

Panarticon

Discorder Magazine. # 25 October 2003.

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Next Five Minutes

Looking out through the glass onion that is Amsterdam, bikes on the right, trams on the left, here I am: stuck in the middle of Next Five Minutes (N5M), the international festival of tactical media <www.n5m.org>. It's late again & I am upstairs in the hacker lounge @ 3am, as usual writing & smoking in dark lights and mahogany walls with a dozen or so pasty-skinned, Linux-runnin' coders giggling over their latest anonymous protocol development. Later I will discover my website has been hacked by some white hat, packet sniffing my wireless FTP transfers—welcome to the New World of ubiquitous insecurity.

A gathering that grew out of Dutch media activism from the '80s and the XS4ALL hacker movement, N5M has become a central touchpoint for the networks of Indymedia and the Independent Media Centre (IMC). Remix that with hacktivists, politically conscious artists, writers and academes stirred in with contemporary psychogeographers and social software advocates & you begin to drift into this global network of resistance that engages the positive production of alternative life & thought. Despite criticism, it's not all bourgeois kids with laptops... a strange mix it is, as I enjoy a spliff with the Brazilians in the middle of Leidseplein, completely cracking over the fact that here, in Amsterdam, and at complete odds to São Paulo, cars, people, and bikes are kept in separate, perfectly ordered lanes. In Brazil, media activism is a different game entirely. While I question the Brazilians on how to bribe police officers in a state of accepted & widespread casual and criminal corruption—which they find *funny*—I also learn of their work in São Paulo. By assembling social graffiti artists, renegade poster freaks, and other public interventionists, the group coordinated subversive public art, eventually managing to secure their own open studio space, where artists could come and work 24/7 on projects in a supportive atmosphere. But this was open to immediate critique that their work was middle-class & focused on aesthetic intervention in São Paulo city central, ignorant of the massively poor sections of the city. They needed to go to the *favellas*, the poor, rural areas... (I should note that the project includes equal representation of women, and that this critique came from a woman member whose name I am unable to hunt down at the moment & who organised the work in the favellas). As Ricardo Ruiz of <basev.has.it> explained to me: drive 4 hours, top speed down the highway... through suburbs, buildings, jungle... then back to suburbs... keep going: and you are *still in Sao Paulo*, this city of close to 20 million people, almost the population of Canada.

With the help of funnelled money from UNESCO, the group scavenged old computer parts and conducted workshops in the favela communities on how to assemble, test and build a PC, install and troubleshoot Linux, set-up local area networks, create content, and access the Net. As they view it, Net access isn't the problem. The issue is what you do once you *have* Net access. The Net is often consumed as a Western product, and what is needed is the production of localized *content*, via tactics that not only link to the world but speak directly to local networks. In fact, this was a theme at N5M: the “deep local” of

the Net, the realisation that the Net needs to be able to work on a neighbourhood level of social communication, a pragmatic level, alongside the global. While the indie-rawk kids go ga-ga over Friendster.net, the Brazilians teach the urban poor Linux. More can be discovered at <www.projetometaphora.org> and in the writings of Ricardo Rosas at <rizoma.net>.

Last 10 Restrictions

Despite my enthusiasm for N5M, criticism is needed. Not on the level of tactics—for like Critical Art Ensemble, I think tactics should not be negated for the sake of “advancing critique”—but rather in the systematization of speakers and slick packaging of the “festival.” Although attempts were made to avoid talking-heads panels and to provoke dialogue, many of the invited speakers spoke on more than one occasion in an atmosphere that made difficult actual conversation. A more diverse range of speakers and a more open system—perhaps borrowing from academia, a Call For Proposals—is needed if the Festival is to discard its reputation as a closed circuit of regulars. Not that these regulars have nothing to say; hearing Geert Lovink was a treat, for example. But when Lovink is speaking *three times*, one wonders if there are not others with perspectives and points to make utilising all the privilege of the limelight. In fact, the best encounters of the conference were in the hacker lounge, the informal dinners, and the two open TAZ spaces, where ad-hoc presentations on psychogeography and mutant sound-jams disrupted the programmed blocks. One of these moments came late on Saturday night. Here’s a few words pounded out on the keyboard in the smoky light...

Genoa Memories

Amsterdam, Saturday. I had plans tonight to see a Yes Men film and catch a lecture or two. But something detained me. After meeting Marc Covell, the British journalist who was beaten within an inch of his life at Genoa during the IndyMedia Centre raid by the police and *carabinieri*, my mind was unsettled. Here was a *person*, and I felt a gravity pulling his handshake to a life-affirming grip. I was haunted by this during the Locative Media workshop <locative.x-i.net>, and went upstairs, afterwards, to write. Marc found me there—we had made a date for 9pm, to grab a possible interview. We did.

Marc told me, over two hours, of his experience in Genoa in 2001. Of the violence, and torture. At points both he, and I, were close to—well, tears. Now, two years later, Marc has already booked a flight—to return, to the "gates of hell," to Italy, to Rome. To return because 72 police officers, including high-ranking officials in charge of Genoa security, have been charged—charged with everything from *attempted manslaughter, torture, assault, perversion and obstruction of justice, to planting of evidence* .

I remember following Genoa--I caught the last Indymedia transmission from the Centre saying it had been raided. That was apparently Marc’s doing. It would be a few hours, and then, a few days and then weeks until the extent of the violence—organised, police violence, what is, *technically fascism*—would be revealed. When the stretchers came pouring out, when the body bags were arranged.. the comas, broken bones, scars, split skulls: these came to light. A lot of this was forgotten one year later, especially in North America, after Nine Eleven. North Americans stopped following the story. But

Europe—thankfully—did not. Inquiries were launched; the EU got involved. And here we are today—with the breaking of the charges. Finally. And I think that Marc can begin, now: for it is only the beginning. But also the beginning of the end.