

WHEN AESTHETIC IS NOT JUST A PRETTY PICTURE

Paolo Cirio's Social Actions

by

Lanfranco Aceti

As a general rule, it is taxation that monetarizes the economy; it is taxation that creates money, and it necessarily creates it in motion, in circulation, with turnover, and also in a correspondence with services and goods in the current of that circulation.

***Decoding the Flow* is an exhibition by Paolo Cirio with the Museum of Contemporary Cuts (MoCC) that opened in parallel with another exhibition by Cirio at Kasa Gallery that was titled *Jurisdiction Shopping*.**

Loophole4All, the artwork shown in these two exhibitions, was a data-based critique of capitalism rendered through a series of disruptive interventions, which provided the opportunity to refocus one's attention on the operational systems of contemporary Data Capitalism.

Cirio's realm of artistic activities is based on a critique of contemporary society that touches and rattles, as much as an artwork can, the smooth operations of international corporations.



Loophole4All (logo), Paolo Cirio, 2013. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.

JURISDICTION AS WELL AS SOCIETY SHOPPING

How could we define the activities of an artist like Cirio and should we neatly frame his works of art? It is too easy and restrictive to place both, artist and works of art, within a new media context, since they do not 'live' solely online, but are a composite of different experiences, performances, processes and practices.

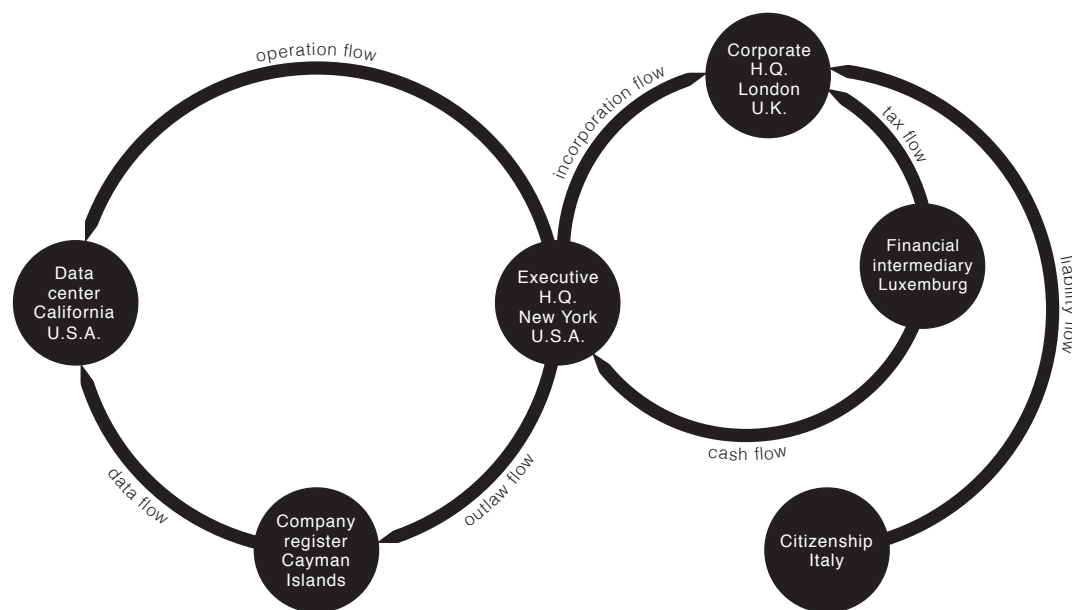
When developing these two exhibitions, *Decoding the Flow* and *Jurisdiction Shopping*, as a curator, I was in the midst of elaborating and reflecting on a series of critiques of the contemporary art world and its patrons – corporate tycoons who still see an artwork as a pretty picture, monetizing galleries that sought the next great cash cow (read: artist), or academic environments that promote obscurantist aesthetics and exsanguinated esotericisms.

Loophole4All represented a valid alternative to the 'usual requirements' of aesthetic conformity and offered a moment of reflection on the conditions of illegality within which the increasingly powerless majority of people (99%) are obliged to live in.

Cirio's *Jurisdiction Shopping* was focused on the current schizophrenic post-postmodern relationships between state, corporations and citizens. The exhibition analyzed the process of personification of corporations and their increasingly transnational nature, which have produced a new set of relationships that exclude and exempt some people from participation in the shared onus (responsibility) towards the state. It focused on the processes that allowed and still allow the privileged few to continue operating illegally within the state; living, abusing and corrupting through financial malpractices the very society within which they live.

Cirio's artwork, *Loophole4All*, democratized the process of escaping from one's obligations towards the state by allowing a liberalized and widespread participation in the process of tax evasion – no longer a privilege of the 'rich few.'

Jurisdiction Shopping offered the viewer the possibility of engaging with a series of works of art that are based on the artist's experience of attempting to democratize practices of illegality, thus presenting



Loophole4All, Paolo Cirio, 2013. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.

the possibility of a world within which frameworks for a generalized tax evasion exist and, accordingly, the tools to replicate billionaires' behaviors are readily available.

