

# DEMO CRA OY 2.0

GEOFF COX

Today the enemy is not called Empire or Capital.  
It's called Democracy. Alan Badiou<sup>1</sup>

Critique is an essential part of capitalist production. The ability to express one's opinions in public allows the system to verify itself as democratic. Through such means, it is able to generate its own critique and then quickly neutralise it. Within the neo-liberal spaces of contemporary art, thereby some opinions not readily acceptable in other public places can be displayed but the politics easily contained. The critical artist offers soft politics that is easily recuperated to legitimate the art institution's self-reflection. But it's not quite that simple – and far more dialectical. On the one hand, art appears to have lost its critical power as any form of critique is automatically recuperated; but on the other, the new situation opens up different strategies of opposition that respond to the ways in which power is organised.<sup>2</sup>



Repetition,  
Les Liens Invisibles, 2010  
Courtesy the artist

What is required is a more detailed examination of the power relations at work, and how they are configured as part and parcel of informational capitalism, and how social relations and control structures are managed. With no longer a centre of power to be found or established opposition as such, it is clear that the (class) enemy is increasingly hard to identify across its networks, and yet power continues to produce its own vulnerabilities. Correspondingly, the recommendation of those developing oppositional tactics is to take advantage of the vulnerabilities in networks (much like successful computer viruses do) by exploiting power differentials that exist in the operating system.<sup>3</sup> Such tactics draw on methods informed by network and information theory, as well as reverse engineering mass culture.<sup>4</sup> The approach offers direct responses to recuperative processes, and yet the effect of *tactical media* is paradoxical, as Lovink contends, leading equally tactically to “benign tolerance”.<sup>5</sup> That may be sadly the case, but the reappraisal of recuperative processes and interventionist responses is necessarily ongoing, not least in the context of how social media have changed the face of the representational political process. This is evident in the apparent success of various campaigns that hope to influence the outcomes of elections and in the rise of services that offer effective participation in the political process.

The tactics of dissent have changed too. *Seppukoo*, a recent hack of Facebook by Les Liens Invisibles (2009),<sup>6</sup> provides an example where users were able to commit virtual suicide in a ritualistic removal of their virtual identity.<sup>7</sup> Critique here operates in the challenge to the living-death user-experience of Facebook and other similar programs that express the social relation in restrictive form. The action provoked a litigious response by Facebook not least.<sup>8</sup> Part of the friendly (inter)face of capitalism, restricted social relations are perpetuated through networks of friends (everyone is a potential friend rather than enemy), such that antagonistic social relations are masked and the politics nullified. Evoking Schmitt's notion of enmity (in *The Concept of the*

*Political, 1927*), the political differentiation of friend or enemy (aka Facebook or Seppukoo) lies at the heart of this, and offers a certain definition of politics. The reference to the Japanese ritual suicide of *Seppuku* (literally *stomach-cutting*) evokes the stubborn refusal to fall into the hands of the enemy – and the preference for autonomy even at the cost of one’s life.<sup>9</sup> Virtual suicide stands as the *refusal* to operate under intolerable conditions of service and as an affirmation of creative autonomous practice. Refusal responds to the way in which those in power regenerate themselves through constant upgrades to break opposition; the position derives from Tronti’s essay ‘The Strategy of Refusal’ of 1965, following the logic that capital uses workers’ antagonistic opposition as a motor for its own development. But crucially, capital does not wish to destroy critique entirely, as it is fundamental to its operations, but obscure its origins and subdue its effectiveness. Moreover, this is its friendly face whether you like it or not. For instance, in the case of Facebook, they keep your account details for perpetuity and commercial exploitation. The *Seppukoo* ‘about’ page explains: “Suicide is a free choice and a kind of self-assertiveness. Unfortunately, Facebook doesn’t give to its users this faculty at all, and your account will be only deactivated.”<sup>11</sup>



