

#002 THE BIG BOOK (C)RIME

EIN E-MAIL GESPRÄCH MIT PAOLO CIRIO, ALESSANDRO LUDOVICO, UBERMORGEN.COM | Rund ein Jahr nach der Veröffentlichung von Google Will Eat Itself (1) haben die Künstler und Medienaktivisten Paolo Cirio, Alessandro Ludovico, Hans Bernhard und Lizvix den internationalen Buchhandelsriesen Amazon.com erfolgreich ausgetrickst. Die Ergebnisse der Medien/Kunst-Aktion Amazon Noir - The Big Book Crime wurde am 15. November 2006 der Öffentlichkeit vorgestellt.

Der Ausgangspunkt für das neueste Projekt der österreichisch-italienischen Künstlergruppe ist die aktuelle Diskussion um den Urheberrechtsschutz für geistig-kreative Güter und deren Ge-/Missbrauch durch neue Technologien im Internet. Mit der zunehmenden Popularität des World Wide Web in den vergangenen 15 Jahren und dem Aufkommen zahlreicher Interaktionsformen und Publikationsmodelle wie etwa Peer-to-Peer-Technologien, wurden Maßnahmen getroffen, „die es dem Individuum erlauben, geistig-kreative und digitalisierte Güter als Ware in Umlauf zu bringen.“ (6) Dem Ruf nach einem freien Informationsfluss der Open-Source-Bewegung stehen global nicht einheitlich funktionierende Rechtssysteme gegenüber. Eine Konsequenz daraus sind User-basierte Varianten des Urheberrechtsschutzes wie Copyleft, Creative Commons oder GNU, die allesamt zum Ziel haben, einen freien Informationsfluss durch Reglementierung von Seiten des eigentlichen Urhebers zu gewährleisten. Bei diesen Modellen handelt es sich trotz aller Freiheiten um eine „extrem dicht verregelte Nutzungsform von einzelnen Privateigentumsrechten. Jede Freie Software Lizenz beruht auf der im Urheberrecht verankerten ausschließlichen Verfügungsgewalt des Rechteinhabers, der dieses Recht in einer umgekehrten Weise nutzt“ (2) und unter bestimmten Voraussetzungen zur freien Verfügung stellt.

Mit der Bereitsstellung der Volltextsuche (Search Inside the Book) bewegt sich der - oft als praktisch und freundlich charakterisierte - Online-Buchladen Amazon.com seit Herbst 2003 in einem Graubereich zwischen Marketing und einem bisher nicht definierten, zusätzlichen Nutzungsrecht von Textmaterial. Ganze Textpassagen aus Büchern werden dem Käufer seit mittlerweile mehr als drei Jahren zum Stöbern

perfect useful customer service is not only problematic for „authors whose individually copyrighted works, such as short fiction, essays, and poems, appear in collections or anthologies because of the significant risk to get copied“ (3), but it is also blurring the edges of the already rather complicated system of copyrights comprising the needs and wants of editors, marketing and wholesalers. It seems that with the rise of new business areas, the (law) system lacks behind the progress of the market.

Even if the netart-project Amazon Noir is not a critique on copyright in general, it concentrates its attention on the relevant discourse. With a special software, which made use of the Search-Inside-the-Book-feature, entire books were partially downloaded, later on recombined and in this way republished to a broad public via communication networks over the past few months. Amazon Noir is based upon a plot, situated in the 1940/50ies Film Noir genre and crime fiction. The authors describe it the following way: the bad guys steal copyrighted books from Amazon.com, using sophisticated robot-perversion-technology. A massive media fight and a brutal legal fight escalate into an online showdown at the center of the story. Daily shoot outs with the global massmedia are followed by hardly resistable kickback-bribes from powerful Amazon.com. Betrayal, blasphemy and pessimism split the gang of bad guys. In the end, the good guys win and drive off into the blistering sun with the beautiful and seductive femme fatale, the massmedia (4).

The following interview was done by Franz Thalmer (FT) for CONT3XT.NET.

FT: 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 (UC): 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 (AL): A supposed „crime“ related to books could refer recursively to Noir (that is a tale about crime in a certain style), so it was the perfect genre to involve in 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.

als Leseproben angeboten und sollen ihn so zum Kauf animieren. Problematisch ist dieses - durchaus nützliche - Kundenservice aber nicht nur für Autoren kurzer Texte, die in Sammlungen und Anthologien erscheinen und deren Material jederzeit zur Gänze kopiert werden kann (3). Durch die Volltextsuche verschwimmen die Urheberrechte für geistiges Eigentum allgemein im Nirgendwo zwischen Verlegern, Vertrieb und Großhandel. Es scheint, als würde sich durch das Entstehen neuer Geschäftsfelder im Internet der Markt schneller entwickeln als das System sich selbst regulieren kann.