In a historical period in which social injustice, illegal market and financial behaviors, corporate malfeasance, as well as multiple obscure and hidden charges have become a form of private taxation and vexation parallel to the public taxations and vexations of corrupt states, *Loophole4All* presented itself as the ultimate mass participation in the phantasmagoric and elusive corporate world of billionaires.

'Everyone could set a corporation in a tax haven = everyone could become a tax evader' becomes the aesthetic mantra; the equation that attempts to dissolve the differences between the enlarging underclass of have-nots (99%) and the minute club of haves (1%).

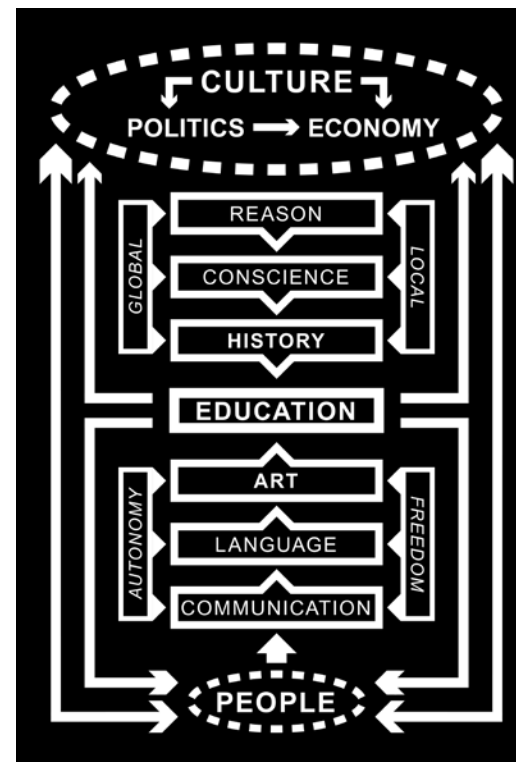
These were and still are the phenomena that contribute to the creation of large underclasses within Europe and North America. In this context, it is important to understand Cirio's artistic vision as one that presented mass tax evasion as the new great social equalizer and a democratic approach to illegality for the creation of 'the great collective artwork.'

The exhibition and its works of art poke fun directly at the failure of the state in reshaping itself into a new corporate and economic identity, as well as the failure of the social body to understand that the new corporate mythology and its systems are, in Deleuzian terms, part of the same old apparatus of capture and extortion. Both the state and the social body have been captured and are being squeezed from the corporate global economics, which were presented as the saving grace of a concept of society that had been declared dead in the 1980s, and that now certainly no longer exists.

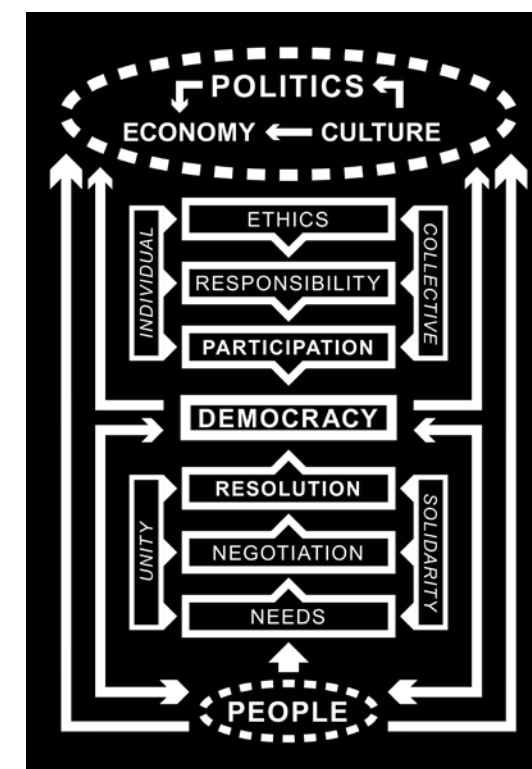
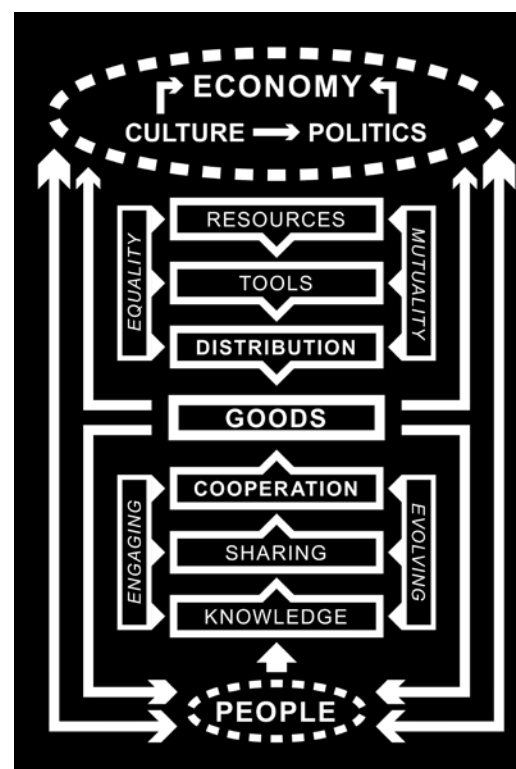
DECODING THE FLOW OF MEANING

