

many other organic and inorganic life forms and abstractions to create a background against and through which autocreativity actualizes, undergoing aesthetic formation.

Gazira Babeli can be seen as a force of estrangement that at the same time, rather than operating by distancing, gets very close—almost too close for the system to continue operation. Whether she acts as sets of sensibilities, abstractions, instructions or scripts to take, or an entity engaged in the production of the space for others, she is an element in the operation of an art platform that could be compared to a human-technical filter or administrator in more standard art platforms: She measures distance by going very far and touches on richness to move the horizon a bit further. Second Front acts as reinforcement, a collaborative attack on structures of normalization that make a platform for others to estrange themselves while adding conceptual and reflexive dimensionalities. An art platform that is the interplay of all these processes produces Second Life art.

The art platform that produces Second Life art is relational, and as such, it is not unusual.<sup>76</sup> Although it takes flexibility and imagination to account for the networks that constitute the production of such an art platform, what needs to be taken from such an analysis is the nonfixity as well as the precise materiality of art platforms and the organizational aesthetics generating them. Such materiality, which is technical and human, and the action of organizational aesthetics with and through it is something that leaves a challenge to be understood.

### 3 Organizational Aesthetics, Digital Folklore, and Software

Software art for you and me!  
 Software art for girls and boys!  
 Kremlin, vodka and software art  
 Sex, drugs and software art  
 Peace, love and software art  
 I love you all/software art  
 Software art for fun and profit  
 Got software art?

(Suggested slogans for Runme.org, from email exchange)

The processes by which something becomes art, especially if its actualization is not manifested merely in an individual project (although it is never that finite) but is instead a set of practices, an artistic current, a cultural movement, or an aesthetic storm, inevitably connect to the question of organization in one manner or another. Organization in this sense is the manner by which art reveals itself and speaks, a modality of formation that is collective and political. Agents of such organizational processes differ drastically, from museum operations, curatorship, soirées, and journal maintenance to garage and café gatherings. It was argued that the homage to the lunatic artist, unnoted while alive and celebrated postmortem, as the mode of operation of the dogmatic museum gave way to the mode of curatorship in the beginning of the twentieth century. It is then that an overthrowing of traditional organizational tendencies was first sensed through the ‘accomplishments’ of the avant-gardes whose bodies of work could themselves be seen as a ‘series of collective gatherings and exhibitions.’<sup>77</sup> Such autopoietic ambitions were further unfolded in the course of twentieth-century art, though not univocally. However a cultural current produces and operates itself, there is an ontogenetic tendency involved that has an organizational dimension to it.

To address the complexity of organizational aesthetics here, it is worth recalling Latour’s rather ironic account of sociology as a troubled field that, while trying to account for the macro, fails to embrace the micro, and vice versa. The whole Tarde-Durkheim debate introduced in the previous chapter refers to this problem: In an attempt to account for society as a structure providing a relatively stable framework for operation and reproduction, in the course of the development of the classical science of

at least the first half of the twentieth century, the search for 'general laws' won over microsociology and monadology. To look at it from a perspective rooted in antiquity, the problem of organization can be seen as one founded in the question of hylomorphism, a perspective that interprets the production of the world through the imposition of ideal forms onto matter. The metaphysics of organization then performs a similar operation, of making happen and making sense of/structuring instances of matter while being materially separate from them, if materialized at all, whereas the matter would not be performed in any manner.

The theory of the artistic field developed by Pierre Bourdieu can be seen as an example of such an organizational model. His figure of the cultural field as a subfield of restricted production<sup>2</sup> is organized hierarchically, existing as a structured space with its own laws of functioning, independent of but reflecting the laws of economy and politics. It is formed of positions (established by defining the sets of problems, instruments, and references applicable to the field) and governed by relations (the relations among the positions occupied within the field and the relations among the 'position-takings'<sup>3</sup> in the area of works). Two directions of struggle define the structure and development of the field: the opposition between the subfield of restricted production and the subfield of large-scale production (economic capital, fighting to define the positions of art and artist) and the struggle within the field of restricted production (among the positions) between what that field constitutes as the consecrated avant-garde and the new avant-garde.<sup>4</sup> The latter struggle takes the form of questioning the essence of the genre and establishing a return to its origin, thus providing a history of purification as the narrative of the field.<sup>5</sup> Such manoeuvres coexist with relations that are agents in the field, relations in turn mediated by the structure of relations between institutions possessing authority.<sup>6</sup>

Such structures of relations and interrelations can be made palpable through certain historical colorations, and it is certainly possible that Bourdieuian analysis has its uses for vintage archives of cultural performances. *The Rules of Art's* tidiness and pretence to completion is admirable as much as any 'universal' theory, which like most of this kind ultimately exhibits a tendency to become a conspiracy theory where forms are preset and imposed onto matter that exhibits no potentiality. The reality of cultural production is much less clean and prescribed and much more entangled with the advance of particular aesthetic material.

Organizational aesthetics is a concept conceived to address the emergence of art in a way that does not start with the end product and the structures within which it is embedded but instead unfolds through aesthetic production, through autocreativity to actualize culture. Here, there is no prior distinction between the project and the network; inside and outside, artist and organization. Moreover, it is increasingly difficult to withdraw a cultural phenomenon from its networks of subjectification; and it is through and with the relations that are reciprocally produced in such a

domain that the grey zones of art and culture emerge, seethe, and actualize particular artistic phenomena, forming and changing the very relations or networks through which they become done and undone.

Certainly, with organizational aesthetics it is more convenient to address contemporary cultural movements at times when organizational relations become core and what used to be the core becomes the outside. Whereas the ideal forms could not be infected, an operation of becoming that is inside and outside at the same time is more interesting as it is liminal, wide open, turbid, and prone to contamination with manifold parasites. A well-connected network of relations is vulnerable, but it is also these very parasites that produce it. In types of production that depend on creative self-expression, playing on the processes of organizational aesthetics has become a commonplace technique of the creative industries. And the same processes have led to large-scale grass-roots cultural production transductively energized to become new kinds of art, new lives of art, to unfold new kinds of organizational aesthetics.

Technological and cultural subjectification grow through each other. There is no organizational aesthetics without technology as one of its threads, mutated together with the autocreative. The philosophical project of the inclusion of technology into the ontogenesis of humanity at large is not new. Gilbert Simondon plays the role of grey eminence behind it, whereas Bernard Sieglar is possibly the single living philosopher who has most meticulously engaged with the history of Western philosophy, from Socrates and Plato to Kant, Husserl, and Heidegger, to prove and establish technics and technology (as a *pharmakon*, a form of memory, a force of individuation core to psychological and collective individuation of the humans) within continental metaphysics.<sup>7</sup> I will not take a philosophical approach to this matter but, instead, will let myself be guided by the empirical. The projects examined in this chapter, in particular the one dearest to me, Runme.org, are especially conceptually strong because they emerged in a time when hardly any discourse for such practices existed; through practical engagement with their organization and digital material, they became a way of thinking, of making a cultural reality unfold in sophisticated and relatively unconfined ways.

Quite often, the collective becoming of art is associated with curating. Curatorship produces art by displaying and writing about it and by putting art into relationships, spaces, organizations, and markets. As new media changes the constitution of these spheres and the energies feeding them as well as the networks of production of the works themselves, curatorship as a practice finds itself transformed and seeks new concepts to catch up with the phenomena unfolding at full speed.<sup>8</sup> 'Distributed curating,' 'immaterial curating,' and 'computer-aided curating' are all terms designed to tackle this change. To my mind, the problems of such terms and the theories they put forward originate from a move to account for the previously rather disregarded part that the technical plays in the subjectification of art, while

at the same time finding themselves locked in the narrow confines of a particular historically defined area of practice. With the development of digital media, the grammar of the reciprocal genesis of the technical and cultural changes, and such change spreads in domains and dimensions beyond the field of art. Indeed, the possibilities and articulations of the very constitutions that propagate into and change the fields of art, urban life, or economics are engendered through technology, as the technical constitutes itself at the root of the genesis of being and forms.

At the same time, the technical here should not be regarded in any deterministic or essentialist manner, and the growing sensibility of the role of the technical or 'automation,' for the sake of the argument, should not cloak its actualization with and through the human, the social, and the political.

Much of this chapter will look at an art practice dealing with the particular actualization of the technocultural: software art. Within the organizational aesthetics of the ecologies of artistic practices, networks, media objects, figures, and performances, software is assigned not only agency<sup>9</sup> but also an eventlike potential for transforming the movement of aesthetic, social, and political morphogenesis. Many of the regularities in such processes are linked to or associated with software. Such association may be direct, in the manner of particular capabilities of systems and programs, or in coded algorithms and control languages<sup>10</sup> and the functions derived from them, whether as interface, database, loop, or otherwise. These can be seen as new agents and concepts to be assigned roles in the production of power, value, and sensibility. To say this is both to say too much and too little. It is certainly possible to wrongly assign software the energy of a genetic code and to miss the subjectifications, new aesthetic powers, social models, and ways of living that are enforced and saturated by software.