Das Netzkunst-Projekt Amazon Noir versteht sich zwar nicht als Copyright-Kritik, setzt aber dennoch genau an diesem Punkt an. Mittels einer speziellen Software wurden ganze Bücher in Einzelteilen downgeloaded, rekonstruiert und auf diese Weise in den letzten Monaten über Kommunikationsnetzwerke einer breiten Öffentlichkeit zur Verfügung gestellt. Amazon Noir - The Big Book Crime ist in seiner Narration und Visualisierung in der Kriminalliteratur und dem Film Noir der 1940/50er Jahre angesiedelt. Die Autoren beschreiben die Geschichte folgendermaßen: The bad guys steal copyrighted books from Amazon.com, using sophisticated robot-perversion-technology. A massive media fight and a brutal legal fight escalate into an online showdown at the center of the story. Daily shoot outs with the global massmedia are followed by hardly resistable kickback-bribes from powerful Amazon.com. Betrayal, blasphemy and pessimism split the gang of bad guys. In the end, the good guys win and drive off into the blistering sun with the beautiful and seductive femme fatale, the massmedia (4).

Das vorliegende Interview mit der Amazon Noir Crew wurde von Franz Thalmeir für CONT3XT.NET geführt. Allgemein wird auf das Setting der Aktion sowie auf ihren kunsthistorischen Hintergrund eingegangen. Weiters sprechen die Künstler über die aktuelle Diskussion um Urheberrechtsangelegenheiten. Auf die Frage nach dem erwarteten bzw. erwartbaren Reaktionen der Öffentlichkeit auf Amazon Noir antwortet ÜBERMORGEN.COM: We do not expect anything.

PAOLO CIRIO (PC): The hype of the spin against piracy that comes from media propaganda is ever focused on the criminalization of downloading and sharing 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 it seems that anything has a right moral or ethic roots.

FT: 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?

UC: 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.

AL: And some of the selection was surprisingly fitting into the core project spirit. For example „Steal this book“ by Abbie Hoffman turned out as one of the first results.

PC: 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 P-2-P networks and two in Europe for schedule the action with intelligent robots.

The main goal was to steal all 150,000 books of the Amazon.com's Search-Inside-the-Book-feature, and then use the same technology of us for stealing books from the Google Print Service. It was just relative of the number of clusters of robots we could use. After the deal with Amazon we can invest money in order to improve our project.

FT: According to a press release from the Edith Russ Haus (5), 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?

UC: 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

Über die Künstlergruppe:

Paolo Cirio [<http://www.paolocirio.info>]
wurde 1979 geboren; er lebt und arbeitet als Medienaktivist in Turin/Italien. Er studierte Multimedia, Kunst, Musik und Performance Kunst an der Universität Turin und hat seinen Abschluss mit dem Thema „Net-Art as model of new performance“ gemacht. Als Teil des Software-Kunst-Kollektivs [epidemiC] organisiert er Kunsthappenings mit einem aktionistischen Hintergrund und arbeitet als Webdesigner, -entwickler und Art Direktor.

Alessandro Ludovico [<http://www.neural.it/english>]
wurde 1969 geboren; er lebt und arbeitet in Bari/Italien als Herausgeber, Journalist und Kritiker. Er ist sowohl eines der Gründungsmitglieder von Nettime und des European Peripheral Magazine als auch seit 1993 Chefredakteur und Herausgeber von Neural. Er hat das „Virtual Reality Handbook“ (1992) und den „Internet.Underground Guide“ (1995) herausgegeben. Im Jahr 2006 war er Mitherausgeber von „The Mag.net reader. Experiences in Electronic Cultural Publishing“.

Lizvlx [<http://www.ubermorgen.com>]
wurde 1973 geboren; sie lebt und arbeitet als Künstlerin in Wien/Österreich und St. Moritz/Schweiz. Sie hat Wirtschaftswissenschaften und Marktanalyse an der Wirtschaftsuniversität Wien/Österreich studiert. Als Gründerin von 194.152.164.137 und Mitgründerin von UBERMORGEN.COM lektoriert Lizvlx international auf Konferenzen und unterschiedlichen Universitäten. Ihr Medienportfolio reicht von Veröffentlichungen auf CNN bis zu Bulgarischen Tageszeitungen.

Hans Bernhard [<http://www.ubermorgen.com>]
wurde 1971 geboren; er lebt und arbeitet als professioneller Künstler und Medienaktivist in Wien/Österreich und St. Moritz/Schweiz. Er hat Visual Communications, digit Art, Kunstgeschichte und Ästhetik sowohl an der Universität für angewandte Kunst Wien/Österreich als auch in San Diego/USA, Pasadena/USA und Wuppertal/Germany studiert. Er ist Gründungsmitglied der etoy.CORPORATION und von UBERMORGEN.COM.

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.

AL: 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's most used technology was done via a special software and then the incoming files were framed as results before any public mention. When people have known about that everything was already done.

PC: Yeah, in the evolution of the net-art projects of historic groups like RtMark, CriticalArtEnsemble (CAE), ElectronicDisturbanceTeather, 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 is in the scenography, because now happenings should be in the anthropological 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.“

FT: 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 dematerialization. Regarding works like Google Will Eat Itself and Amazon Noir from this point of view, the term dematerialization 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?