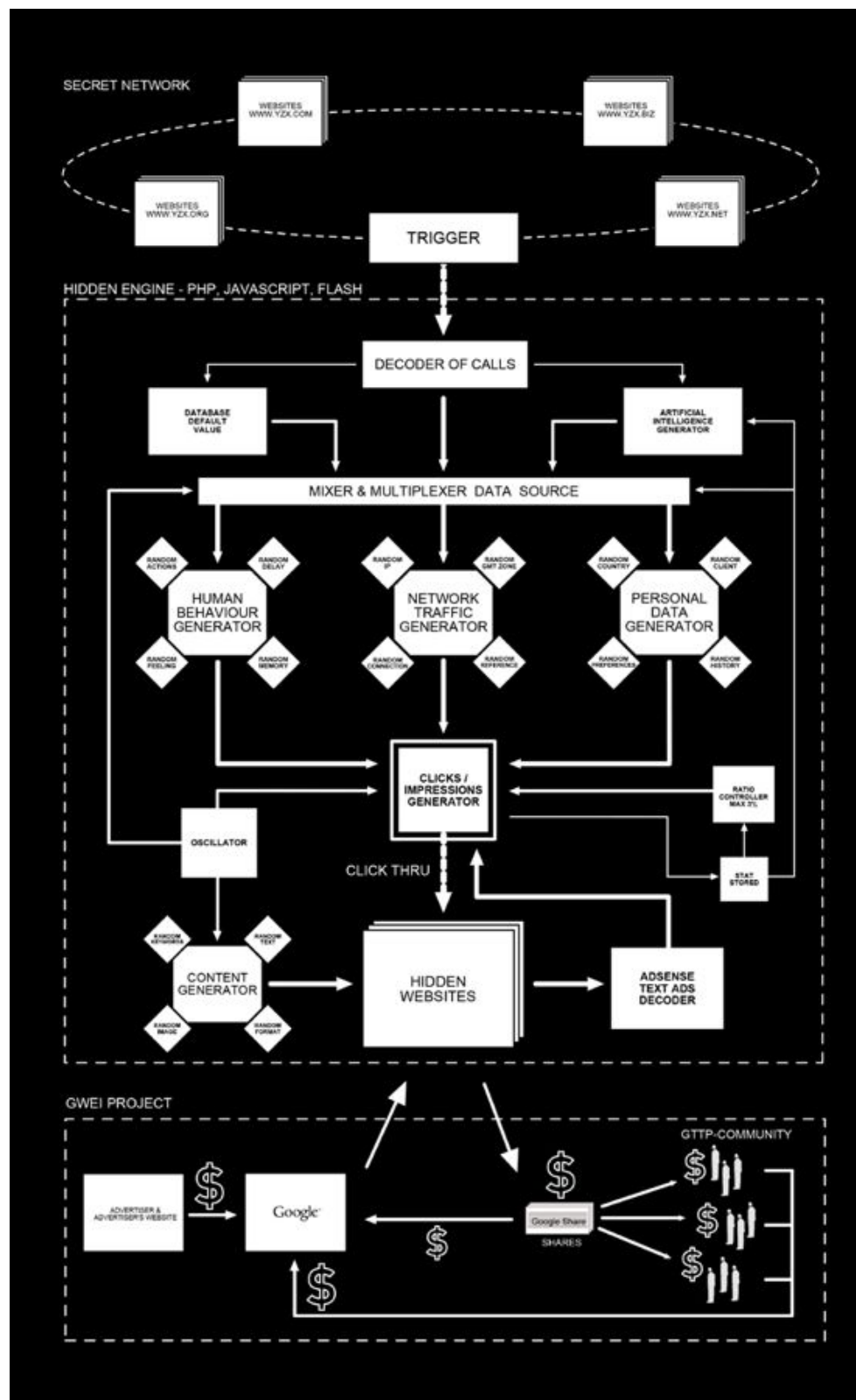
Closely linked with deterritorialization and reterritorialization are the parallel terms "decoding" and "recoding," which bear on representations rather than on concrete objects. Decoding, it is important to note, [...] refers to a process of dis-investing given meanings altogether, to a process of "uncoding," [...] ultimately the elimination of established codes that confer fixed meaning. ²

The elimination of fixed meanings eliminates value and generates a flow that can be orchestrated, manipu-



Open Society Structures - Algorithms Triptych, Paolo Cirio, 2009. Serigraph (digital) print on Plexiglass, 54cm x 39cm. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.





