetic properties—although the aesthetics are projections (projectiles) that do not result in 'an image' necessarily - for example. What we must do as artists is shed the ideological constraints of some hidden 'essence' of an image OR 'aura' and begin to replace it with the aesthetics of material manipulations and processes. This does not necessarily mean the manipulation of just art materials as in an 'installation' OR 'video' BUT the manipulation of the materials of social bodies, the materials of nation-states, the materials of networks, the materials of culture, the material of electricity and energy, the materials of biology, genetics.

I think there is a lot more going on here than just 'mapping' (visually) these movements of materials OR even a traditional understanding of DIY because I think there is much more to it. Rather we are trying now to understand (conceptualize) the artist as having the ability to manipulate these materials in direct/indirect, conscious/unconscious ways that may or may-not have direct and immediate outcomes resulting in some 'final moment'—a painting on a wall, an installation.

I think economically the arts must sustain themselves but can do this by moving beyond the 'institutionalized' professions of art to explore the infinite amount of materials out there. Can an artist become a biologist? Can an artist become an economist? Can an artist infiltrate a foreign system (even slightly) from the outside to the inside? Can artists be politicians? Lawyers? Mercenaries (lets not



pretend all artists are 'good'? Can artists become 'the other' as Nietzsche (9) might say? What keeps an artist in the discipline of "art"? Comfort? Friends? Common interests? Does border crossings from one discipline to the next make one any less of an artist?

Right now I am working in "theater" with lights and sound. I have never done this before nor have I really had any exposure in theater other than going to see a bad Broadway musical once! I have had to learn a whole new language, aesthetics, collaboration, etc. in relatively a short amount of time. Granted I'm still in 'the arts'—but even comparatively to 'fine arts' this experience is very foreign to me. What now can my role be in this new field? Can I bring something new to the discourse indirectly and directly through my presence? What can I learn that might be utilized in another discipline and under different conditions?

I have also been studying mycology and would love to take a few classes in genetic engineering, micro-biology etc.—but I could only do this if I had a University job that allowed me to take classes for free obviously.

I think economically the 'institution' of art is too established, specific, and at times very impenetrable. For me, artists need to look for alternative economic systems to grasp onto, infiltrate and consequently redefine and alter. This may be a disciplinary change!—but I really mean that there are other systems for us to involve ourselves in and other mechanisms to creation and material manipulations that can eventually emerge to have extraordinary impacts—viral impacts that are much different I think than just the idea of 'drop-out' autonomy OR punk and/or '90's DIY.

About Mark E. Grimm

Mark E. Grimm is an artist that works in and between New York City and Rochester, NY in the U.S. His work is primarily focused on new media art (interactive installations, video art and internet art) and conceptual works. In 2000 he became co-founder of the Social Media Group (<http://socialmediagroup.org>, <http://socialmediagroup.com>), recent works have become increasingly concerned with the intersection between the human, the ecological, and the technological. Heavily influenced by current philosophical theory such as post-modern and post-structural theory he uses environmental and social issues as hidden text veiled in a minimalist garb.

His professional experiences include teachings at Oswego State University of New York (NY), Kean University (NJ) and Teachers College at Columbia University (NY). Currently he is working on his PhD and is employed at Syracuse University as a Media Consultant.

- (1) <http://warsgrindthingstoahalt.megrimm.net/>
- (2) http://socialmediagroup.org/projects/entry_excavate_cohabit_02.php
- (3) <http://megrimm.net/writing.php>
- (4) <http://mtschaefer.net/>
- (5) <http://art.runme.org/1107805077-9249-0/schaefer.pdf> , p.68
- (6) Ryle, G. (1949) *The Concept of Mind*. Chicago. The University of Chicago Press
- (7) Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- (8) Delanda, M. (2006). *A New Philosophy of Society*. London: Continuum.
- (9) Nietzsche, F. (1956) *The Birth of Tragedy & The Genealogy of Morals*. Anchor Books.

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