

# Table of Contents

Editorial . . . . .	1
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# Editorial

ByMute Editor

This summer the new media art world is marked by two events of diametrically opposed tragic and comic proportions. On the one hand, artist Steve Kurtz along with two other members of the Critical Art Ensemble, has been charged with bioterrorism on the strength of using some standard biology lab equipment for testing the GM profile of shop bought food. After waking up to find his wife had died of a cardiac arrest, Kurtz called the emergency services whose suspicions about the equipment scattered about his home soon escalated. On the other hand, ISEA2004 has chartered an 'amazing ferry' to sail the digerati from Helsinki to Tallinn this August, providing the ultimate metaphor for the conversion of art appreciation into leisure and consumption; a setting that will cast the work on display in the unreal light of holidays in the sun. It's very tempting to link the two into a speculative narrative: the new media art world, a pioneer of immaterial production, having served its purpose as proselytiser of information networks, is now deemed obsolete, its residual cyberpunk frisson a bio- and economic-hazard, and is forced to retreat to the margins of 'old Europe' in a temporary autonomous ship.

Meanwhile the global picture is darkening. The Pentagon's Special Access Programme (SAP) &ndash; which produces zones of exceptional illegality in the combat against axes of 'evil', resulting in atrocities such as the Abu Ghraib tortures &ndash; makes inroads into the devastated third world hinterland produced by the long-term effects of Structural Adjustment Programmes (that other bearer of the SAP acronym). The motif is always the same: power's ability to create smooth space, to shake off, suspend or rescind protective zones, tariffs, laws, protocols and rights, producing infinite pliability and vulnerability in its wake. Steve Kurtz's right to private grief was apprehended along with his wife's body &ndash; converting his loss into another keyhole of special access. How should this arrogance of power be parried? In this issue of Mute, the focus seems to lie less on cultural production than different cultures of resistance. A central focus of coverage is the university and its smoothing out into a site coextensive with the operations of neo-liberal economics. On p.72, Tiziana Terranova and Marc Bousquet discuss not only the detrimental effects this has on students and staff, but also the opportunities for solidarity that arise out of the demolition of educational ivory towers: 'mass intellectuality' is a condition that newly unites call centre workers and students through their hyper-exploitation in the 'social factory'. Meanwhile, some of the more formalised spaces of resistance such as the World and European Social Forums are succumbing ever more to the dominion of representational politics, as parliamentary parties and NGOs infiltrate and co-opt their organisation and root out any potential radicalism (see pages 62-71). The excluded residuum, forced to set up camp outside the perimeter fence and deprived of co-ordinating power, becomes the new site of potentially creative disruption. The organisational impasse of activist coordinating body Peoples' Global Action (partly responsible for Global Action Days such as the mass demonstrations in Seattle and Genoa), is likewise an effect of the crisis of legitimacy and co-optation that dogs global political matrices (see p.20 and p.110). In Iraq, as Ewa Jasiewicz reports on p.106, with Saddam Hussein's ban on all organised labour disputes prolonged by the US occupation, oil workers use the pincer of illegal strikes and armed resistance to attack imperialist exploitation. Another rabble is developing in the devastated educational landscape as disaffected groups build their own institutions in which to teach themselves (see our survey, p.82 and 'Politicising the Immaterial Labour Camp', p.10). Now that everything has become a temporary autonomous zone, from theatres of war to self-institutions to art festivals, embracing tactical forms is now everybody's game; no reason why only the capitalist state should learn to perfect it. Look out, here comes everybody, we're all called Steve, and we've all got a Special Access Programme!

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