Google Will Eat Itself (GWEI) - Algorithm diagram, Paolo Cirio, 2005. Mixed media, dimensions variable. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.

lated, structured and directed according to specific and particular interests within a capitalistic society that exists and prospers on the lack of meaning. Here, perhaps, in Deleuzian terms, the difference between the representation and the action is displayed through Cirio's aesthetic approach, in his request to the audience of actively understanding how something works and in taking an action.

*Let us recall that "decoding" does not signify the state of a flow whose code is understood (compris) (deciphered, translatable, assimilable), but, in a more radical sense, the state of a flow that is no longer contained in (compris dans) its own code, that escapes its own code.*⁵

Decoding The Flow on the online platform of the Museum of Contemporary Cuts was a necessary counterpoint to the physical exhibition that took place

simultaneously at Kasa Gallery. *Decoding the Flow* was an artistic and curatorial statement that created a flow of images and "code, that escapes its own code"⁴ by presenting a survey of Cirio's aesthetic and artistic practice.

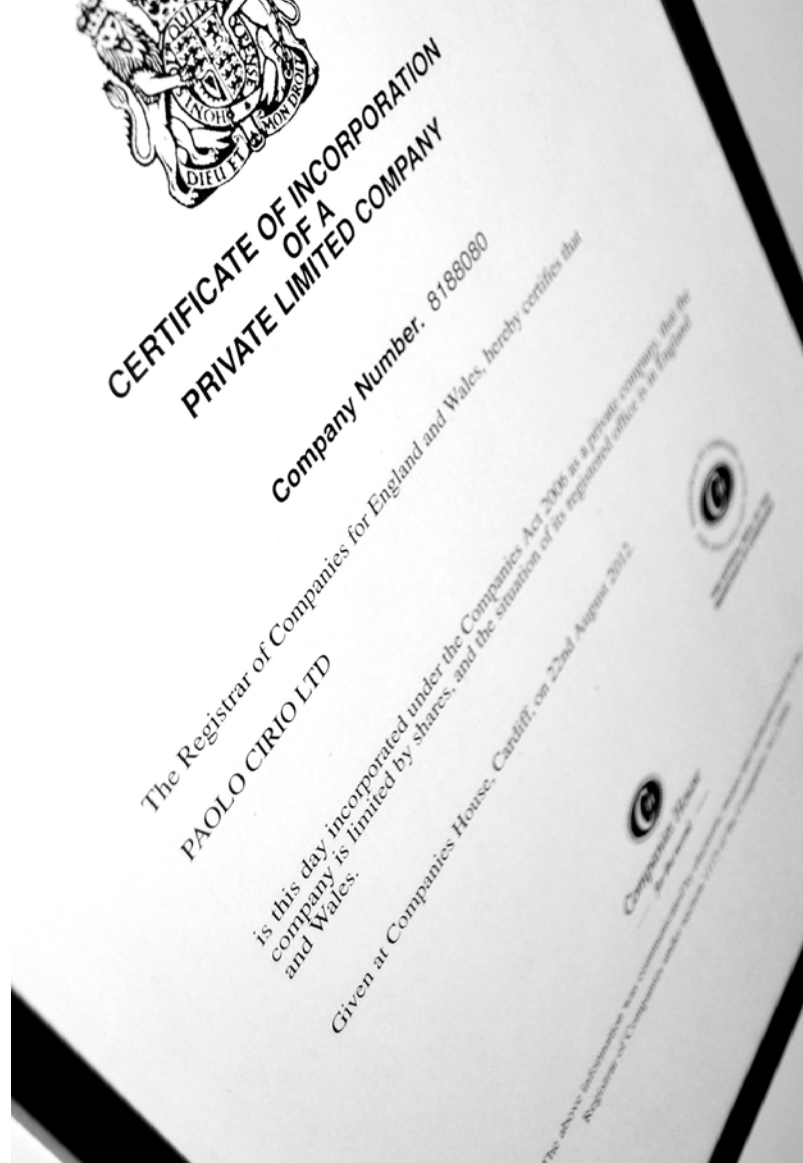
Starting from the latest of Cirio's works of art, *Loop-hole4All*, MoCC presented a series of images with the clear understanding that this could only be an attempt to decode the financial and social crisis, as well as represent the larger social issues that characterized the last part of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century. The exhibition wanted to direct the gaze of the viewer to the loss of meaning of both state and citizen in a world where corporations were and are re-shaping in capitalistic terms not just their own existence but the 'lack' of meaning and conditions for everyone else within it.



Loophole4All, Paolo Cirio, 2013. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.



Loophole4All, Paolo Cirio, 2013. Multimedia Installation at
Aksioma, 2014. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.



