

AMAZON NOIR INTERVIEW

with Franz Thalmer for CONT3XT/furtherfield

1 [setting/framework] Crime, thievery, betrayal, the bad and the good guys and a final showdown with the blistering sun: Amazon Noir refers in its title, narration and visualisation to the 1940/50ies Film Noir and crime fiction. Why did you settle your newest project in this genre and who are the good guys, honestly?

UBERMORGEN.COM: Dating back to "the digital hijack" with etoy – using movie scripting and film plots are very useful aesthetically and technically for digital actionism (media hacking). Noir is symptomatic for labeling art forms in retrospect. We were also dealing with German expressionism at the time and from there it is not far to Film Noir. The combination of the two is best described in the dialogue of Amazon Noir: <http://www.amazon-noir.com/dialogue.html>

ALESSANDRO LUDOVICO: A supposed 'crime' related to book could refer recursively to Noir (that is a tale about crime in a certain style), so it was the perfect genre to involve in a such a project. The good guys won in the end. But this is not happening in any noir, as you probably know, and the twists are always possible.

PAOLO CIRIO: The hype of the spin against piracy that come from media propaganda is ever focused on the criminalization of downloading and share content under copyright. The main controversial consequence of increment of sharing of content is the lucrative exploiting by the corporations, like actually Napster or the big business of the devices for playing mp3 and dvix. So we are the worst guys of the scene: we have done a big crime and in the end we have betrayed our action, with a deal with the enemy. It's a representation of the actual ambiguity about copyright issue, where in any case seem that everything haven't a right moral or ethic roots.

2 [technology/coding] Despite all storytelling, Amazon Noir is a socio-technical piece/process of art. What is the coding background of the "sophisticated robot-perversion-technology" ab/using Amazon.com's "Search Inside the Book"-feature? Did you select the books according to certain criteria?

UBERMORGEN.COM: No, the books were auto-selected by keywords – we entered a list of 23 keywords to the machine, from then on it was tripping by itself. The books were then selected, downloaded, stored and redistributed by the machine.

ALESSANDRO LUDOVICO: And some of the selection was surprisingly fitting the core project spirit. For example 'Steal this book' by Abbie Hoffman turned out as one of the first results.

PAOLO CIRIO: The background of our robot-perversion-technology was a system of four servers around the globe, everyone with a specific function: one in USA for a faster sucking of books, one in Russia for injecting books in p2p networks and two in Europe for schedule the action with intelligent robots. The main goal was steal all 150,000 books of the Amazon.com's "Search Inside the Book" feature, and then use the same technology of us for steal books from the Google Print Service. It's was just relative of the number of cluster of robots we could use. After the deal with Amazon we can invest

money in order to improve our project.

3 [reactions/feedback] According to a press release from Edith Russ Haus, Amazon Noir is based upon the tradition of happenings and seen as a performative media event, which includes the reaction of conventional media in its concept. Already any reactions from Amazon.com or any other part of the show: media, press, lawyers, ... ? What kind of responses do/did you expect?

UBERMORGEN.COM: We do not expect anything. The setting is experimental and our research carries us into unknown territories, socially, economically, politically and in terms of media (mass media, internet, mobile communication). It was striking that the project was fully running on a technical level (underground) and hyped on a mass media level (overground) but there was a vacuum in the middle. We have not released the project until Nov 15 2006 – but by then the project was over. This release strategy was totally new to us.

ALESSANDRO LUDOVICO: We're not interested in generating a media hype, but in researching and then sharing innovation on both conceptual and technical level. Amazon Noir was an experiment in many senses. Among them the secret exploit of one of Amazon mostly used technology was done via a special software and then the incoming files were framed as results before any public mention. When people has known about that everything was already done.

PAOLO CIRIO: Yeah, in the evolution of the net-art projects of historic groups like RtMark, CriticalArtEnsemble, ElectronicDisturbanceTheater, we are the synthesis of the best of their core style. We play in different stages: on the net, on the old mass media and in the streets. We engage in our show different actors: the audience, media, art and legal system. Every layer of our complex society are in the scenography, because now happenings should be in the anthropologically space of our contemporary culture. So I like this quote of 'Digital resistance', of the CAE: " The aim of The Living Theater to break the boundaries of its traditional architecture was successful. It collapsed the art and life distinction, which has been of tremendous help by establishing one of the first recombinant stages. "

4 [art (historic) background] Amazon.com , in both senses, deals with books, one of the exemplary non-material good of our time. In the late 1960ies Conceptual Art was controversially characterised by the term dematerialisation. Regarding works like Google will eat itself and Amazon Noir from this point of view, the term dematerialisation gets an ambiguous kind of meaning: Are you -- asked provocatively -- dematerialising economics by art or even rematerialising art? Do you see yourself as Conceptual Artists?

UBERMORGEN.COM: Yes. We see part our work in the tradition of conceptual art. For the dematerialising part of your question, click-economy and global finance already work on extremely abstract levels. We love to short-circuit and to lay out very basic instructional text (code) as the core of our projects. The Computer and The Network create our art and combine every aspect of it. UBERMORGEN.COM is metaphysically influenced by Lawrence Weiner and practically enhanced by ever reinventing Madonna, Jean Tinguely, the Nouveaux Réalistes and by the hardcore Viennese Actionists.

ALESSANDRO LUDOVICO: The material/immaterial dilemma is at the base of digital,

but after so many dematerialisation analysis, now it seem that to re-materialize stuff is an art trend. What we do is to re-materialize digital paradoxes and de-stabilizing potential markets in a 'conceptual' economy.

5 [copyright/property] Copyright/left, GNU, Creative Commons, All Rites Reversed -- The discussions about the actual restrictions of the copyright are multifaceted and emanate from many different points of view. Where do you -- as artists, writers, producers of intellectual, non-material goods -- see the most striking clash between intellectual property and commodities in their original meaning as industrial property?

PAOLO CIRIO: The second step of the materialization of the books in printed copy with Print on Demand technology and the distribution of these in public space of pour countries will be a concrete example of commodities. When a common good has gave to people for free or for a cheap price, the society have to earning. Every day we see the rampant privatization of commons, as soon as people become more poor and ignorant. The latest movements of CC, Wikipedia, P2P free networks, etc.. are a needed resistance in a world where the use of cultural content is ever less a right but ever more a business.

UBERMORGEN.COM: One of UBERMORGEN.COMs ongoing projects is called "Chinese Gold". It mixes up the "virtual" (the game) with the "real" (money). In China there are many Online-Gaming Workshops that hire people to play online games such as World of Warcraft (WoW) day and night. The gaming workers produce in-game currency, equipments, and whole characters that are sold to American and European Gamers via Ebay. These people are called „Chinese Gold Farmers". The future is now!

Image Series:

http://www.hansbernhard.com/X/pages/photo/pages/chinese_gold_workshop.html

http://www.hansbernhard.com/X/pages/photo/pages/chinese_gold_screenshots.html

6 [final] One final question to all of you: What was the last book you ordered on Amazon.com? And was it your last?

UBERMORGEN.COM: Anne McCaffrey, "All The Weyrs of Pern". Yes, we stopped downloading books the moment the contract (sale of the software) was signed with Amazon USA. Thanks for your Qs. Amazon Noir is a project by UBERMORGEN.COM, PAOLO CIRIO, ALESSANDRO LUDOVICO, 2006

ALESSANDRO LUDOVICO: Mine was 'Amazon.com: Get Big Fast' by Robert Spector