Software is code and algorithm, vernacular language, something that is compiled and run. But it is also sets of relationships,<sup>11</sup> functions, usages, concepts, that are coded while still leaving us, by and large, indifferent to how in particular it is done. Such a statement might seem blasphemous, but a lot of code appears simply as ready-to-use objects. And a lot of software, when it is at work, leaps into domains, concepts, and problems that are as much reliant on software as on the functioning of other spheres, whether aesthetic, cognitive, or political.<sup>12</sup>

As Adrian Mackenzie puts it, within software-saturated domains, not everything results from code but everything 'boils down to code.'<sup>13</sup> Such code is not a training behaviour, a DNA. Code is formal, but it does not mean that any formally describable relationship is coded or is code itself. Rather, software can be seen as a possibility, a 'means of mutation'<sup>14</sup> whereby alteration can be worked at every level, including code—where code can be seen as a process that is buggy, undergoing a process of becoming, intertwined with other emergences.

Every art platform runs through software-based relations; many of them deal with cultural phenomena feeding on energies brought about or

managed by software. Collectivity, self-organization, and autocreativity in art platforms inevitably go through some form of actualization driven by software and are fattened by relations running through it, a combination of networks, choices, back ends, discussions, production and communication tools, but such dynamics also number among themselves a capacity for humour and the folkloristic, the vernacular as a precious ingredient. This chapter is built around the enquiry into the formation of the field of software art through Runme.org and on the analysis of the organizational relations interweaving technology, humour, and folklore, among other things, in art platforms. It concludes with tracing art-surfing clubs as some of the potential art platforms of the social Web.

Interface and structure, all the strata that make up an art platform: database, administration, an accept/reject email template (if used), titles, uses, relationships, dynamics, amplification of aesthetic endeavour, humour, mass-scale autocreativity, all come together in variable combinations as the regularities of organizational aesthetics, playing out in the unfolding of digital forms of art.

## RUNME.ORG

Runme.org is a 'software art repository.'<sup>15</sup> Whatever this might seem to mean, Runme.org was not created as an archive but to test a format that would be something between an out-of-scale festival, a distributed salon, infinite exhibition, an open collection, sets of samizdat books, and sets of relationships—all in all, an art platform in the making.

What Runme.org became to software art is multilayered. It is an advocate and a club that engenders enough energy and irony to produce a dynamics for the field to unfold with in a way that would run perpendicularly to dominant, possibly redundant modes of structuring an art current; at the same time, it provides the field of software art with time and space for its unfolding to be frivolous, abundant, and relatively unconstrained.

Software art is a minor art field. It is built at the intersections of divergent practices, but it also struggles to gain its own coherency, a plane of operation that would suit and sustain its particular ecology. The production of such a plane for software art was in part carried out through Runme.org. It is with Runme.org that it became possible, largely through developing certain sensibilities and intensities, through openness and humour, to equip the movement with multivalent lenses or points of entry through which to draw links to varying strata, from programmers' folklore cultures to conceptual art to Google hacks, and while cutting across fields, to construct itself as another art movement.

Runme.org is built in a way that is similar to software download repositories.<sup>16</sup> One of the inspirations for Runme.org was Sweetcode.org, a repository for 'innovative free software' (launched in autumn 2001). The 'About'

section of Sweetcode.org read: 'Software reported on sweetcode should surprise you in some interesting way.' Sweetcode.org linked free software projects, many of which could be labeled as software art or at least could be referenced as unusual or absurd pieces of technology; it was down for a while and now functions as a 'normal' repository. Making such a conceptual link was important for Runme.org as it aimed to establish connections between artistic and software worlds and to extend software art beyond art.

Runme.org has a rather straightforward structure: categories with sub-categories on the left side of the screen<sup>17</sup> and keywords in the form of a cloud on the right, similar to the more recently popularized 'folksonomy';<sup>18</sup> and a Web upload function, which allows any registered user to submit a project through a clear sequence of steps.<sup>19</sup> The platform is moderated: Submitted projects are queued and wait for the administrators' approval. Apart from filtering out spam and inappropriate projects, the Runme.org administration also filters out projects that would not fit its understanding of the current state of the field or material that is considered unexciting; there is a transmutative process of sieving and choosing, and the level of permeability or choice fluctuates depending on a wide variety of conditions.<sup>20</sup> What can seem a technically automated setup is in fact a loaded structure that

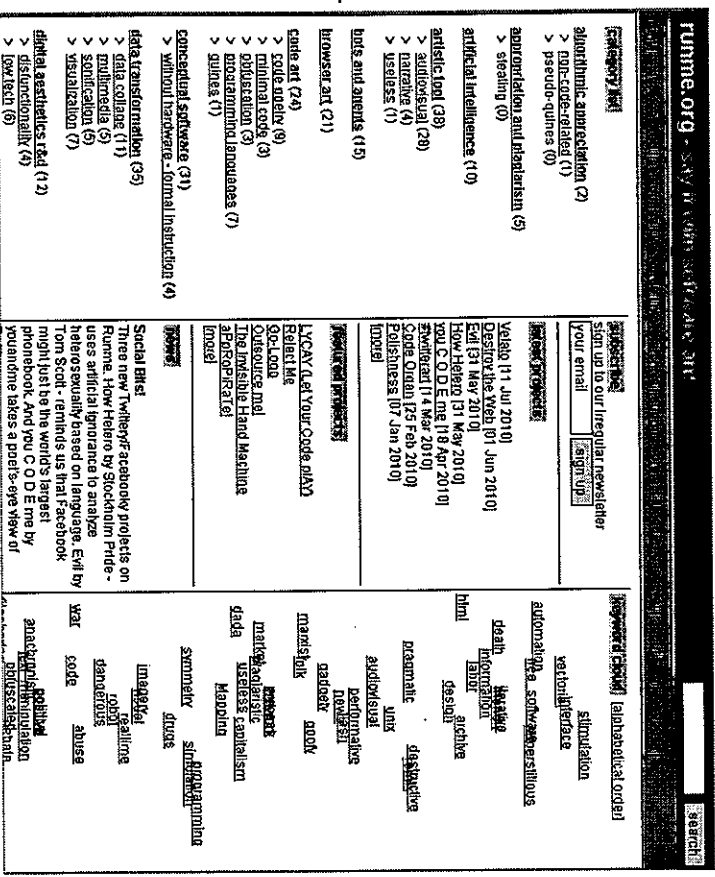


Figure 3.1 Runme.org.

is proactive while being hidden away. The most common mistake of theorists that have not made such things themselves is the metonymic action of extending a narrowly understood model of the technical over the horizon of all actualization. Often this is done to account for changes leading to more open forms of production at times when a more delicately nuanced account of the reciprocal construction of the technical and organizational, the political, and humane is needed.

The last characteristic of Runme.org is 'featuring.' A group of theorists and practitioners in the field were invited yearly to feature what they individually saw as the best projects, building a library of texts about software art pieces that could participate, together with the *Text-software art related* category of entries to the site, in the construction of the self-referentiality of the movement. As Runme.org grew from a series of art festivals (discussed in the following), the use of features was initially sought as an overthrowing of the usual art-festival prize system by placing multiple projects and perspectives in the limelight,<sup>21</sup> but it quickly became a key venue of discussion and site for the conceptualization of software art.

Substituting the position of winners with the process of featuring commented on a situation in media art, a field that is itself beset by an over-reliance on this organizational form, wherein the best works can usually only be found in the 'honorary mention' categories or the like. To sketch a picture of the digital arts of the late 1990s, it is worth browsing through the honorable mentions of. Net category in the Ars Electronica festival to spot the most influential projects (faking into account the fact that some are still left out, often because artists find it unbearable to enter). The entries that won the festival's highest award, the Golden Nica, would most likely not be recalled by active participants or specialists in the field.

Runme.org's featured works appeared in the 'Featured' section and were included in festival catalogues. Many of the authors of featured works were invited to these festivals. Each year, the same Runme.org database would be used, with new projects uploaded after the previous edition, possibly alongside projects that had already gone through the selection process. For the first annual cycle forty-seven projects were selected and featured. Having forty-seven winners is a radical concept for a festival, but not surprising for a platform/repository, wherein 'featuring' becomes a form of organizational aesthetics.

Whereas the mechanism described above might seem quite simple, the organization of Runme.org interfered with and played out at the scene of art events and institutions as well at the plane of an art current emerging with force and significance. Projects and practices gathered to collectively form and participate in the differentiating movement, the amplification generated to enunciate software art. As an attractor, Runme.org caused transformative reactions, whether to hierarchical fields or to the region of related language, to thinking about an art practice, or of making art. Even solely used as a reference point, a place for flâneurs, a space to immerse,

to ramble around, it became a site of difference and brilliance, fun and excitement, leading somewhere else, disjoining something. People drawn by the contemporary politics of art or attracted to 'bizarre' or techno-savvy things found Runme.org a forceful catalyst and an environment with multiple entries that did not lock them down but tried to provide a collective language, the expression of certain kinds of beings and the politics of a cultural movement.

For the sake of context, the festival for art and digital culture, Transmediale, launched an 'artistic software' category in the year 2001, and software art became the hype among the media art communities. It can be maintained that software art grew from the net art movement, rooted back in the early and mid-1990s.<sup>22</sup> At least, projects such as alternative Web browsers started to be written back in 1997 (with *Web Stalker* by I/O/D, a thread continued by *Web Shredder* by Mark Napier in 1998, and *Netomat* by Maciej Wisniewski in 1999), and was often labeled with the new term 'software art' or, alternately, 'online software art,' as found in *Introduction to net.art* (1994–1999) by Natalie Bookchin and Alexei Shulgín.<sup>23</sup> Engagement with the code of Internet Web pages (HTML) and the material of the networks, characteristic of net art, included tracking the materiality of the software running or searching through Internet servers, personal computer applications, and its embeddedness in hardware, be they sound chips or suitcases. The practice asked questions about what software is and what it does in relation to objects, subjects, ways of doing and making, agency, sensibility, and culture. How does the aesthetics of code couple with the artistic, medical, managerial, or teaching culture gated through software? What are the concepts and forms of software that become dominating forces in the practices structured by software?