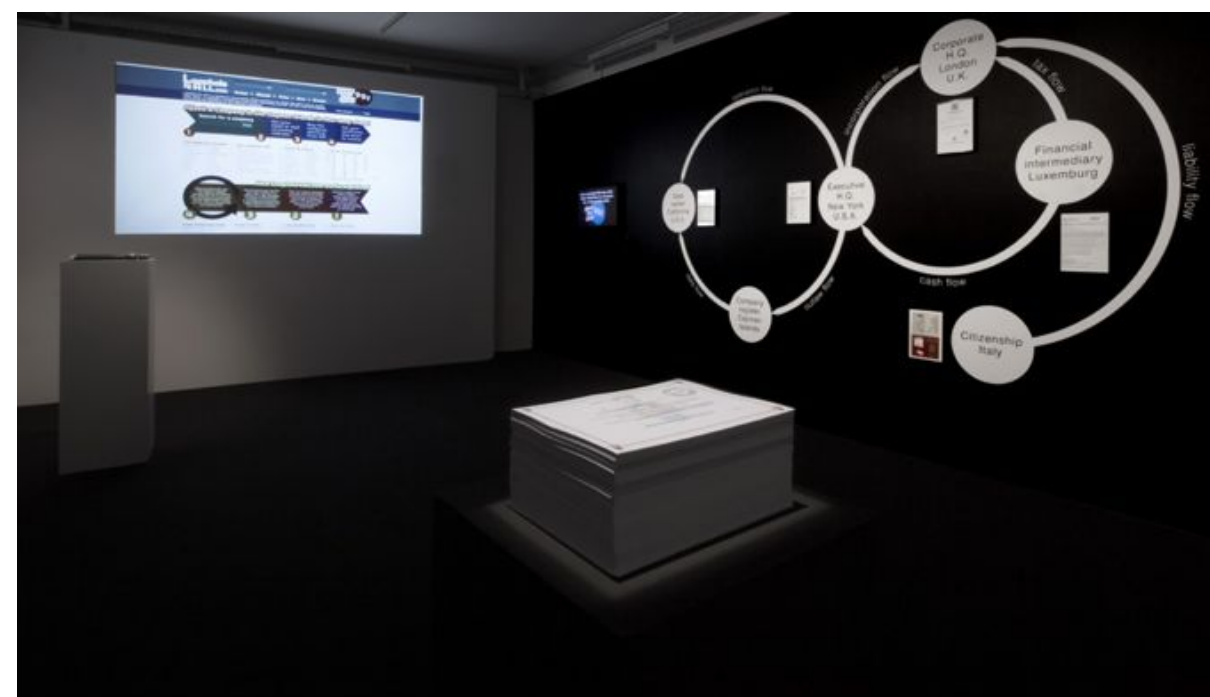
Loophole4All, Paolo Cirio, 2013. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.

The following were the questions that arose and became part of the curatorial statement for the exhibition:

In a world of corporations is there any role left for the individual? What are the future implications of the current processes of exploitation, commodification and enslavement of the individual to supranational economic entities? Are there processes that would allow extended forms of community and citizenship to unveil and alter the power relationships between the post-citizens, the post-state and the omnivorous corporations? In order to reconsider these power relationships, what alternatives and constructive frameworks can be offered by contemporary aesthetic and artistic practices?

Cirio's works of art have attempted, over the years, to respond to these questions and have received critical acclaim and attention from the press, as well as raised 'corporate eyebrows' that have led to legal actions and controversies.

Such controversies are embedded in the capitalistic process of decoding, whereby aesthetic analyses in this particular context of disproportionate power relationships can make of the artist an embodied mythological representation – but also the embodiment of an action for a struggle that increasingly sees the concept of citizenship reduced to a condition of slavery. This condition is systematically imposed by a widespread corporate perception of economic power that is endorsed and supported by a skewed understanding of statehood and democracy.



Loophole4All, Paolo Cirio, 2013. Multimedia Installation at Aksioma, 2014. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.

From: service@paypal.co.uk
 Subject: Your account has been limited
 Date: March 27, 2013 8:21:28 AM EDT
 To: info@paolo-cirio.com

PayPal

Dear Paolo Cirio,
 We are hereby notifying you that, after a recent review of your account activity, it has been determined that you are in violation of PayPal's Acceptable Use Policy regarding your sales / offers on <http://loophole4all.com/>.

Please refer to:
 - Transaction 3WS17399AM104863D

Therefore, your account has been permanently limited.

Per the User Agreement, when PayPal permanently limits an account due to an Acceptable Use Policy violation, we may hold your funds up to 180 days. We will review your account at 30 days from the date of this email, we will calculate our exposure and will release any excess funds to you for withdrawal. If there are any funds remaining in your account at this time, we will review your account every 30 days until either all your funds have been made available to you for withdrawal, or a period of 180 days from the date your account was limited is reached. Please log in to your PayPal account and verify that your account information is accurate, as PayPal cannot be held responsible for incorrect information provided by the account holder.