Seppukoo (screen grab),  
Les Liens Invisibles, 2009  
Courtesy the artist

Democracy and authoritarianism operate dialectically. This is in keeping with the liberal tradition, as Balibar explains, and the distinction between individual opinions and collective actions in the ways they “reciprocally ‘underwrite’ each other”.<sup>12</sup> Individuals voice their diverse opinions, both for and against the ruling power, in order to legitimate its effects. Expressing the *violence of participation*, this is the basis of liberal democracy as well as the basis of its democratic renewal – what we together refer to as *participatory democracy*. Individuals actively imagine their participation in what ultimately is part of their subjugation. This comes close to Lazzarato’s discussion of *participative management* in the workplace as a technique of power in restructured form, and one that appears to grant special privileges to artistic labour. Indeed, Lazzarato thinks the technique is more totalitarian than the production line as it involves the willing subjectivity of the worker in the participatory process.<sup>13</sup> Again, popular social media platforms like Facebook come to mind, and more specifically applications such as *Causes* through which users can imagine the effectiveness of their political engagement by creating petitions in support of a particular cause. The ‘about’ statement expresses the ambition of no less than changing the world:

Facebook Platform presents an unprecedented opportunity to engage our generation, most of whom are on Facebook, in seizing the future and making a difference in the world around us. Our generation cares deeply, but the current system has alienated us. *Causes* provides the tools so that any Facebook user can leverage their network of real friends to effect positive change. The goal of all this is what we call ‘equal opportunity activism.’ We’re trying to level the playing field by empowering individuals to change the world.<sup>14</sup>

Another project by Les Liens Invisibles, commissioned by Arnolfini in 2010, uses the tactic of *over-identification* to respond to such tendencies.<sup>15</sup> In the age of over-mediated democracy, Repetitionr provides a platform for activism with minimal effort, an online petition service with a difference; offering advanced Web 2.0 technologies to make participatory democracy a truly user-centered experience.<sup>16</sup> The success of every campaign is guaranteed as just one click is all it takes to generate a whole campaign with up to a million automatic fake signatures. The project reflects the acknowledged need for new institutional forms that challenge existing systems of governance and representational structures, as a blatant expression of *non-representational democracy*.<sup>17</sup> The approach challenges the limits of representational democracy and the discourse of neo-liberalism in general, offering a means to rethink politics within network cultures. If this is an example of over-identification with real existing participatory democracy, then the provocation is that we need to develop far better strategies and techniques of organisation.

In opposition to informational capitalism lies commons-based peer production. Indeed, concerns over the commons are encapsulated by the title of Hardt and Negri’s recent book *Commonwealth*, to indicate the ‘common-wealth’ of land, water and the atmosphere.<sup>18</sup> Current political, economic and ecological crises derive from aggressive and primitive forms of property (such as disputes over copyright and intellectual property) and energy production (geopolitical disputes over carbon fuels) – a lack of recognition of the common. Historical parallels between the ways in which the commons were turned in private property (through the enclosure movement), and the ways in which intellectual property is being privatised have been well established. In addition, the way that code is being privatised offers a useful focus to discuss wider issues of organisation and power struggles.

The cultural significance of this is captured by the term *recursive public* to account for the ways in which the public is “a collective independent of other forms of constituted power and is capable of speaking to existing forms of power through the production of actually existing alternatives”.<sup>19</sup> Somewhat related to the concept of the public sphere, a recursive public is capable of modifying itself through participation, relatively unmediated by higher authority. For Kelty, the collective technical experiment of the Free Software movement is an example of a recursive public that draws attention to its democratic and political significance and the limitations of our understanding of the public in the light of the restructuring of power over networks, struggles over intellectual property rights and sharing of code. In this sense, the concept of the public sphere itself is taken as open to modification and reuse – made recursive in other words. As a consequence, a reconceptualisation of political action is required that combines traditional forms of expression such as free speech with coding practices and sharing associated with Free Software. Making reference to the work of Arendt, Kelty’s intervention is to extend a definition of a public grounded in discourse – through speech, writing and assembly – to other legal and technical layers that underpin the internet in recognition of the ways in which contemporary power and control are structured – through both discourses and infrastructures.<sup>20</sup>