Software art is an aesthetic current, sets of objects, processes, concepts, and figures, that focus on software (that goes all the way down to hardware, layer after layer) as means of symbolic and material expression. Software expresses power dynamics, runs systems of profiling and segmentation, creates and circulates sensibilities, lures into specific kinds of sociotechnical interaction. It also includes technological collapses, major challenges, and revolutions as its conceptual cores. In a way, sociopolitical and economic systems of today are all expressed in software. Such 'expression' is certainly two-way: It is through the expression in software that such systems and orders are not only run and changed but also created, imagined, and extended into potential futures. Software here not only has agency, but agency so powerful that, coupled with other human-technical ensembles and processes, is able to bypass numerous other interests in the construction of society.

Software art engages with such expressivity of software, as something that is or should be made open and available for entry, assembly, mutation, and thought. Whether critical, subjective, humorous, homemade, or businesslike, software art focus on the materiality of software as an open

potentiality. For software art, software is not only a reality to learn to live inside of, to break out of, to sink into to the extent of modelling its regularities and boundaries, to reassemble, to take pleasure in and destroy, but it is also an open concept loaded with currents across the fields and practices of mathematics, biology, finance, avant-garde, politics, secret services, birth, decay, and many others that are worth being questioned, mediated, organized, and reorganized with software as they are saturated with and, in turn, yield software. Here certainly, besides software, software art does not only deal with hardware, networks, languages, and algorithms but also with the histories and relationships of which software is a product, agent, and provocateur.

Artists started off the problematization of software,<sup>24</sup> but the 1990s could not be seen as the only breeding time for software art. Aesthetic engagement with or response to behaviourist, algorithmic, ideological, and mechanistic structures of reality of the twentieth century can be exemplified by currents such as Dada, surrealism, and Fluxus; mail art and concept art. Florian Cramer and Saul Albert in particular have argued that Dadaism and conceptual art are important historical references for software art.<sup>25</sup> Jacob Lillemoose reconceptualized certain strands of work in conceptual art as productive of information tools, means of challenging and changing 'information society'—something followed in its pathos by software art.<sup>26</sup> Because software can be defined as a set of formal instructions that can be executed by a computer, or simultaneously as 'code' and its 'execution,' a history of the precursors of software art, including permutational poetry and experiments with formal variations and execution of instructions, can be retrospectively built.<sup>27</sup> Inke Arns, Amy Alexander, Geoff Cox, Adrian Ward, and Alex McLean wrote very productively about performativity of code, speech-act theory, live programming, and generative code.<sup>28</sup>

But even taking software as coded algorithms, it cannot be perceived separately from its production and conceptualization within the domains of academia, hardware, politics, economics, the availability of source code, cultures of usage, humour, experiment, cracking, maintenance, and discarding. Hackers' aesthetic experiments with software date back to the 1950s, when the first high-level programming languages were created<sup>29</sup> and when the first mainframe computers were bought by a few large universities.<sup>30</sup> The first and subsequent generations of hackers, a circle of people for whom ontological experimentation with the boundaries of their own inventiveness, competence, and persistence was carried out through interaction with a computer, created one of the crucial modalities software art draws from. Hackers, in fact, are partly responsible for both the formal development of computer science and the software industry and for their exciting deviations and rhizomatic passages, such as free software, alternative games development, a culture of jokes and hoaxes, gimmicks, hidden features and poetic competitions in code, among other amazing things.

With an energetic charge similar to that of bastard philosophers and poet-criminals, hackers and geeks (further attended to in the chapter 4) build a social and political dimension of engineering and computer science drop-outs,<sup>31</sup> self-taught masters, and pacifist coders that fundamentally changes the domain of technology in its relation to politics, education, power, art, and humour.

The idea of the open database that later turned into Runme.org was conceived in Moscow, in late May 2002, the day after Readme, the first software art festival, was held. The first, and at the time the only software art festival had just taken place. It was a disputed art practice, and even descriptions of what the festival was looking for sounded unsure back in 2001.<sup>32</sup> An institutional software art 'boom' was about to happen.<sup>33</sup>

For the first Readme festival, an open database with all submissions was created and stayed online but was closed to further contributions after the submission deadline. It was clear that a new database needed to be opened for the second Readme (held in Helsinki, 2003). When Runme.org was in the making, it was supposed to serve as the festival submission platform.

As mentioned above, Runme.org was conceived of as a mockery of a traditional festival submission system. All the entries were to be stored in an open database and could be viewed at any point. Nonartists and especially programmers could be lured more easily into uploading their pieces to a software-database-like website. On top of that, it would have too many categories and 'winners' to make orderly sense of them all. Such joking conceptualization did not mean to foreclose the long-term independent development of Runme.org. Although being partly funded through the link to the Readme events,<sup>34</sup> Runme.org quickly outgrew the festival in prominence and, establishing itself as an activity in its own right, allowed people to form personal, unmediated relations to and through it.

'Software art' as a term signifying certain practices was still at the stage of becoming familiar back in 2002, and inheriting from net art traditions, exhibited a high degree of sensitivity towards institutional forms of organization.<sup>35</sup> Given this, it was duly suspected by some to exhaust a cultural current by postproducing a few names and projects.<sup>36</sup> Runme.org aimed to think about software art and take part in its emergence while trying to preserve the irregularities and chaos of the area: all in all, while making art, to go beyond the known confines of art. It was decided that Runme.org should start off with a large number of 'categories' that would be diverse, contradictory, and funny to work as creeping roots that would let the plant grow stronger. For instance, on the 22 October 2002, Florian Cramer writes: 'I strongly favor the creation of categories in the first place because they make people more aware of the full range of entries that is possible. (Too many artists simply misunderstand «software art» as synonymous of either «[audiovisual] software tools for artists» or «algorithmic data visualization»).'

On 23 October 2002, Amy Alexander replies to Florian Cramer: 'it's a tricky issue, as we saw . . . people are understanding software art to mean

more than that now, but new clichés are arising, so I think somehow we should use the categories to encourage a wide range of work, rather than to encourage—or whine about—new clichés . . . the field seems to be in a very delicate state at this moment . . . our curation system should help get more entries, but that's really just a crutch; things need to flourish on their own, especially if we hope for more involvement from the non-art software community, I think we should put forth a really positive image, and not an overly-critical or artworldish one.'<sup>37</sup>

The initial intention of creating an overlapping, inexact, funny, and inspiring taxonomy can be traced through the current categories, which cover a wide range of approaches from projects that create critical allowances for modes of writing and textual cultures that are constructed and maintained through word-processing software in the *text manipulation* category to that of browser art that critically engages with the genre of browser software as a mechanism that constrains and limits the network to windows that appear in a browser window. Alternative browsers explore the meaning of network connections, datasets sourced and held, and introduce 'perspectivalism' in relation to the Internet. Art games create game worlds of symbolic, expressive, and political order radically different from those in domination, inheriting from hacker and artisanship scenes, whereas the projects of *system dysfunctionality* and *digital aesthetics red* often deal with the aesthetics of error as a genuine computer aesthetics<sup>38</sup> (and as a core function of the computer, to error) and with low-tech, based on the creative use of limiting, obsolete, free, or low-cost algorithms and hardware. Such projects poke at the boundaries of digital material to force it to exhibit its structures, processes, languages, and metaphors that are often obscured by desires to normalize, imitate, update, make 'seductive,' or make digital technology disappear. *Hardware transformation* projects (initially *hardware deformation* projects) either produce damage or a demand for redesign, and *bots and agents* projects list pieces of software that, like normal bots, crawl the Web to gather information or perform other tasks but, unlike them, harness discarded data, reveal hidden links and link clusters, and take on imaginative roles. *Artistic tool* projects work towards providing new software models for expression, production, and collaboration; they are sometimes made in spite of mainstream interface models, drawing on the heritage of early hobbyist software. *Data transformation* projects add to it by creating tools and aesthetic patterns that work for and by transforming the data they handle, i.e., rendering an aural image a visual one, merging words with images, and revealing connections among algorithms, databases, search engines, and so on. *Generative art, algorithmic appreciation* and *code art* projects (with the sarcastic category *bouncing balls* as a certain kind of interactive art ultimately left out) work with the 'beauty' of code and aesthetics of its execution (*Classicalist Yomi* was one of the proposed names for it), sometimes inheriting ideas and practice from the traditions of programmers' folklore.



Some categories overtly question or invite sabotage of the political, social, or economic orders as inscribed through dominating families of software: *political and activist software* lists useful activist software and projects that undermine some of the operations of global capitalist society and neoliberal ideology, particularly as they are embodied in software; *existing software manipulations* projects present clever hacks or misuse of software; and *social software* works towards providing environments for social interactions, often nonnormatively framed, or more widely assays the development of software as a social praxis.

