

invoices and receiving payments in their name, but redirecting the funds to oneself. Depending of jurisdiction, one could declare one's business in the Cayman Islands yet hold a bank account in one's actual zone of operations, as is the norm for wealthy people and corporations who abuse tax havens.

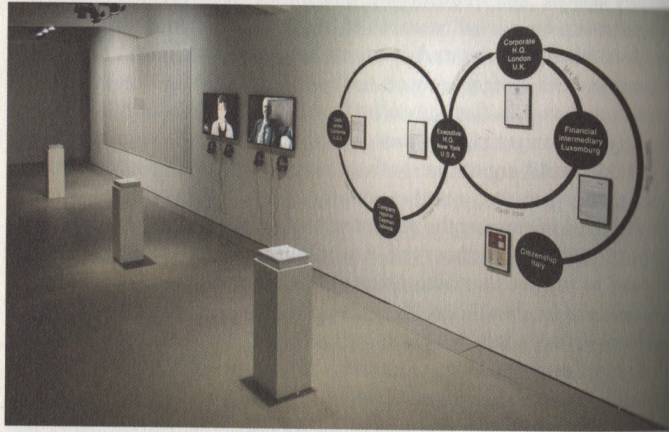


Figure 42 Paolo Cirio, *Loophole For All*, 2013. Installation view, House of Electronic Arts, Basel, Switzerland. Courtesy of the artist.

Here, Cirio ironically creates a recursive parasite. In the first place, corporations have used the Cayman Islands and other such tax havens to escape the democratic redistribution of wealth (taxes) in the societies in which they operate, instead simply extracting as much money as possible, parasitic on those societies. But hitherto this dark magic is reserved only for the world's most elite corporations and people who can afford the hefty legal and registration fees associated with starting an offshore account.⁷³ Cirio's intervention allows potentially anyone, presumably citizens of the ripped-off nations now forced to shoulder more of society's costs, to act parasitically on the parasite, essentially hijacking offshore corporate identities.

While ultimately this might be considered a form of fraud, the reality is that the Cayman Islands and other tax havens are so secretive and generally lawless, and the global financial architecture is so complex and mediated by subsidiary law firms and subsidiaries, that proving that the original corporate or billionaire who purchased the company is its "rightful" owner may be challenging. In any case, the Registry of Stocks of the Cayman Islands acted swiftly, both issuing press releases announcing

Cirio's work as a hoax and complaining to the online payments platform Paypal, who promptly suspended Cirio's account putting an end to the sale of certificates and freezing the roughly \$700 he had so far earned from the project. This is all especially ironic, given the role that art plays in the offshore machinations of the super-elite.⁷⁴

To a certain extent, Cirio's project is resonant with the form of benign pessimism illustrated above. While the project adopts the visage of a democratization of financial tools and a means by which working people can feed at the same trough as the rich, in reality it's difficult to imagine a real-world application for such a fake certificate that wouldn't severely jeopardize the user, and it is unclear if any of Cirio's clients made any such attempts.

Cirio's project could be said to be aimed to deliver the participant into a reflective moment. Hence the project was aimed less at actually generating purchases and more at mobilizing the potential of participation as a form of interactive spectacle, calibrated to feed off of the online attention economy to magnify its ideological impact. Ultimately, the would-be participant, the figure we might once have called the audience, is hailed into a kind of sly solidarity with the artist. The possibility of parasiting the parasites then works to lampoon power in a way that is particularly germane to the form of digitalized, financialized capitalism we have been exploring here. Unlike Güell and Orta's work, explored in Chapter 2, Cirio's *Loophole for All* is not primarily intended to redirect global resources. It is a deeply cunning intervention at the intersection of multiple overlapping parasitic economies. First, of course, the parasitic economy of the world of tax havens. Second, the parasitic online attention economy that will allow his intervention to travel. Third, the art economy itself because, like Güell and Orta, Cirio here is an activist mobilizing art as an alibi for undertaking para-legal acts, or perhaps an artist using activist tactics to create aesthetic and critical impacts in a deeply changed parasitic economic and political ecology that we are only now beginning to understand.

Ultimately, Cirio's intervention aimed to prove that the seemingly invincible, untouchable transnational financialized elite are in some sense vulnerable. In this sense, the work might appear more spectacular than participatory, more in line with the strategies of tactical media and the prankish interventions of ensembles like RTMark, the Electronic Disturbance Theatre or the Yes Men.⁷⁵ As in the case of SUPERFLEX and in some ways Stockburger above, participation here functions in some ways precisely through its own abeyance: The would-be participant in Cirio's piece may not in fact purchase a certificate and engage in allegedly fraudulent activities, but they still must participate in an

coevolved with financialization as a means to accelerate cycles of urban, technological and financial accumulation.⁷⁰ For ours is a moment where both the financial world and the art world are characterized by a paradox which is becoming all too familiar across a wide variety of social fields: on the one hand, they are rigidly and oppressively hierarchical, notoriously opaque and impenetrable and highly idiosyncratic. Both fields are overseen by a small number of highly specialized and well-placed insiders whose actions and decisions have wide-reaching impacts. On the other, both systems rely on the contributions of a huge number of participants and, in fact, specialize in seeking out, seducing, harnessing, tapping and integrating the participatory margins to the center.⁷¹

So one could argue that both contemporary art and contemporary finance are parasitic on the underlying real economy. But without diminishing in any way the pejorative force of such an accusation, which in both cases is well deserved, it would be more accurate and helpful instead to suggest that both fields of imaginative economic activity are frameworks for parasitism. It's not simply that both feed off wealth that is external to them. It is that both fields reflect or index the way that financialization as a paradigm recalibrates almost all fields of social activity toward a logic of parasitism in general.

For Post Brothers and Chris Fitzpatrick this almost-impossible situation is best addressed by a self-conscious acceptance of the relations of mutual parasitism that define critical contemporary art and looking to the biological world for models of successful parasitism, rather than any wishful thinking (cruel optimism) that would imagine that the "good life" and "good art" awaits us following some perfect autonomous, critical maneuver.

Loophole for All

A fine example of parasite-oriented participatory artwork is Paolo Cirio's 2014 work *Loophole for All*.⁷² The artist, whose work has targeted the shadow worlds of data and money, "hacked" the website of the Cayman Islands General Registry of companies, the vehicle through which some of the world's richest people and corporations set up shell companies in the notorious tax haven in order to avoid paying taxes in their home countries. This allowed Cirio to collect and publish the hitherto unknown names of over 200,000 firms, many of which were simply numbered corporations or ambiguously titled companies, and develop a website where, for prices starting as low at \$0.99, anyone could purchase a forged certificate of ownership of that company. Presumably, one could then operate financially as a parasite on that company's identity, issuing

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ART AFTER MONEY MONEY AFTER ART

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