Such a reconsideration of public space or a politics of the common exposes the sad reality of liberal participatory democracy. To Rancière, the origin of the political lies in the properties of its subjects and in how they come together, how they ‘part-take’, or in other words how they participate in contradictory forms of action. “Politics is a paradoxical form of action” according to Rancière, and hence can be defined in the contradictions at the heart of action – between acting and being acted upon. It is the

very "axioms of democracy" (of ruling and being ruled) that require rupture to open up discussion of the constitution of the subject and its relations.<sup>21</sup> New publics are required – in coalitions of human and non-human agents involved in radical networks – to engage with and to modify the infrastructures they inhabit as an extension of the public sphere. Evidently publicness is constituted not simply by speaking, writing, arguing and protesting but also through modification of the domain or platform through which these practices are enacted. Democracy requires an upgrade but only if released fully into the public domain.

1. Badiou, A. "Prefazione all'edizione italiana." *Metropolitica*. Naples: Cronopio, 2002. There are far too many other references to mention here that take a critical view of Western representational democracy, but a particularly polemical view appears in the first section of Muammar Al Qathafi's 'The Solution of the Problem of Democracy' in his *The Green Book*.
2. I prefer the word 'antagonism' to 'opposition' in recognition of how important it is for neo-liberalism to dilute it in order to function effectively. Amongst others, this is in keeping with Chantal Mouffe's position in "Artistic and Agonistic Spaces." *Art & Research*. vol. 1. no. 2, 2007 <<http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/mouffe>>.
3. Galloway, AR and Thacker, E. "The Exploit: A Theory of Networks." *Electronic Mediations*. vol. 21. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.
4. The exhibition *Craftivism* at Arnolfini Nov 2009–Feb 2010, is an example of 'reverse engineering' aiming to question and disrupt the prevailing codes of mass consumerism <<http://www.craftivism.net>>.
5. Lovink says: "The ideal is to be little more than a temporary glitch, a brief instance of noise or interference. Tactical media set themselves up for exploitation in the same manner that 'modders' do in the game industry: both dispense with their knowledge of loop holes in the system for free. They point out the problem, and then run away. Capital is delighted, and thanks the tactical media outfit or nerd-modder for the home improvement." Geert Lovink quoted in Raley, R. "Tactical Media." *Electronic Mediations*. vol. 28. Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 2009: 28. 'Tactical Media' broadly refers to contemporary forms of dissent somewhere between creative experimentation and a reflexive engagement with social change; particularly important are the collaborative writings of Lovink, as in 'The ABC of Tactical Media', 1997 (with David Garcia), and 'New Rules for the New Economy', 2001 (with Florian Schneider) and the *Next Five Minutes* conferences, held in Amsterdam from 1993.
6. Les Liens Invisibles are an imaginary art-group from Italy, comprised of media artists Clemente Pestelli and Gionatan Quintini <<http://www.lesliensinvisibles.org>>.
7. *Seppukoo* <<http://www.seppukoo.com>>. Also note similar projects, such as Cory Arcangel's *Friendster Suicide* <<http://www.coryarcangel.com/2005/12/friendster-suicide-live-in-person-dec-2005>> and moddr\_lab's *Web2.0 Suicide Machine* <<http://suicidemachine.org>>.
8. See the 'cease and desist' letter from Facebook's lawyers, and the reply – both linked to the *Seppukoo* home page <<http://www.seppukoo.com>>.
9. Thanks to Tatiana Bazzichelli for pointing out that the inspiration for the project is *Seppuku*, the ritual suicide that some members of the Luther Blissett Project committed in 1999, to declare the end of their multiple identities project <[http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/452\\_en](http://www.lutherblissett.net/archive/452_en)>.
10. Tronti, M. "The Strategy of Refusal." *Autonomia: Post-Political Politics, Semiotext(e)*. vol. 3, no. 3. New York: Semiotext(e), 1980: 28–34.
11. *Seppukoo* <<http://www.seppukoo.com>>.
12. Balibar, E. *Spinoza and Politics*. London: Verso, 2008. 27.
13. Lazzarato, M. "Forms of Production and Circulation of Knowledge." *Readme! Filtered by Nettime: ASCII Culture and the Revenge of Knowledge*. Ed. Josephine Bosma et al. New York: Autonomedia, 1999. <<http://apps.facebook.com/causes/about>>
14. The psychoanalytic term 'over-identification', often associated with Slavoj Žižek, has been taken up as a tactic by many activist-artists, including The Yes Men, to expose a position by exaggerating a position, wildly pushing the system to its extremes in order to conclude that it is unacceptable.
15. <<http://www.repetition.com>>
16. 'Non-representational democracy' describes democracy decoupled from sovereign power, as discussed in Ned Rossiter's *Organized Networks: Media Theory, Creative Labour, New Institutions*. Rotterdam: NAi, in association with the Institute of Network Cultures, Hogeschool van Amsterdam, 2006. 39. Rossiter also cites Paolo Virno's *The Grammar of the Multitude*. New York: Semiotext(e), 2004.
17. In addition, "love provides another path for investigating the power and productivity of the common. [... Such a] notion of love gives us a new definition of wealth that extends our notion of the common and points toward a process of liberation." Hardt, M and Negri, A. *Commonwealth*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press/Harvard University Press, 2009. xi–xii.
18. Kelly, CM. *Two Bits: the Cultural Significance of Free Software*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008. 3.
19. Ibid. 50.
20. Rancière, J. "Ten Theses on Politics." *Theory & Event* 5.3, 2001 <[http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory\\_and\\_event/v005/5.3ranciere.html](http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v005/5.3ranciere.html)>.