Runme.org's taxonomy is not a 'proper' classification. In the initial taxonomy, as well as in its subsequent revisions, phenomena of different levels neighbour each other. Here, the rhetoric of works or their formal methods were put side by side to comments on systems of curatorship (*text about software art and game deconstruction, crack/patch and best festival jury*); self-reference and irony (*competition for suggesting categories*), reflection on the features of repositories and their use and abuse (*manipulating voting*), aesthetic change (*software as culture*), software characteristics (*hard to use software*), sensibilities (*minimal code, beautiful crash of the system*), software type/genre (*demo category, viruses, best artistic re-packaging of existing tools*), art history perspective (*Jodi plagiarism*) were all intermixed.

The open-armed and chaotic embrace of software-related art practices seen in the categories was held as a strategy of collective declaration that was foundational to the movement. On the other hand, a politically understood becoming of the field constructed areas of quite different intensities within it. 'Categories' were included or omitted, carefully named, filled in with projects (that administrators often searched for and uploaded themselves) or left to themselves depending on their power and function towards the emergence of software art.<sup>39</sup> For instance, the category *demo scene*<sup>40</sup> was not included as engagement with such a well-established and large sphere was considered to invite a distorting potential in regards to aesthetic engagement with software. *Flash category* was also omitted because although it allows 'programming' with Lingo, JavaScript or ActionScript, the plague of Flash-based 'worms' (shapeless, oblong, or round little things that move, rotate, and jump) featuring some basic interactivity that populated various media festivals were not particularly inspiring.<sup>41</sup> Amy Alexander wrote the following about Flash-based software artwork (14 October 2002): 'I wouldn't personally want to make a generalization about Flash itself. I don't mind Flash, but rather I mind the similarity of most (not all) Flash projects—and that they mostly aren't too convincing as software. Of course that part is no problem when they don't present themselves as software, but I'm talking about when they don't go beyond the conventional Flash conventions, and then they say, "this is software."<sup>42</sup>

Some of the more ironic categories were not included either, for instance, Pit Schultz's *emulated modernism* (software art that generates countless

copies of Mondrian, Kandinsky, Malevich), *pixel paint* (every piece of software art that uses the visual quality of pixels as the main trick to impress its viewers), and *pixel soup* (the impressionistic/animated version of pixel paint). The proposed categories, such as *trivial software*, *obsessive software*, *best software poser*, *best physiological reaction*, and even *the algorithm is the message*, were also left out.

To give a taste of the humour of Runme.org's foundational rhetoric, I will provide a few more examples:

01 November 2002, Matthew Fuller proposes:

- Arms Race (software that outpaces military developments, from a civilian source)
- Best Grant Hoover (Software that gains X amount of funding by simple use of keywords, i.e., 'software', 'interaction', spurious art terms whilst maxing the yawm-rate)

02 November 2002, Pit Schultz offers:

- artistic vapourware (dusting away in the cupboards)
- modern art (according to what i remember every digital art using only very low bandwidth)
- dead data (unreadable code, code made unreadable, code too uninteresting to read, destroyed digital art)
- weibelism pr pranks (software art which wouldn't be possible without the press and extensive marketing efforts)
- e-flux (a version of pr pranks almost entirely based on email promotion)

From 10 October 2002 to 18 December 2002, Amy Alexander suggests:

- most pompous artist's statement; i.e., artist's statements that talk up a storm of artspeak none of which is realized in the project.
- software cemetery / left for dead: abandonware, abandonware repositories (with subcategories such as)
  - > the undead: software that's dead, but doesn't rest in peace. i.e., people still use it as though it were alive—e.g., wordstar
  - > the grateful dead: if only this software were as beloved in life as it is in death . . . this can include retro-nostalgia/"dead media" type stuff that nobody paid attention to when it was alive but now it's a cult classic.
  - > born again: software that died but came back as a religion. this subcategory will i'm sure be won by unix::linux, i mean unix::gnu/linux but runners up will include ascii art.

The *Jodi* category was included in the list during the first offline discussion as a category for art created by the famous artistic duo Jodi, whereas *Jodi plagiarism* signified works following the aesthetic/formalist path established by Jodi's work. The category that later became digital aesthetics was first sketched as a joke, a commentary on the type of the new-media sensibility the couple almost single-handedly developed in digital art.<sup>42</sup> It was rather seriously discussed, however, as Jodi's aesthetics had become so internalized that it seemed worth differentiating and emphasizing the significance of sensibilities, produced by them, for the software art movement.<sup>43</sup>

The taxonomy was conceived as open to a degree and determined to be constantly changing in accordance with the works submitted or the amount of works collected. Every user could suggest a subcategory while uploading her piece, and the suggestion then waited for approval from the moderators. There was no such option for the categories, but a category could be suggested by emailing the administrators. For instance, in 2003, *Whitespace* (a programming language working only with space) gained a new artistic subcategory, *programming language, solely for itself*, within the *code art* category. An ironic category, *artistic tool—useless* (referring to the affordances of technological age such as reuse and remix of abundant visual material) was turned into the more affirmative *data collage*.

This relative modularity of Runme.org was supported by the policy of the submission of found objects. A large number of projects that maintained the irregularities in the movement of software art were found and uploaded by the platform's administrators, invited artists/writers and other people with an interest in the field. The category of *digital folklore* (discussed in the following) was largely filled by such 'objet trouvé' submissions, whereas in spite of the high numbers of projects listed under the *generative art* title, the team members in that category hardly ever submitted a project.

The previous discussion demonstrates the dynamics of technically mediated influences on software art brought about by the larger Runme.org team. Beyond administrators, the larger team, and invited 'experts,' the art platform's crew included the entire group of artists and nonartists that made Runme.org the way it is. An art platform cannot create a cultural movement single-handedly, and although its role might be rather formative in the dynamics of such a becoming, it does, in a way, always come later in the unfolding of autocreativity, in the actualization of an aesthetic practice.

The organizational aesthetics of Runme.org proceeded through very intricate reciprocal formulations of software art and the energies feeding it and the organization of the art platform. Neither would be the same without the other one. The collective and political enunciation of software art was partly carried through this art platform, but such a process also formed it. Here, the amplification of aesthetic intensity took place in the network of relations between the movement and the art platform. The devices of the art platform's operation in such an amplificatory dynamic are technically embedded gestures and thoughts (categories, uploading, filtering,

featuring). Through the linkage to the Readme festivals, but also with work, love, excitement, Runme.org charged the atmosphere to form a wind favourable to the minor practice of software art. Cutting across a variety of spheres and functioning between them, Runme.org could work towards some kind of amplification of autocreativity while avoiding the trap of centralization. Runme.org was very significant but remained minor.

The term 'minor art' is drawn from *Kafka, Toward a Minor Literature* by Deleuze and Guattari. They speak of Kafka, writing in German for the Jews of Prague during the period of the Austro-Hungarian empire, in terms of his belonging to a 'linguistic Third World zone,' and I wonder what it means for today's state of the world. What are the deterritorialized languages of today that hybrid minorities, professional gypsies, and amateur nomads are speaking online, in dialects accented by technology? What becomes their expression, their empowerment, their castle? Given the background established by Kafka and the range of political urgencies, pain, and radical multiplicity of networked minor fields of expression, my proposition is to look into folklore and its humour.

## DIGITAL FOLKLORE

The term 'folklore' belongs to the time period of a Hegelian becoming of nation-states. The first rounds of attention to folklore were significantly politically informed and served the development of strong national identities.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, the term 'folklore' can be seen as inscribed into the hierarchical and essentialist paradigms of framing cultural practices and processes as they are measured against a grid of counterpositions, such as art versus nonart, professional versus amateur or artisan, precious versus waste, oral culture versus written/visual/print culture, individual versus collective. As such, 'folklore' has played its specific roles in the performance of power on the political scenes, and in the cultural and artistic arenas of the nineteenth and twentieth century.

For instance, in the 1930s, while abandoning the early Soviet studies of folklore, including the classic formalist works of Vladimir Propp, folklore became heavily politicized as a part of the ongoing processes of 'Russification' and was identified with poetry and literature located in the past.<sup>45</sup> It is not only in the Soviet academy, however, that the field of folklore was conceived as exotic due to its origin, age, and aesthetics. Folklore was distinguished as an ethnographic object, as a culture of the Others that expressed the fundamental ideas of the origin of the world and other archetypal myths; and the most 'valued' folklore rested entirely in the nonliterate oral past or was sited exotically overseas. Contemporary studies of folklore regard their subject as an always-present part of human culture, be it a life-cycle ritual, a dance or game, a story or image. In this context, 'folklore' refers to the creative life of groups and individuals based on tradition and





repeated situations vis-à-vis the computer. Here, repetition is encountered again, to be amplified into something else via humour.

As with classical folklore, digital folklore also reworks elements that are to an extent typical. Thus, one of its features can be its variability: repetition and change of figures, devices, genres, poetic languages, functions, etc. The forms of organization of folklore include relatively stable genres as well as flexible forms and one-off projects. Pit Schultz, for instance, listed the following genres of digital folklore: 'There is the field of gimmicks, nerdy tricks and playing with the given formulas, the eyes which follow the mouse pointer. . . there is the useless software production, insider gags, Easter eggs, hidden features based on mathematical jokes, the Escher-from-pe-Poell effects of playing with perception.'<sup>49</sup> The list could be expanded: there are musical hacks of the system, making the floppy drive sing songs or orchestrating motherboard beeps and fan sounds. Various ASCII art traditions can also be referred to as aspects of digital folklore.

