Interview about "The Big Plot" on Velvet Magazine, 05/09 Issue, Daphne Dragona - Greece

Daphne Dragona: What is the plot behind "The Big Plot" and how does it evolve for the viewers?

Paolo Cirio: There are two meanings for the word 'Plot'; one is related to the storytelling field and the other to the political conspiracy. Both are included in the project: an experimental way to tell a story as well as a way to infiltrate a real conservative political movement through a sentimental love story and the effective first plot of doing home made espionage by spying the life of a real spy.

DD: You have characterised it as an example of recombinant fiction. Can you tell us a few words about that?

PC: Recombinant Fiction is a label that I had to define after realizing that other former experiments of cross-media storytelling were weak on theory, probably because they were often advertising or games (Guerrilla Marketing and Alternative Reality Game) and they also weren't just stories but always had commercial purposes or came with a challenge of a final tangle to solve.

I thought that the Recombinant Theatre theory by Critical Art Ensemble fits very well most of the aspects of this new way of doing active political fiction. In particular CAE has suggested ideas about the way performers should be; basically nowadays in order to enact a character of a story, it is necessary to include all stages, real and virtual, where the role plays. The Social Networking phenomenon underlines the notion of the identity, so now any performer should care about their electronic identity like the masks that depict characters on classical stages.

Then, the most interesting aspect of this new form of fiction is its expression, which penetrates reality and brings the audience into a real story. It's like a subjective shot in cinema: social networks are recording our experiences, sentiments, relations, etc, so many stories are already there, and people like stories, that's why we like to spy the gossip of our friends, or of unknown people. Unfortunately most of the stories of common people are boring, that's why I tried to do something of more exciting with actors and thrilling stolen identities.

DD: "The Big Plot" as well as older works of yours is a critique on the use of the popular social networks of our times. To which elements of the web 2.0 are you mostly referring to?

PC: There are so many topics in 2.0 phenomenon. - Sociologically: the compulsory use of social networks sounds like a narcissistic and exhibitionistic urge, in one word - the egocentrification. Then the dysfunctional sociality that is being created about the concept of friendships and relationships – Marketing: privacy matters - with tools like Facebook, we are self declaring everything about ourselves, ans so advertisers become more sophisticated about behavioural targeting - Politically: the Stasi's main objective was to rebuild the network of dissidents, names of other insurgents is the first question asked under torture. Activists have always tried to crypt their connections; I still saw it just few years ago in the anti-G8 demonstrations. But now it is enough to query a database in order to know all peoples who participate in any outcry. The recent events in Egypt and Croatia are examples of tactical mistakes of using Facebook as political tool.

However media like social networks may have incredible potential for networking, sharing of knowledge and aggregation of people for claims. I think social networks will replace political parties with a more direct participatory democracy, of course, not by corporative and commercial platforms but with P2P technologies.

DD: How have people reacted to the big plot? How do you think that they perceive these forms of "resistance" to web 2.0 that are proposed by media artists today?

PC: So many people around the world joined the story, they are interacting with the characters and some participants proposed to act in it, however as the story is still running I can't say which will be the end and what will happen! At the moment most of audiences are gamers or random people, they are not interested in politics or in network critics, and actually it has been an objective of the project, because it would be a form of Invisible Theatre (theory by A.Boal which I linked with the Recombinant Theatre by CAE), so the fiction should have a maieutic function and should bring people to thinking about their beliefs and behaviours.