

# YOU AND WHOSE ARMY?

G-MK | Miroslav Kraljevic Gallery

**Núria Güell and Levi Orta**

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**Curated by Alejandra Labastida**

October 17 – November 9, 2013

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I am not sure where exactly I heard or read that neoliberalism had been the last effective revolution in history. It might have been in a conference of Franco Bifo Berardi in documenta 13 since it makes sense with the text he published for the occasion. In this text he develops an argument that the complexity of social life and flow of information has rendered acts of total transformation- a revolution- impossible since there is no longer a single identifiable power to subvert. At the same time this saturation overflows our capacity for processing information pushing us to a state of automated decision making and shared behavior that longs for machines of complexity-reduction. Politicians and economist's goal becomes then the monopolization of the role of interpreters of this density in order to lead us to believe that we live in a state of symbiosis with the financial apparatus and that our lives must be aligned with its expectations of infinite growth. The premise is that life and capitalism are so intertwined that the end of capitalism would be in fact the end of the world. For Bifo it is foremost a question of form, money is the form, the format of common perception that acts as an automated machine embedded in the body and in the mind of society. *Form as the regulator and selector of the process of becoming.* <sup>1</sup> In order to question the financial dictatorship or whatever form is being imposed, the first step is to acknowledge that society is autonomous of the form and that a new form is not only possible but necessary.

In these political games of perception the resistance must start as well at a perception

level which makes art a privileged strategic front. Artists can also play the role of interpreters and work in a performative mode, as an act of language that has the power to produce a different relation between the participants of the communication and therefore a different landscape for social action, not to produce a mechanical effect but to induce unexpected waves that allow the potentialities of a system to emerge.

This project hopes to put into play different geopolitical situations with different relationships to the power apparatus through the work of Levy Orta (La Habana, 1984) and Nuria Güell (Barcelona, 1981), whose practice goes a step beyond allowing the visualization of the structures and strategies of exploitation and subjugation of the individual in the current state of things. Sometimes nonalignment is not enough, infiltration strategies are necessary to create room to maneuver. Whether it is in a communist or a capitalist context, the documentation of the actions of this artists provide an inside viewpoint of the abuses of power allowed by the established "legality" and the dominant morals but they are always the second stage of an active and subversive infiltration into the system. The spectrum of acts of resistance in different geopolitical contexts meet in the horizon of dissidence. Understanding dissidence, as the yearning that fuels the question: *how not to be governed that way? not in the name of those principles nor through the means of those procedures. Not in that way, not for that or for them.* <sup>2</sup>

The two levels are equally important, Güell

creates what she calls displaced legal applications in which for example she inverts the profiting logic of the banks into themselves and creates a manual to expropriate money from them, with specific strategies on how to commit fraud to the bank without being caught. So the work exists as an installation but also as a manual that is actually published and distributed in libraries inserting itself into reality. The logic of debt lies at the center of the subjugation and impoverishment of social life. But again is debt a metaphysical inescapable necessity or is it just an act of language as a promise? Güell's displaced legal applications reminds us not only that promises can be broken but that sometimes if produced under a cohesive situation of mathematical slavery, they should be.

The level of personal investment and commitment is essential in Orta and Güell's practice, some of these actions create a situation in which they are playing in the limit of legality at their own risk. Orta contacts an ex-cultural spy of the Cuban regime who tips him of an active officer who presents himself as a curator and creates a specific subversive work in order to follow the bureaucratic path of censorship in Cuba. As a counterpart he finds a flaw in the closed censorship system in a children's TV show where you can send drawings and they are shown as part of the program, he uses this gap in the system to infiltrate key censored topics illustrated as children's drawings which are actually shown on national TV.

The political genealogy of the term intervention is directly related to the evolution of State power tactics, a State that namely intervenes instead of ruling. This exhibition reflects on artistic practices based on intervention as a method but as one that has evolved mirroring the practices of administration of state power, from direct confrontation to more subtle and undercover operations. Fieldworks or undercover actions that involve certain personal risk for the artists but that follow the rules of the game in order

not to be read or discovered as transgressions, not until a second reading occurs in the formalization of the art piece as a document within the jurisdiction of the exhibition space. Far from weakening their work, it is precisely in the action of covering their backs through the same legal and control strategies of the system they pretend to transgress that the artworks prove to be more revealing.

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1- Bifo-Franco Berardi and Alessandro Sarti, *RUN Morphogenesis*, documenta und Museum friedericianum, Kassel, 2012.

2- Butler, Judith. *¿Que es la crítica Un ensayo sobre la virtud de Foucault?*, <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0806/butler>

**Núria Güell**

***Displaced Legal Application #1 : Fractional Reserve, 2010-2011***

**Master plan, video documentation of educational meeting and publication of a manual**

**Courtesy of the artist and ADN Galeria**

Güell (Barcelona, 1981) acts as a modern sort Robin Hood that makes sure she will not have to live in the forest, always working in the edge of the legal system but never outside it. She creates what she calls a displaced legal application in which she inverts the profiting logic of the banks on to them selves and creates with the help of experts a manual to expropriate money from them, with specific strategies on how to commit fraud without being caught. The manual was actually published and distributed in libraries in setting it self into reality .



*Displaced Legal Application #1 : Fractional Reserve, 2010-2011*  
Master plan, video documentation of educational meeting and  
publication of a manual  
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**Núria Güell**

***Displaced Legal Application #3: F.I.E.S, 2011-2012***

**Letters from prisoners of the F.I.E.S regime and documentation of action applied to the Minister of Justice.**

**Courtesy of the artist and ADN Galería**

In 1991 the F.I.E.S regime (Spanish acronym for Special Tracking Inmates File) was added to the penitentiary Spanish system. F.I.E.S. puts into practice methods of direct control, solitary confinement and total isolation over the "maladjusted" prisoners. Coincidentally, this group of maladjusted prisoners corresponds with the political prisoners. The same methods violate the fundamental rights, the Spanish Constitution, the Penitentiary Regulation and the Penal Code. Güell made an open call to prisoners forced to live under the F.I.E.S. regime inviting them to write a "poem, picture or short text" as a "complaint letter" denouncing the institutional torture they are subjected to. She managed to obtain the address of the Minister of Justice's summer house by hiring a private investigator and every day he sent him one of these letters.

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**Levi Orta**  
***Pedophilia, 2008***  
**Children's drawings, tv show.**  
**Video**  
**Courtesy of the artist**

Orta found a flaw in the Cuban censorship system in a children's TV show where there is an open invitation to send drawings to be presented and he used it to infiltrate key censored topics. The work consisted of sending a series of drawings that document the social, political and economic context of the country. Enclosed, the artist sent a letter presenting himself as a teacher who wanted to stimulate his most prominent pupils with the presentation of their drawings on national TV.



***Pedophilia, 2008***

Children's drawings, tv show.

Courtesy of the artist

**Levi Orta**

***Artwork donation to a political art museum, 2010***

**Undercover operation and documentation**

**Courtesy of the artist**

The secret intelligence and counterintelligence center of the Cuban Ministry of the Interior has agents who oversee and control all the cultural activities held in the country. These agents have always been more or less evidently present in the Cuban artistic milieu, depending on the Ministry's policy. Using counterespionage techniques Orta infiltrates a politically charged artwork in the Ministry of the Interior files in order to follow the bureaucratic paths of censorship in Cuba.

**Artwork donation to a political art museum, 2010**  
Undercover operation and documentation  
Courtesy of the artist





***Artwork donation to a political art museum, 2010***

Undercover operation and documentation

Courtesy of the artist

# Artist Talk

Núria Güell, Levi Orta and Alejandra Labastida



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