Such folklore is exemplified by anonymous software ephemera, such as viruslike minor prank programs of the 1990s, which would flip the desktop upside down, shake icons, change interface colours, let all desktop folders drop down, and fill the screen with dozens of pop-up windows. Fake viruses would display warnings about the system preparing to format the hard drive and block the keyboard (these were predominant in Norton Commander times). With such little programs, one was able to gun the desktop or start a snow flurry on it (a little animation with snow falling down the desktop and piling up at the edges of open windows and the bottom of the screen). Many of these aesthetics are presently incorporated into large commercial successes. It is now easy to flip the desktop upside down with CTRL+ALT+↑ key combination in Windows Vista, for instance; application windows that elegantly slip away is a common feature of operating systems since Mac OS X; and most humorous animation-based interactions have made their way into iPhone apps and new paradigms of software design in terms of 'funware.' Today's digital folklore moves towards performances on YouTube.com and the exchange of links through Twitter.com; however, such evolution does not make digital folklore less interesting or telling. Digital folklore can result in an abundance of waste material, in a text or experimental work, in art, in mainstream software or, indeed, in the hackers' 'canon' of pranks and cool things. It is through the engagement with such practices that some core qualities of digital material performances and the vectors along which they pull software-based social life can be understood.

Digital folklore is a way of living with and making sense of technology, whereby such a sense is affective, habitual, digitally crafty, and funny. When digital material is habitable and populated, it is through its problematization as a playful exploration that it unfolds and multiplies to employ tempos and methodologies of various kinds of doing, enabling it to differentiate and spring across to other domains, which may in turn become art, design, education, organization, and idling.

Making use of various forms and languages of material, be they executable or other files, lines of code, instructions, emails, network protocols, browser windows, or desktops, creates a body of practice and a way of producing it that is exciting (sometimes really idiotic) and largely invisible (or neglected). The current of digital folklore in software, being a wide layer of cultural unfolding below the radar of art, inspires many artistic practices and informs research into digital objects. Software art in particular drew its lifeblood from programmers' and other users' cultures, and channeling such energies was an important part of the organizational aesthetics of Runme.org.

A special Runme.org category, *digital folk and artisanship*, was created early on and hosted a number of projects that Runme.org's team fished for in the debris of networks. A rather 'impolite' policy of linking to or uploading 'found objects,' whose authors would probably never consider including them in an 'arty' resource, established a certain manner of thinking that made such practices operable at different levels of visibility. Being inspired by them correlated with the widening of conceptual and technical operations of inclusion, learning, and transduction. Runme.org's attention to digital folklore made way for the rethinking of art and set out modes by which software art could balance the challenging dynamics of widening art's boundaries while also establishing an art field.

Runme.org has featured a few projects within the folklore category. *WinGnk Builder* by an anonymous author, for instance, is a collection of pseudoviruses and a tool for building them, an objet trouvé that was awarded an honorary mention at the Readme 2002 festival.<sup>50</sup> The project is representative of the cracker culture of 'revenge software' that produces the impression that the computer is affected by a virus. Running the program would crumble the icons or make the screen blink in every colour it can produce. But as an ironic metacommentary on the all-powerful cracker culture, *WinGnk Builder* is also a program for custom making such 'viruses' for users' own disposal via specifying, through a menu, the effects one wants to produce and simply pressing the 'generate' button. The project also makes fun of the Windows-like standard application interface that, coupled with a mockery of functionality, makes aesthetic interventions into software design and functionality from niches buried deep in the 'dark' Web.

*Tempest for Eliza* by Erik Thiele is a hacker's canonical digital folklore work that was found through 'browsing' and linked on Runme.org.<sup>51</sup> ('Browsing' is a now-forgotten and largely impossible activity because the reign of the Google page-rank algorithm and personalization hinders such flâneuring from stumbling across obscure and non-popular sites. It has been entirely replaced by surf clubs and reposting of links, as discussed in the following). *Tempest for Eliza* is a classic, brilliant 'joke' that is dazzling when taken as a nonart piece of experimentation. The project explores the physical qualities of computer systems: Electronic devices emit electromagnetic waves, which can be caught in order for the original data to be

reconstructed. *Tempest for Eliza* demonstrates this in a very precise manner: The software displays black and white stripes on the computer monitor ('one for each note in the song'), whose particular combination and rate of change generate kinds of signals sufficient to constitute some well-known pieces of music, which is played by shortwave AM radio. Not only does the project playfully undermine conventionalities of what constitutes information, where information is to be located, and the conditionality of usability, it is also a hands-on demonstration of the ways in which TEMPEST is possible. Telecommunications Electronics Material Protected from Emanating Spurious Transmissions (TEMPEST) is a secret service code word coined in the late 1960s/early 1970s for the use of and defence against 'compromising emissions.' As a way of putting myth to work, *Tempest for Eliza* did more for the aesthetics of digital materiality than for security. Redefining, by making visible, the complexity of the ecology computers produce and are part of, this project that is made for fun, represents an intensive aesthetic endeavour occurring outside of art.

Bringing such nonartistic aesthetic forms of life to Runme.org and the context of software art is a specific strand of work within its organizational aesthetics, in terms of its conceptually, politically, and technically nuanced unfolding. It is by the power of such leaping propelled by the organizational mannerisms of Runme.org that certain flavours of software art could be intensified.

#### ART-SURFING CLUBS

Digital folklore drives more than software or software art. Similar modalities of practice are inscribed into the passage of autocreativity and into the actualization of the technical. With the boom of Web 2.0, through participatory platforms and networks of devices that enable kinds of circulation of immediate creative, folk, and funny statements and cultural responses, the human-technical grammars protocolling how autocreativity arises, what the meanings and values of digital folklore are, and how aesthetic brilliance can come about stand out as requiring reconceptualization. This exploration guided the previous chapters through the concepts of autocreativity, self-organization, aesthetic brilliance, amplification, repetition, and organizational aesthetics. And because at this point only a small vocabulary has been developed to tackle both the massive range of cultural production on the Net and the new modes of the formation of art currents, I would like to look into some rather recent movements that explore such questions empirically.

Such currents are sets of websites that, to continue the unfolding of art platforms 'propaganda', are fragmentary or molecular: art platforms reassembled to deal better with particular kinds of aesthetic production. Compared to Udaff.com or Runme.org, they would appear only to employ

fragments of such art platforms' organizational aesthetics while augmenting them to include new kinds of self-developed human-technical mechanisms that allow the profound destabilization of aesthetic obesity. The relationships that constitute an art platform may be partly present here, while the scales, ratios and vectors of autocreative emergence shift. It is in the ethos of my argument to imagine art platforms as something uncapcied, unrestricted to specific arrangements of human-technical ensembles for the conditions of their aesthetic becoming. The kinds of relational art platform found between Second Life, Gazira Babeli, and Second Front is joined here by a flâneuring and methodological kind of art platform, artistic-surfing clubs.<sup>52</sup> The kinds of aesthetic force that surfing clubs amplify can partly be addressed through a certain 'digital media idioy.'<sup>53</sup> Such idioy carries traces of Doszoevsky's holy foolishness, manifesting a specific aesthetic that, although highly limited across a terrain of sensibilities if not purposefully simplified, is able to cook up a kind of performance absent from existing enunciations. Idioy here is not meant in a derogatory manner; rather, it is about looking for what the Web and digital reality is technically and culturally made of in these days after the coup of Google, Apple, and Facebook, and being able to appreciate its manifestations or discoveries.

A surf club, or a 'pro surfer' club, according to terminology originating around the website NastyNets.com<sup>54</sup> usually refers to a group of people who post objects found in the paraphernalia of the Internet onto a website, often organized as a blog. Such found objects could be something from YouTube.com or other kinds of video, captures of online performances, software operations, digital objects, images, advertisements, Flash files, pieces of html or other code, or 'digital junk.'<sup>55</sup> Art surfers can reposition the objects by equipping them with a title or commentary. Marisa Olson reports that two members of NastyNets.com developed *Pic-See*, a Web-based tool that 'makes it easier for internet users to plunder images archived in open directories.'<sup>56</sup> Plundering, a device in their organizational aesthetics, here means that the 'original' location is referenced while the object is positioned within a different set of contexts, sometimes to enhance its aesthetic valence.

Artist surfers claim to undergo a certain fetishization of surfing, an ecstasy in front of an infinite data pool and a human massivity to add to the scent of artist groups blogs.<sup>57</sup> One (at least I) cannot help but sense a certain chemical enhancement in the 'rambling sessions of Web browsing'<sup>58</sup> founding such projects, and consequently envy their youth, perhaps providing them with the time and intensity to pursue such exploration. This kind, rate, and habit of work is certainly all about economies of attention and production, but it is important not to lose sight of other charges guiding such work.

How is an art-surfing club different from a buzzy exchange of links via email or Twitter or collected on an individual blog? In fact, it is not very different, and that is precisely the source of its force. Found objects and projects made of or with them form the basis of the art-surfing club, which

together with its members, explores the material and the aesthetics of the digital. What they work on is a profound engagement with the creative unfolding of digital culture as it occurs in all its gory detail. Pro surfers wade through the muddiness of mass-scale autocreativity, through folklore that may be stereotypical, funny, bad, exciting, and stupid, and what they produce through their selections tells one more about digital culture and art in their processual self-assembly than any dismissive top-down or overly optimistic explorations possibly can.