Geoff Cox is a Researcher in Digital Aesthetics at the Digital Urban Living Research Center, Aarhus University, Denmark, and Associate Curator of Online Projects at Arnolfini. Les Liens Invisibles is an imaginary art-group from Italy, comprised of media artists Clemente Pestelli and Gionatan Quintini.

## Nation Sets Its Sights on Building Sane Economy

True Cost Tax, Salary Caps, Trust-Busting Top List  
By T. VERLEN

The President has called for swift passage of the Safeguards for a New Economy (S.A.N.E.) bill. The omnibus economic package includes a federal maximum wage, mandatory "True Cost Accounting," a phased withdrawal from complex financial instruments, and other measures intended to improve life for ordinary Americans. (See highlights box on Page A10.) He also repeated earlier calls for passage of the "Ban on Lobbying" bill currently making its way through Congress.

Treasury Secretary Paul Krugman stressed the importance of the bill. "Markets make great servants, terrible leaders, and absurd religions," said Krugman, quoting Paul Hawken, an advocate of corporate responsibility and author of "Blessed Unrest. How the Largest Movement in the World Came into Being and Why No One Saw It Coming."

"At this point, the market is our

# IRAQ WAR ENDS



U.S. Army helicopters begin moving troops and equipment from Saddam Hussein's former Baghdad palace.

**Recruiters Train for New Life**  
As a ban is imposed on recruiting minors, executives nationwide look for new work. The Times follows one on his job hunt odyssey through Manhattan and surrounding areas.

**USA Patriot Act Repealed**  
Eight years later, a shamed-faced Congress quietly repeals the much-maligned USA Patriot Act, unanimously... or almost.

**Evangelicals Open Homes to Refugees**  
Up to a million Iraqi exiles — nearly half of the total — will find sanctuary in Christian homes across the U.S., vows the National Association of Evangelicals. Other denominations are expected to follow.