You will need to remove all references to PayPal from your website/s and/or auction/s. This includes not only removing PayPal as a payment option, but also the PayPal logo and/or shopping cart.

The PayPal User Agreement states that PayPal, at its sole discretion, reserves the right to limit an account for any violation of the User Agreement, including the Acceptable Use Policy.

Under the Acceptable Use Policy, PayPal may not be used to send or receive payments for items that encourage, promote, facilitate or instruct others to engage in illegal activity.

The complete Acceptable Use Policy can be found at the following URL:
https://cms.paypal.com/uk/cgi-bin/?cmd=_render-content&content_ID=ua/AcceptableUse_full&locale.x=en_GB

To learn more about the Acceptable Use Policy, please refer to our Help Centre page here: https://www.paypal.com/uk/cgi-bin/helpweb?cmd=_help

We thank you in advance for your cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact the PayPal Brand Risk Management Department at euau@paypal.co.uk.

Sincerely,
 Andrei
 PayPal, Brand Risk Management

Copyright © 1999-2013 PayPal. All rights reserved.
 PayPal (Europe) S.à r.l. & Cie, S.C.A.
 Société en Commandite par Actions
 Registered Office: 22-24 Boulevard Royal, 5ème étage, L-2449 Luxembourg
 RCS Luxembourg B 118 349

Responses to this email address are not monitored. Please send any additional questions that you may have to euau@paypal.co.uk.

It is for this possibility of the action – more than the representation – that the aesthetic practice of Cirio suggested and continues to suggest peaceful methodologies of re-appropriation of civic forms of shared participation and civility, which may still be possible to salvage from what Adorno defined as the “age of total neutralization,” and within which Cirio, as an artist, does not seek any false and easy reconciliations.

It is the action that still suggests a meaning, and not vice-versa, in a capitalistic society of simulacral representation that produces and proceeds from the elimination of meaning to the elimination of action.

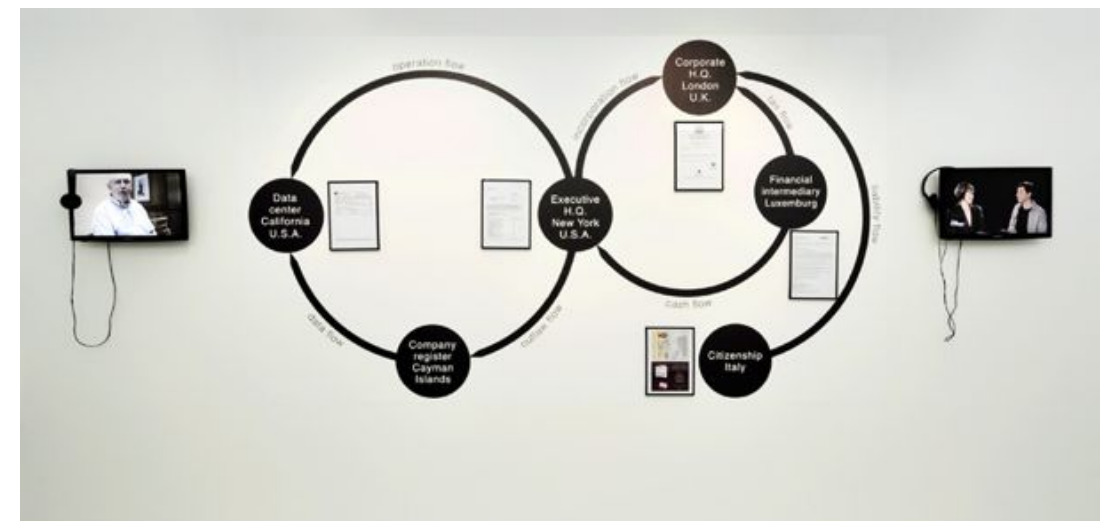
The Museum of Contemporary Cuts disseminated every day, for the entire duration of the show, one image of the exhibition *Decoding the Flow* on its electronic platforms, creating an accretion of content, a flow, a structure to which meaning could be attributed through decoding, coding, uncoding and re-coding. The meaning was and remains that of an action, an event, an exhibition that happened in spite of and despite cultural frameworks and corporate structures.

THE CONCLUSION OF AN EXPERIENCE

The exhibition *Decoding the Flow* at the Museum of Contemporary Cuts complemented and enriched the physical exhibition *Jurisdiction Shopping* at Kasa Gallery, and confirmed with this publication the importance of ‘another’ discourse in the fine arts. These are aesthetic discourses that should be outside corporate agendas and exist beyond the requests of exhibiting ‘names.’

The two exhibitions were successful in as much as they were ‘actions’ and provided meaningful experiences upon which to reflect, both in curatorial and aesthetic terms.