Early net art threw itself into browsing, repositioning found objects within an art context with projects, such as *Blá-Blá Sizes* and XXX by Alexei Shulgín (1996).<sup>59</sup> Much of its philosophy comes from a respectful appreciation of others' creativity, especially that of nonartists or 'bad artists,' and also a respectful appreciation towards automatism. Whether the former would suggest that there are too few ideas for too many brains so that duplication is necessary, the latter would indicate that if a monkey spends a hundred years with a typewriter randomly pressing its buttons, it would have eventually typed out *War and Peace*. The net art kind browsing went through a period of decline to be reborn again with the massive creativity of Web 2.0.

NastyNets.com, NetmaresNetdreams.net, Supercentral.org, Loshadka.org, SpiritSurfers.net, and Double Happiness, among others,<sup>60</sup> in their fishing for digital folklore and nonprofessional and professional art alike, intensify certain qualities of the organizational aesthetics of art platforms while dropping some others. Thus, a methodology and kinds of attentiveness to the qualities and relationships through which digital material comes about may allow for a nuanced formulation of the changing constitution of digital aesthetics. Art platforms can be cross-platform or technically almost nonexistent, they can be seen as close to online curating or nonart and as essentially idiotic, but their operation thrives on a digitally nuanced aesthetic exploration and amplification of what is happening, through means of repositioning, referentiality, intensification, promotion, sociality, and humour.

## 4 Geeky Publics, Amateurs, and the Potency of Art

Then there is the power user scene, rather born in teenage-suburbia than the universities and war-science-labs . . . their standards mostly the musical ones, modules, is still a model for 'open source' music production, folkloristic indeed, based on chart hits but distinctively different from what electronic dance floor music became. They are made in and for the bedroom.

(Pit Schultz, 'Computer Age is Coming into Age')

Cool cool cool  
(low-tech music by high-tech people?)

[espestro:] diagnostic: waiting for myself!

[work:] work please!!!

[captaincash:] antisocial intolerantropology

[gwem:] look at the idle time—it can give you important info

[sinusjog:] we want [erzatz] we don't want the authentic originalz

[pipplina:] sad songs are nature's onions

[demoneyes:] hey baby can I ring your modulator???

[neutralino:] I'd rather have a bottle in front of me than a frontal

lobotomy.

[marieke:] ladies, dudes without humor are a big waste of your time!

(Jan-14-2004)

(Microtalk at Micromusic.net)

Art platforms assemble objects, networks, technologies, and desires to work in culture and make art. Such assemblies perform as coherent entities, but their performance is also logged in other ensembles and processes, be it production or subjectification that they are an integral part of. Although art platforms operate at a certain level of autonomy, establishing and performing according to their own laws, they do comply with, challenge, and change larger machinic groupings. In fact, in a certain way they are part of the operative processes of such larger machines, and their potential for rearranging relations between different flows while making up a perceptive, a human, a societal, a political component rests in such native acquaintance. Such a claim draws on a Guattarian concept of aesthetics and microevolutions as well as on the experiences of projects and practices already attended to and on those to be explored in this chapter.

It seems that the political power akin to the one an art platform may accumulate from or with which it can charge its productive constituents has

- Izd.Khud.Lit., 1931); S. Didamov, *Prof. Peverzev i ego partinye 'druz'ya'* (Prof. Peverzev and his party 'Friends') (Moscow: Gos.Izd.Khud.Lit., 1931).
58. Isaiah Berlin, *Istoriya svobody: Rossiya*. This compilation includes the following articles by Isaiah Berlin: 'A Remarkable Decade,' 1955; 'Artistic Commitment: The Russian Legacy,' 1966; 'Herzen and Bakunin on Individual Liberty,' 1955; 'The Soviet Intelligentsia,' 1957; and others. Many of these are published in Isaiah Berlin, *The Proper Study of Mankind* (New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2000); and Isaiah Berlin, *Russian Thinkers* (London, Penguin, 1979).
59. As with other phenomena of the 'border' culture, the concept of intelligentsia was taken from Europe. The term itself comes from Latin and was reactivated during the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. In the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries the term denoted a 'capacity to think' or even of 'being educated' and was used mainly in literature. In the nineteenth century the meaning of the term was substantially broadened, acquiring new functions; from this time on, the word 'intelligentsia' was applied to the 'people of conscience,' not only of intellect. It was given new content within the Russian context and brought back to Europe, enriched with new meanings and marked as a 'Russian' term or phenomenon. See Berlin, *Istoriya*; and Mikhail Gasparov, *Zapisi i vybiski* (Notes and extracts).
60. Gasparov, *Zapisi*, 94.
61. Boris Uspensky, *Étudy po russkoj istorii* (Etudes in Russian history), 403–4.
62. *Ibid.*, 402.
63. Lev Gudkov, *Negativnaja identichnost: Stat'i 1997–2002 godov* (Negative identity: Articles 1997–2002), 717–25.
64. Peter Ludlow and Mark Wallace, *The Second Life Herald: The Virtual Tabloid that Witnessed the Dawn of the Metaverse*, 77.
65. This seems to be one of the major findings of Ludlow and Wallace. On Gazira's grieving, see also Patrick Lichty, 'I Know Gaz Babeli,' 75.
66. Ludlow and Wallace, *Second Life Herald*, 128–43.
67. *Ibid.*
68. *Ibid.*, 138.
69. *Ibid.*
70. Gazira Babeli (artist website and documentation), <http://gazirababeli.com> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
71. Second Front (artist group website and documentation), <http://slfront.blogspot.com>; <http://secondfront.org> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
72. Domenico Quaranta, 'Second Front: A Leap into the Void,' in *Networked Performance* (website), 16 Apr. 2007, <http://nrbalance.org/blog/2007/04/16/domenico-quaranta-s-interview-with/> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
73. See the articles by Patrick Lichty and Alan Sondheim in Quaranta, 'Second Front.'
74. Luther Blissett (website), <http://www.lutherblissett.net> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
75. This is not to say that they are not interesting as a group and Gazira is their leader, although they do say the following in the interview with Domenico Quaranta: 'Second Front is using a growing set of code-based interventions in its performances, thanks to our techno-doyen, Mama Gaz Babeli.' Quaranta, 'Second Front.'
76. The performance group Streetwithaview, populating Google Maps captures with a carnival, group procession, artworks, and performances that can be seen as another example of an art platform making art in terms of reciprocal generation occurring between the systems producing Google Maps, the organizational aesthetics of Streetwithaview, art and cultural history, societal

institutions and people. See Streetwithaview (website), <http://streetwithaview.com> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).

### NOTE TO CHAPTER 3

1. See introduction by Christophe Chericx to Hans Ulrich Obrist, ed., *A Brief History of Curating*. See also Karsten Schubert, *The Curator's Egg: The Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day*.
2. Bourdieu defines the cultural field as a subfield of restricted production, one that is not directed at large economic markets (production for producers). Opposed to the cultural field, he points to the subfield of large-scale production, aimed at acquiring the maximum profits possible (production for nonproducers). The capital of a subfield of restricted production is symbolic. Symbolic capital (that cannot be reduced to but sometimes can be transformed into economic capital) is achieved through different forms of recognition, legitimation, and consecration exercised in various ways. Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*.
3. Position taking (works, acts, discussions—the strategies of struggle) usually reflects the relationship among the positions. For Bourdieu, the establishment of particular position takings from the 'space of possibles' is defined through dispositions arrived at by and constituting certain elements of particular habitus and the possession of symbolic capital. Changes in the structure of position takings (change in the field) can result from radical change in the space of positions constituted by relations of power and can be caused by new demands from producers or expectations from the public (the larger field of power). Pierre Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 181–82.
4. A new avant-garde group is usually constituted from authors who may be very different in their habitus, but who become united for a moment by their shared negativism towards the dominant position. This negativism is seen by Bourdieu as an instrument for acquiring symbolic capital. Such a process ends up with the dissolution of the group with those of the most privileged dispositions accumulating significant portions of symbolic profits.
5. To summarize, Bourdieu discusses a number of levels of the artistic field: of works (interpreted within the context of available positions and actual position takings); of producers (informed by their habitus, taking positions within the field, that define their social trajectory); of structure of the field (constituted by relations among the positions, among the position takings, between works and institutions of consecration, between the new and old avant-gardes), and the position of the field within the larger field of power. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*.
6. *Ibid.*, 121–22.
7. See Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. Bernard Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, vols. 1 and 2.
8. For accounts of new kinds of curating, see Joasia Krysa's 'From Object to Process and System' and other articles in Christiane Paul, ed., *New Media in the White Cube and Beyond: Curatorial Models for Digital Art*.
9. See Adrian Mackenzie, *Cutting Code: Software and Sociality*, the field of software studies, with Matthew Fuller, ed., *Software Studies: A Lexicon*, and the series of the same name from MIT Press.
10. See Florian Gramer and Matthew Fuller, 'Interface,' in Fuller, *Software Studies*.