**Public Relations Industry Starts to Shut Down**  
The public relations industry has been criticized for misleading the American people, corrupting politicians, and even helping to start wars. Now, it's beginning the process of shutting down for good.

**Last to Die**  
Two proportional monuments — one to the Iraqi dead, 300 feet high, and one to the American dead, 15 feet high — are unveiled in Baghdad, and a five-year-old boy whose lifespan coincided with that of the Iraq War is remembered.



Protests organized by Witness Against Torture helped pave the way for the close of the Guantánamo facility.

measures that granted relief from debt caused by low crop prices.

"The similarities between the two periods are remarkable, and the lesson that emerges is simple: if you want change, keep our feet to the fire."

Dr. Wellman agrees. "The only reason the current President and Congress have been able to implement all these changes, was because of pressure from popular movements that made them have to."

The Plains report, due out next month, cites the work of groups associated with United for Peace and Justice, an umbrella for anti-war groups, for galvanizing public support for ending the war, and for pushing the Administration to resist the oil lobby and other interest groups. It also cites the work

## Maximum Wage Law Succeeds

Salary Caps Will Help Stabilize Economy  
By J.K. MALONE

WASHINGTON — After long and often bitter debate, Congress has passed legislation, fiercely fought for by labor and progressive groups, that will limit top salaries to fifteen times the minimum wage.

Tying the bill to a plan of overall reform of the U.S. economy, the bill echoes a similar effort enacted by President Franklin Roosevelt in 1942, which was followed by the 1992 period of growth for the middle class in U.S. history.

"When C.E.O. salaries remain stable thanks to high taxation of high salaries, there's little incentive to take big risks with shareholders' money, and the economy remains in a steady growth mode," said Senator Barney Frank, one of the bill's cosponsors. "But when C.E.O. salaries can fly through the roof, there's a very strong incentive for C.E.O.s

Continued on Page A10

## TREASURY ANNOUNCES "TRUE COST" TAX PLAN

By MARCUS S. DRIGGS

The long-awaited "True Cost" plan, which requires product prices to reflect their cost to society, has been signed into law.

Beginning next month, throw-away items like plastic water bottles and other items which are wasteful or damaging to the environment will be heavily taxed, as in many developed countries. Sleep taxes will also apply to large cars and gasoline.

The new plan calls for a 200 percent tax on gasoline, comparable to the one long in effect in most European countries. Companies and consumers are already switching to more efficient gas vehicles to new electric cars. "We suddenly have a waiting list 200 names long for the EV," said John Chabner, the owner of Chabner Chevrolet in

Continued on Page A10

## Popular Pressure Ushers Recent Progressive Tilt

Study Cites Movements for Massive Shift in DC  
By SAMUEL FELDEN

The spate of reform initiatives undertaken by the Administration and both houses of Congress can be attributed directly to grassroots advocacy, according to a comprehensive study that out this month.

"In education and health care, most notably, but also in housing, banking, and the environment, we have documented unprecedented responsiveness on the part of political leaders," said Dr. Joyce Wellman, director of the Plains Institute for Policy Analysis, a New York-based think tank. "Our data show a direct correlation between the level of activity of particular coalitions, on the one hand, and specific legislative action, on the other. It's popular pressure that is responsible for the swiftness and scope of legislation emerging from the White House and Congress."

The institute's report shows a threefold increase in the incidence of letters, phone calls, faxes, and email received by congressional offices, 88 percent of which were from people who identified themselves as new members of particular activist organizations.

See [nytimes.se.com](http://nytimes.se.com) for more

## Ex-Secretary Apologizes for W.M.D. Scare

300,000 Troops Never Faced Risk of Instant Obliteration  
By FRANK LARIMORE

Ex-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice reassured soldiers that the Bush Administration had known well before the invasion that Saddam Hussein lacked weapons of mass destruction.