UC: 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 Realistes and by the hardcore Viennese Actionists.

AL: The material/immaterial dilemma is at the base of digital, but after so many dematerialization analysis, now it seems that to re-materialize stuff is an art trend. What we

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do is to re-materialize digital paradoxes and de-stabilizing potential markets in a „conceptual“ economy.

FT: 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?

PC: The second step of the materialization of the books in printed copy is with Print on Demand technology and the distribution of these in public space of poor countries will be a concrete example of commodities. When a common good has been given to people for free or for a cheap price, the society has won. Every day we see the rampant privatization of commons, as soon as people become more poor and ignorant. The latest movements of CC, Wikipedia, P-2-P 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.

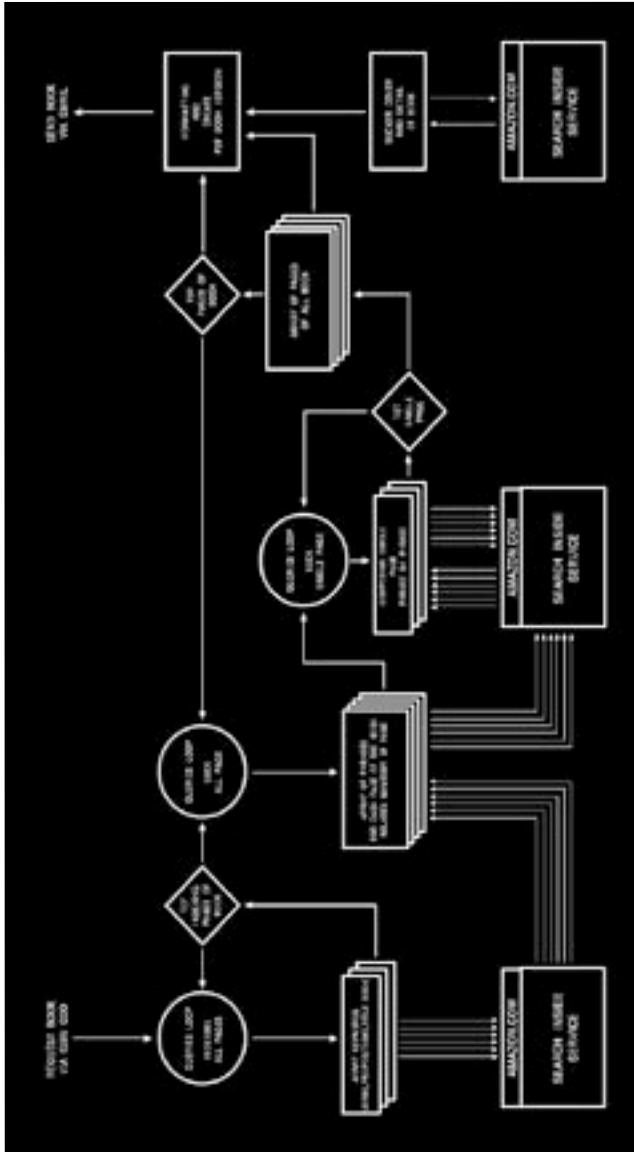
UC: One of UBERMORGEN.COMs ongoing projects is called „Chinese Gold“. It mixes up the „virtual“ (the game) with the „real“ (money). In China there are many Online-Gaming Workshops that hire people to play online games such as World of Warcraft (WoW) day and night. The gaming workers produce in-game currency, 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]

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

UC: 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

AL: Mine was „Amazon.com: Get Big Fast“ by Robert Spector.

Thank you very much/grazie mille for the interview!



About the Amazon Noir crew:

Paolo Cirio [<http://www.paolocirio.info>]

is a Turin/Italy based Media activist, born in 1979. He studied Multimedia, Art, Music and Performing Arts at the University of Torino/Italy and completed his degree with the topic „Net-Art as model of new performance“. He is part of the software-art collective [epidemiC] and organizes art happenings with an activist background. He works as a webdesigner and developer as well as art director.

Alessandro Ludovico [<http://www.neural.it/english>]

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Lizvlx [<http://www.ubermorgen.com>]

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(1) <http://www.gwei.org>, 14.11.2006

(2) cf. Nuss, S.: Copyright & Copyriot. Aneignungskonflikte um geistiges Eigentum im informationellen Kapitalismus. Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot. Münster. 2006, p. 235

(3) <http://www.authorslawyer.com/c-amazon.shtml>, 14.11.2006

(4) <http://www.amazon-noir.com>, 14.11.2006

(5) <http://www.edith-russ-haus.de/german/stipendien2006.html>, 14.11.2006

(6) Nuss, S.: Copyright & Copyriot. Aneignungskonflikte um geistiges Eigentum im informationellen Kapitalismus. Verlag Westfälisches Dampfboot. Münster. 2006, p. 230