11. For instance, interchangeability analysed as 'import/export' by Lev Manovich in Fuller, *Software Studies* 1, 119–124.
  12. This is an approach generally utilized in software studies.
  13. See Mackenzie, *Cutting Code*.
  14. See Matthew Fuller, 'A Means of Mutation: Notes on I/O/D 4: The Web Stalker.'
  15. Runme.org was launched on the 15 January 2003. It was developed in three months, from the first email inviting discussion of the project until its official launch. Through the three months, not only were the database structure, interface design, and the questions of moderation discussed, but the idea itself of the software art repository was discovered 'out of thin air' and was realized through discussing, designing, programming, testing, and polishing. Runme.org was conceptualized by a group of ten people who took part in the discussion via a mailing list: Amy Alexander, Florian Cramer, Matthew Fuller, Olga Gorunova, Thomax Kaulmann, Alex McLean, Pir Schultz, Alexei Shulgin, and the Yes Men. Upon moving from discussion to designing Runme.org, a new mailing list was created in order not to spam people's mailboxes with a lot of possibly uninteresting, largely technical details. Everyone was invited to sign up for the new list on their own, but four have done so: Alexei Shulgin, myself, Amy Alexander, and Alex McLean (who coded the system). These four became the continuous Runme.org administrators, whereas the larger team and many more people took part in uploading and writing about the projects throughout subsequent years. There are about five hundred projects submitted and accepted, and about a hundred features written, all accessible on the platform.
  16. Such as, for instance, Sourceforge.net (website), <http://sourceforge.net>; or Tucows Downloads (website), <http://tucows.com>; Sweetcode.org (website), <http://sweetcode.org> (all accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
  17. There are twenty-four categories with forty-three subcategories and around 250 keywords.
  18. Our keywords, conceptualized as an 'irrational taxonomy' (and any similar mechanism of attributing keywords to projects largely applied at online databases at the time when Runme.org was created) are largely similar to today's 'tags,' proximate in their use to those of online social bookmarking sites and tagging platforms, such as Del.icio.us at <http://del.icio.us> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011). Such tags create folksonomies, systems for the collaborative categorization of online content by applying tags (labels). The advocates of folksonomies claim that it is a low-cost and efficient categorization instrument. Folksonomies work because a user often finds a person that categorizes content in a (personal) way that is similar to her own, which thus makes a particular folksonomy very useful for a particular user. Displaying the most popular object, the use of keyword clouds, and search narrowed down through a step-by-step process, as implemented at Runme.org, are all features of today's collaborative tagging platforms.
  19. Providing a title, names of authors, text and visual info, providing a URL or uploading a file, choosing a category/subcategory, suggesting a new subcategory, attributing keywords.
  20. On average, one-third of the projects submitted are turned down. For the first year, the scheme was as follows: A project first waited for two yes votes (out of four) to gain approval. The same procedure was used for disapproval. A wiki page was sketched where all the projects were supposed to be discussed. In extreme situations, an email to the Runme.org mailing list was also an option. Approximately one year later the scheme changed: Each one administrated for two weeks in turn. Others helped if help was necessary
- (i.e., technical platforms are unavailable, lack of technical skills to judge, or difficulty making a decision). Later, Amy Alexander took on most filtering work on Runme.org and continues to take care of the project most devotedly and consistently.
21. The jury members of the first Readme 2002 festival decided it was impossible to rank software art projects, explaining that 'the term «software art» is a decidedly broad category, and each of the awarded projects takes a very different approach to it. . . . In recognition of the fact that «software art» is not simply one genre but encompasses a variety of approaches, the jury has decided to dispense with the rankings and award each of the three selected projects equivalent prizes. Since readme 1.2 is one of the pioneering festivals of software art we felt it necessary to open up the field rather than to prematurely narrow it down.' Amy Alexander, Cue P. Doll, Florian Cramer, RTMark, and Alexei Shulgin, 'Read\_me 1.2 Jury Statement,' 2002, Runme.org (website), <http://readme.runme.org/1.2/adden.htm> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
  22. There is not a shared opinion on this today, however. The introduction to *New Media Art* by Mark Tribe and Reena Jana suggests net art and software art are both equal subgenres of new media art, whereas *Internet Art* by Rachel Greene includes software art in net art in a rather direct manner. See Mark Tribe and Reena Jana, *New Media Art*; and Rachel Greene, *Internet Art*.
  23. Alexei Shulgin and Nathalie Bookchin, 'Introduction to netart (1994–1999),' Easylife.org (website), 1999, <http://easylife.org/netart> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
  24. Deconstructions of HTML by Jodi, for instance, later lead to the modification of an old computer video game (*Wolfenstein 3D*) titled *SOD* (1999) and other games. Some other net art projects popular at that time could be seen as a step towards software art (i.e., *Multi-cultural Recycler* by Amy Alexander, 1996/1997). One of the influential pieces of software art, generative vector graphics application *Auto-Illustrator* by Adrian Ward, was already released in 2001. Towards the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s, a few papers appeared that were later attributed to software art discourse. See Matthew Fuller and Simon Pope, 'Warning. . . This Computer Has Multiple Personality Disorder,' pHreak Webhub (website), 1995, [http://www.phreak.co.uk/i\\_o\\_d/warning.html](http://www.phreak.co.uk/i_o_d/warning.html); Saul Albert, 'Artware,' *Mute*, no. 14 (1999), <http://wenteenthcentury.com/saulartware.htm>; Adrian Ward, 'How I Drew One of My Pictures,' 1999, Generative.net (website), <http://www.generative.net/papers/autoshop/index.html>; Geoff Cox, Alex McLean, and Adrian Ward, 'The Aesthetics of Generative Art,' Generative.net (website), 2000, <http://generative.net/papers/aesthetics/> (all accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
  25. Ulrike Gabriel and Florian Cramer, 'Software Art' (2001), [www.netzliteratur.net](http://www.netzliteratur.net) (website), [http://www.netzliteratur.net/cramer/software\\_art\\_-\\_transmedial.html](http://www.netzliteratur.net/cramer/software_art_-_transmedial.html) (accessed 21 Jan. 2011); Florian Cramer, 'Concept, Notation, Software, Art,' [www.netzliteratur.net](http://www.netzliteratur.net) (website), 2002, [http://www.netzliteratur.net/cramer/concepts\\_notations\\_software\\_art.html](http://www.netzliteratur.net/cramer/concepts_notations_software_art.html) (accessed 21 Jan. 2011); See also Albert, 'Artware.'
  26. Jacob Lillemose, *Art as Information Tool: Critical Engagements with Contemporary Software Culture*, PhD dissertation, University of Copenhagen, 2010.
  27. See Florian Cramer, *Words Made Flesh* (Rotterdam: Piet Zwart Institute, 2005), Piet Zwart Institute (website), <http://pzwart.wdka.hro.nl/indiv/research/cramer/wordsmade flesh/> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).