"Now that all of you brave servicemen and women are returning, it's important to us to reassure you, and the American people, that we were certain Hussein had no W.M.D. and that he would never launch a first strike against the U.S.," Ms. Rice told a group of wounded soldiers at a Veterans' Administration hospital yesterday.

"I want you to know that if we had had the slightest suspicion that Saddam could use W.M.D.s against you, we never would have sent hundreds of thousands of you to be sitting ducks on the Iraqi border for several months."

Ms. Rice was referring to the fact that by August 2002, eight months before the ground invasion, the US had over 100,000 troops stationed in countries throughout the Gulf, a number that grew to over 300,000 shortly before the 2003 attack on Baghdad. Most of these were within range of the Scud missiles used by Mr. Hussein in the 1991 Gulf War, that could easily have been fitted with chemical or biological weapons if they had existed.

Rice noted that in the 1991 Gulf War, Hussein had used missiles to launch attacks on Israel, which made him popular with Arab citizens throughout the Middle East.

"Do you really think we would have given Saddam a major public relations coup by allowing him to annihilate tens of thousands of you right there on holy territory?" asked Ms. Rice.

Former Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger responded to Ms. Rice's revelation without surprise. "Of course this was the case. When Israel believed Iraq had nuclear weapons in 1981, they didn't attack on the ground — they bombed from the air. That's a pre-emptive attack. If you believe deterrence will not prevent an attack and that your enemy has W.M.D.s, then the last thing you do is station your troops right next door."

ABC's George Stephanopoulos

Continued on Page A5

## USA Patriot Act Repealed

Evangelicals Open Homes to Refugees

Public Relations Industry Starts to Shut Down

Last to Die

## INTERNATIONAL A4-5

**Gitmo, Other Centers Closed**  
The notorious Guantánamo Bay, Cuba detention camp will be closed, along with a network of secret C.I.A. run facilities in Eastern Europe, Afghanistan and elsewhere. PAGE A24

**Iraqi Refugees Worldwide Celebrate Withdrawal**  
Two million Iraqi exiles, and three million internal refugees, celebrated the end of hostilities and began making plans to return to their homes. PAGE A4

**NATIONAL A6-9**  
**Conflict of Interest Law Will Stop Revolving Door**  
The "Revolving Door" bill will prohibit high-ranking corporate officers from holding public office for ten years upon

leaving their companies, and public officials from accepting management positions at large corporations for the same period. Coupled with the Ban on Lobbying bill, the bill will reduce the influence of large corporations on public policy. PAGE A9

**Health Insurance Act Clears House**  
While almost all are celebrating the passage of the National Health Insurance

Act, which finally brings the U.S. up to par with other developed nations, representatives of Kaiser, Cigna and other health insurance companies are vowing to "fight tooth and nail" to protect their interests. PAGE A7

**Bush to Face Charges**  
Most observers weren't surprised by the high treason indictment itself, but rather by the party that brought it. The case could also provide an unexpected boost to the International Criminal Court, paving the way for more indictments. PAGE A5

**BUSINESS A10-11**  
**Corporate Personhood Gets Real**  
An initiative to abolish limited liability will make shareholders pay for the crimes their corporations commit — even if they only own one or two shares in a mutual fund. PAGE A11

## NEW YORK A12

**Bicycle Lanes Inaugurated**  
With the completion of the 9th Avenue bike lane and groundbreaking on other avenues, New York is on the (bike) path to becoming as livable as other world cities. PAGE A12

**EDITORIAL A13**  
**A Lobbyist Defends Lobbying**  
The Ban on Lobbying bill is not without victims. PAGE A13

**Thomas L. Friedman**  
The columnist resigns, and will put down his pen to take up a screwdriver. PAGE A13

## EDITORIAL A13

**A Baboon Troop's Experience**  
A particularly peaceful baboon troop may have lessons to teach us. PAGE A13

**More Inside The Times.**  
PAGE A2 =

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9 2 0 1 5  
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