In this context, my curatorial action was that of enforcing an agenda that ignored and defied requests to present not innovative works, but the true and tried and tired, replicating a circuit of names and artistic practices that left little to the imagination.



Loophole4All, Paolo Cirio, 2013. Multimedia Installation at the Centre for Contemporary Culture

Strozzina, 2013. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.

Loophole4All, Paolo Cirio, 2013. Multimedia Installation at the Centre for Contemporary Culture

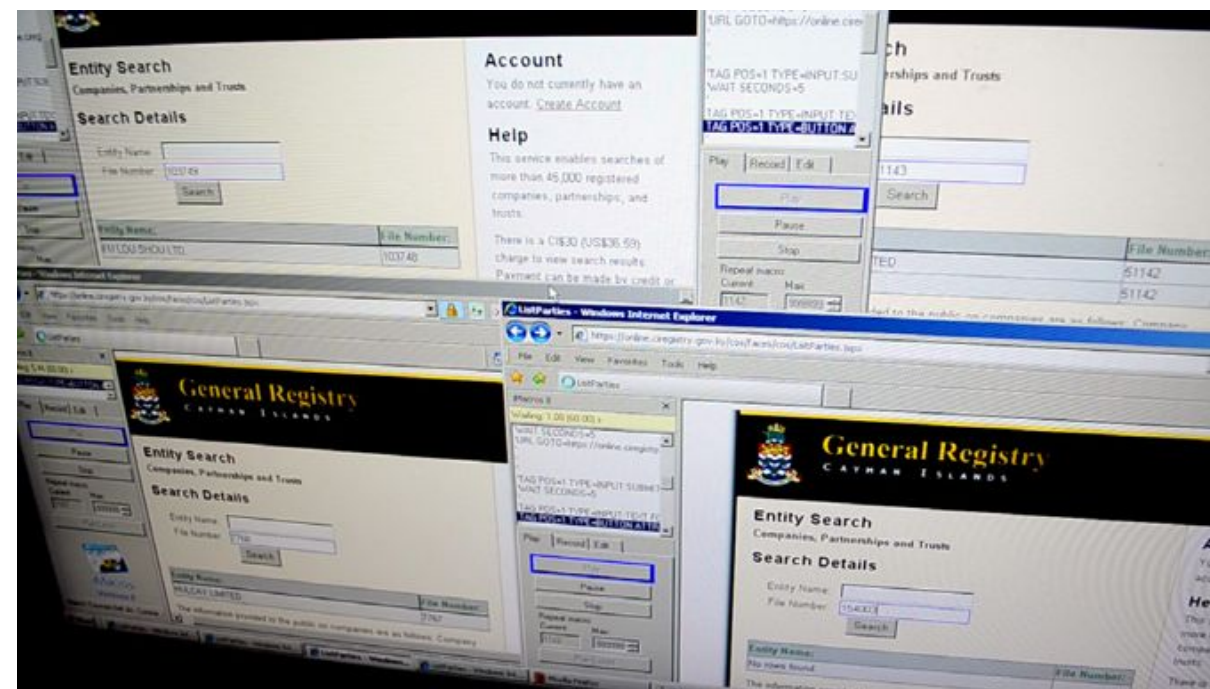
Strozzina, 2013. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.

It seems at times a pointless exercise to present the same works of art that have no contribution to make, that have been cannibalized, chewed to smithereens and spat out as pulp not by the artist in an act of defiance – as in the case of *Art and Culture* aka *Still and Chew* by John Latham – but by the corporate and marketing promotional tools of ‘high art.’ Particularly, if nothing is added, nothing else is constructed, nothing is destroyed and no other thought is sedimented upon the building blocks of history of art, what is the value (excluding monetary compensations) of revelling yet again in the same trite aesthetics?

Paolo Cirio's two exhibitions fall in this unusual convergence of digital and physical space, of action and representation, of literal and obscure, simple and complex. *Loophole4All* was and is an artwork able to instigate reactions and actions and not just representations. The reterritorialization of meaning in a new utopian society – devoid of capitalism – may as well come through an artwork that advocates for democratic tax evasion. ■

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 443.
2. Eugene W. Holland, *Deleuze and Guattari's Anti-Oedipus: Introduction to Schizoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 1999), 20.
3. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, 448-449.
4. Ibid.



Loophole4All.com investigates offshore centers through interviews with experts and *Loophole4All.com* introductory video – *Became a pirate, hijack an offshore company!*, Paolo Cirio, 2013. Still images. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.