28. Inke Arns, 'Read\_me, Run\_me, Execute\_me: Software and Its Discontents, or: It's the Performativity of Code, Strupfl!'; Geoff Cox, Alex McLean, and Adrian Ward, 'Coding Praxis: Reconsidering the Aesthetics of Code'; and Amy Alexander, Nick Collins, et al., 'Live Algorithm Programming and a Temporary Organisation for Its Promotion.'
29. From 1954 onwards, according to Paul Ceruzzi, *A History of Modern Computing*, 86–87; or from Short Code language (from the year 1950), according to Florian Cramer, 'Language' in Fuller, *Software Studies*.
30. Namely, by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in the end of the 1950s; see Steven Levy, *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*. According to Levy, it was in 1961 that the first computer game 'space war' was created by 'Slug' and other students of MIT as a 'hacker aberration' (Levy, 65).
31. Levy, *Hackers*.
32. The Transmediale call for proposals used the following formula: 'The definition that we use for the as yet barely defined field of artistic software is that it incorporates projects in which self-written algorithmic computer software ... is not merely a functional tool, but is itself an artistic creation and a form of aesthetic expression.' See email from Andreas Broeckmann, subject line 'Call for Entries,' 2000, <http://amsterdam.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-bold-0009/msg00045.html> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011). When releasing the call for works for the first Readme in 2001, the following description was cooked up: 'The following works can be referred to as artistic software: 1. Instructions (read\_me) on adjusting standard (commonly used) software, as well as patches and any kind of impact on software, whose results are not planned by producers and application of which leads to creation of an artistic product; 2. Deconstruction of existing software products, including computer games; 3. Written from scratch program with purpose differing from usual rational software purposes, i.e., refusal of the idea of a program as a purely pragmatic tool.' See Olga Gorinova, Alexei Shulgim, and Sergei Teterin, 'Call for Works,' Runme.org (website), 2001, <http://readme.runme.org/1.2/abouten.htm> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
- In May 2002 Florian Cramer as a part of Readme 2002 jury group proposed a generic description of software art that subsequently became widely used: 'Software art ... [is] art of which the material is formal instruction code, and/or which addresses cultural concepts of software.' See Olga Gorinova and Alexei Shulgim, eds., *Read\_me Festival 1.2. Software Art/Software Art Games*.
33. In one year, a number of events dedicated to one or another form of software art were held: art.bit in Tokyo, Generator (Liverpool Biennale) in Great Britain, CODEDOC (Whitney Museum) in New York, and the Electrotype conference in Malmo (Sweden). In 2003/2004 other events were held: 'Software Art—Artistic Future or Curatorial Fiction?' panel discussion, Kuenstlerhaus Bethanien in cooperation with Transmediale 03, Berlin; Ars Electronica 'Code' edition, Linz, Austria; 'Skinning Our Tools' symposium, Banff New Media Center, Banff, Canada; 'Art-Oriented Programming' symposium, Paris, France; and several other related events and initiatives.
34. Runme.org grew from the thinking around Readme software art festivals held in Moscow in 2002, Helsinki in 2003, Aarhus in 2004, and Dortmund in 2005, curated by myself, Alexei Shulgim, and various partners; see Runme.org (website), <http://readme.runme.org> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011). It is through this link that its creation could be partly funded (with small fees for coding and writing features).
- In subsequent years Runme.org was administered, filtered, and continuously restructured. The Readme software art festivals, for which Runme.org has continuously served as the project submission platform, were funded by various institutional bodies. It is through such indirect financial channels that the Runme.org administrators and 'experts' writing featuring texts drew occasional modest financial support.
- Features were published yearly in the festivals' catalogues along with articles submitted for the talk part of the event and uploaded on Runme. 1.2. *Software Art/Software Art Games*; Olga Gorinova and Alexei Shulgim, eds., *Read\_me Festival*, *Read\_me 2.3 Reader: About Software Art*; Olga Gorinova and Alexei Shulgim, eds., *Read\_me. Software Art and Cultures*; Olga Gorinova, ed., *Readme 100: Temporary Software Art Factory*.
- It is worth emphasizing that work on Runme.org was never directly paid, nor could the financial contribution from festivals cover the amount of labour put into this art platform. Such a scheme is not uncommon among art platforms in general.
35. For an account of net art pathos, see especially, Stallabras, *Internet Art*.
36. This concern was particularly expressed by Pit Schultz at the Kuenstlerhaus Bethanien panel in 2003; see Amy Alexander et al., 'Software Art, a Curatorial Fiction or a New Perspective?' Transcript of the panel discussion on 4 Feb. 2003 in Kuenstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, Germany, <http://www.softwareart.net> (website), <http://www.softwareart.net> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
37. From Runme.org mailing list.
38. Olga Gorinova and Alexei Shulgim, 'Girch,' in Fuller, *Software Studies*.
39. The following are some examples of proposed categories that were not included in the Runme.org taxonomy:
- 11 Oct 2002, Alex McLean suggests:
- binary modification
  - obfuscated code
  - code obfuscating code
  - rss feeder (i.e., something that takes an rss, rdf or similar feed and does something with it)
40. The culture of the demo scene produces a demo—a multimedia presentation computed in real time and used by programmers to compete on the level of the best graphical and music programming skills. The demo scene is an old and powerful culture that originates from the hackers' scene of the early 1980s, when short demos were added to the opening visuals of cracked video games. One of the portals for such activity is Scene.org (website), <http://www.scene.org> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
41. Lev Manovich in particular has criticized the equation of software art with algorithmically generated visuals and sound, writing on Ars Electronica 2003. See Lev Manovich, 'Don't Call it Art, Ars Electronica 2003,' Nettime, <http://www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-1-0309/msg00102.html> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
42. For a good analysis of writing on Jodi's work, see Adrian Mackenzie, *Cutting Code: Software and Society*; and Pit Schultz, 'JODI as Software Culture.'
43. 17 Oct 2002, Amy Alexander writes:
- 'i still don't really understand the jodi categories too well; they concern me some, because, i think the idea of 'jodi plagiarism' can express a narrow, net-art-scene-centric view, a lot of people 'plagiarize' jodi without ever having seen their work, digitally, because they are picking up on certain inherent tendencies in software and systems that jodi also picked up on and conceptually, because for example, formalism and rhythm in time-based visual media has a long history before jodi, with abstract filmmakers (fischinger/turtman/whitneys etc) and painters of course too.... so in short, i don't want to make

a mistake of implying that everything with similarities to jodi's work plagiarizes them—often people are just appropriating the same histories.'

17 Oct 2002, Florian Cramer writes:

'So what about renaming the category as follows: "Conscious or unconscious plagiarism of what jury members might, because of their own narrow aesthetic socializations, call "jodi-style" digital art?" (This is a serious proposal.)'

44. The rise of the term 'folklore' dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when, for instance, within the German-originated Romanticist movements (sometimes known as National Romanticism) writers first used folklore materials in creating tales and poems, and folklore started to be collected, such as the Grimm Brothers' *Children's and Household Tales* (first published 1812), or fairytales by Vasilii Zhukovskii or Alexander Pushkin, collections by Vladimir Dal' or Petr Ershov, published in the early 1830s in Russia.
45. Vladimir Propp, *Folklor, literatura, istoriya; Vladimir Propp, Russkaya skazka*.
46. B. N. Putilov, *Folklor i narodnaya kul'tura. In Memoriam* (Folklore and people's culture: In memoriam).
47. Intangible cultural heritage is a concept most often linked to the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 2003. It refers to 'the practices, representations, expressions, as well as the knowledge and skills, that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage.' Intangible cultural heritage is believed to be transmitted from generation to generation, being both traditional and living and providing «communities with a sense of identity and continuity.' See Unesco.org (website), <http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?pg=00002> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
48. Putilov, *Folklor*, 69.
49. Pit Schultz, 'Computer Age Is Coming into Age,' interview with Alexei Shulgin, 31–32.
50. *WinGhuk Builder*. Runme.org (website), <http://readme.runme.org/1.2/adden.htm> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
51. See *Tempest for Eliza*, Home Page of Erik Thiele (website), <http://www.erikyyy.de/tempest> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
52. Some of the events conceptualizing this movement included Sleepover (2007), Eyebeam.org (website), <http://eyebeam.org/events/the-great-internet-sleepover> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011); and Letsmeetinrealife (2009), In Real Life (website), <http://letsmeetinrealife.com> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
53. Olga Gorunova, 'Idiocy and New Media,' talk delivered at the workshop 'Russia on Edge,' Cambridge University, December 2009.
54. See Marisa Olson, 'Words Without Pictures,' *Words Without Pictures* (website), 2009, <http://wordswithoutpictures.org/main.html?id=276&note=281> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
55. See Marcin Ramocki, 'Surfing Clubs: Organized Notes and Comments,' *Ramocki.net* (website), 2008, <http://ramocki.net/surfing-clubs.html> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011).
56. Olson, 'Words Without Pictures.'
57. Marocki, 'Surfing Clubs.'
58. Brian Droitcour, 'Members Only: Loshadka Surfs the Web,' (accessed 21 Jan. 2011), <http://www.desk.nl/~you/bla-bla> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011); XXX, *Easylife.org* (website), 1995, <http://www.easylife.org/xxx/anim.html> (accessed 21 Jan. 2011). The project of the *First Cyberpunk Rock Band 386DX* was born from surfing and found (MHD) files.

60. See NastyNets.com (website), <http://nastynets.com; Netmares!Netdreams.net> v. 2.2 (website), <http://www.netmaresnetdreams.net; Supercentral.org> (website), <http://www.supercentral.org/wordpress; Loshadka.org> (website) <http://www.loshadka.org/wp; Spiritsurfers.net> (website), <http://www.spiritsurfers.net; and Double Happiness> (website), <http://doublehappiness.ilkentcehings.com> (all accessed 21 Jan. 2011).

#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

1. Pit Schultz, 'Computer Age Is Coming into Age.'
2. The first part is the title of the article by DRX, published in *Microbuilder*. The second part is one of the slogans of Micromusic.net.
3. Paolo Virno, *A Grammar of the Multitude*, 21–29.
4. Giorgio Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 18–19.
5. Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, 60–62. See also Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*.
6. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 67.
7. *Ibid.*, 60.
8. See Agamben, *The Coming Community*.
9. Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, 4–6.
10. *Ibid.*, 12–31, 38–40.
11. *Ibid.*, 40–41, 80.
12. Christopher Kelty, *Two Bits: The Cultural Significance of Free Software*, 27–28.
13. *Ibid.*, 29.
14. *Ibid.*, 62.
15. Bruno Latour, 'From Realpolitik to Dingpolitik—or How to Make Things Public.'
16. *Ibid.*, 15.
17. Noortje Marres, 'Issues Spark a Public into Being: A Key but Often Forgotten Point of the Lippmann-Dewey Debate.'
18. *Ibid.*, 216.
19. Latour, *Making Things Public*.
20. Marres, op. cit.
21. Kelty, *Two Bits*, 50.
22. Marres, 'Issues,' 216.
23. See Kelty, *Two Bits*, 38, 40–42; and also Marres, 'Issues,' where a public is a phantom, an imaginary entity.
24. Kelty, *Two Bits*, 40.
25. Irina Aristarkhova, 'Stepanova's "Laboratories."'
26. John Roberts, 'Collaboration As a Problem in Arr's Cultural Form.'
27. *Ibid.*
28. See Marion von Osten's figure of the unsuccessful artist that cannot be assimilated into the capitalist discourse of positivity. Commenting on creative capitalism, she finds alternative networks and institutions, and reminds us that 'artistic ways of living and working contain forces that cannot be fully controlled, because they not only engender but also always take part in dissolution of their own conditions. These myths (of artistic ways of life managers cannot handle) can also be used by social groups that would otherwise be silenced within existing power relations.' See Marion von Osten, 'Unpredictable Outcomes/Unpredictable Outcasts: A Reflection After Some Years of Debates on Creativity and Creative Industries,' *Transform.ejcp.net*