MASSIVE OFFSHORE PRIVATE DEBT
2534724, DEBIT PARTNERS I LIMITED
253472, KBR TRADE FINANCE DEBT
253472, GRAMERCY HIGH YIELD CORPORATE
253472, BLACKSTONE COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE
253472, DEBIT PARTNERS I GP
253472, DEBIT PARTNERS I SPECIAL
253472, RP DEBT OPPORTUNITIES SPV
253472, ALCANTARA GOVERNMENT DEBT FUND
253472, DRAGON CAPITAL DEBT MANAGEMENT
253472, BARCLAYS WEALTH ADVISOR SERIES
253472, FH EMERGING MARKETS SHORT
253472, BLACKSTONE COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE
253472, BLACKSTONE COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE
253472, BLACKSTONE COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE
253472, GRAMERCY DISTRESSED DEBT MASTER
253472, GRAMERCY CORPORATE EMERGING MARKET

Loophole4All, Paolo Cirio, 2013. Multimedia Installation at the Centre for Contemporary Culture

Strozzina, 2013. Courtesy of the artist. Used with permission.

253472, GROVE IW DEBT PARTNERS
253472, GROVE IW DEBT HOLDINGS
253472, GROVE IW DEBT SUB
253472, ICAHN DEBT FUND I
253472, SULLIVAN DEBT OPPORTUNITY FUND
253472, GOLDENTREE CLO DEBT RECOVERY
253472, GOLDENTREE CLO DEBT RECOVERY
253472, GOLDENTREE CLO DEBT RECOVERY
253472, DELTEC EMERGING MARKET DEBT
253472, EKF DEBT OPPORTUNITIES GP
253472, EKF DEBT OPPORTUNITIES OFFSHORE
253472, TALISMANCPI EUROPEAN PROPERTY DEBT
253472, TALISMANCPI EUROPEAN PROPERTY DEBT
253472, ALCANTARA EMERGING MARKETS DEBT
253472, TORCHLIGHT DEBT OPPORTUNITY III
253472, ALCANTARA EMERGING MARKETS DEBT
253472, KKR DEBT INVESTORS 2006
253472, CAYSTAR DEBT HOLDINGS CORP
253472, GOLDENTREE CLO DEBT RECOVERY
253472, MACQUARIE COMMERCIAL REAL ESTATE
253472, GOLDENTREE CLO DEBT RECOVERY
253472, GOLDENTREE CLO DEBT RECOVERY
253472, COMMERCIAL DEBT CO
253472, VIETNAM DEBT FUND SPC
253472, TEP DEBT HOLDINGS OFFSHORE
253472, CALLIDUS DEBT PARTNERS CLO
253472, WEXTRUST HIGH YIELD DEBT
253472, KKR DEBT INVESTORS I
253472, KKR DEBT INVESTORS I SPECIAL

253472, CAYMAN CROSS CURRENCY FUND
253472, DYMOM ASIA CURRENCY FUND
253472, BARCLAYS WEALTH ADVISOR SERIES
253472, TRG LOCAL CURRENCY OPPORTUNITY
253472, OPPENHEIMER CURRENCY OPPORTUNITY
253472, TRG LOCAL CURRENCY OPPORTUNITIES FUND
253472, GRAMERCY LOCAL CURRENCY EMERGING
253472, ALLIANCEBERNSTEIN CURRENCY ALPHA MASTER
253472, K2 CURRENCY FUND LTD
253472, CP MULTI STRATEGY CURRENCY
253472, MCM CONVERTIBLE ALPHA OFFSHORE
253472, MCM CREDITALPHA MARKET NEUTRAL
253472, COVEPOINT COMMODITY CURRENCY OVERSEAS
253472, COVEPOINT COMMODITY CURRENCY MASTER
253472, THE RP EMERGING MARKETS
253472, THE RP EMERGING MARKETS
253472, THE RP EMERGING MARKETS
253472, SFS INTERNATIONAL CURRENCY &
253472, SFS INTERNATIONAL CURRENCY &
253472, ELEUTHERA CURRENCY FUND
253472, FRONTPOINT CURRENCY FUND GP
253472, FRONTPOINT OFFSHORE CURRENCY FUND
253472, THE CAMBRIDGE STRATEGY EXTENDED
253472, THE CAMBRIDGE STRATEGY EXTENDED
253472, HENDERSON GLOBAL CURRENCY FUND
253472, HENDERSON GLOBAL CURRENCY MASTER
253472, CURRENCYDISTRESSED ASSET OPPORTUNITY
253472, ARMORED WOLF EMERGING MARKET
253472, CAPRICORN CURRENCY MANAGEMENT CAYMAN
253472, OLD MUTUAL CURRENCY FUND
253472, OLD MUTUAL CURRENCY MASTER
253472, THE PROTECTED CAPITAL CURRENCY
253472, THE PROTECTED CAPITAL CURRENCY
253472, SILVER CREEK CURRENCY HEDGED
253472, O'CONNOR CURRENCY AND RATES
253472, LC RATES & CURRENCIES
253472, WESTERN ASSET MANAGED CURRENCY
253472, CINNAMON CURRENCY OPPORTUNITIES
253472, ALPHA PLUS GLOBAL



museumofcontemporarycuts.org