

Re-enacting And Open Sourcing As Methods For Experiencing Programmed Art Utopia

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Abstract

Programmed art is the definition given to the body of works by a group of Italian artists active between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. This definition was introduced by Bruno Munari and Umberto Eco in 1961 in the *Almanacco Bompiani* and used in 1962 on the occasion of an exhibition hosted at the Olivetti show room in Milan, featuring works by the artists of Gruppo T. Gruppo T's artworks embedded the utopia of an interactive democratic art made for everyone and open to everyone's participation. The paper addresses the strategies for making the Gruppo T's utopia current in our days through the application of open source and DIY approaches that propose collaborative solutions to kinetic art preservation as well as subversive model to art distribution.

Programmed art utopia

Programmed art is the definition given to the body of works by a group of Italian artists active between the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s. This definition was introduced by Bruno Munari and Umberto Eco in December 1961, for the publication of *Almanacco Letterario* by Bompiani, and used on the occasion of the exhibition hosted in Milan at the Olivetti show room in 1962, featuring works by Munari, Enzo Mari and the artists of Gruppo T (Giovanni Anceschi, Davide Boriani, Gianni Colombo, Gabriele Devecchi, Grazia Varisco) and Gruppo N [1]. These artists produced works through the application of processes similar to those of technological and design research, such as creating prototypes that were then reproduced as a series of varying artifacts. Gruppo T prefigured a mobile, variable, metamorphic world. It was the beginning of the 1960s, yet their art was already interactive and immersive. Nevertheless at that time their artworks were difficult to be read, understood and accepted.

The work by programmed artists belonging to Gruppo T (active circa 1959-1968) has been defined one of the

biggest taboo of contemporary art [2]. This omission is also connected to the fragile nature of kinetic artworks, which makes them difficult to preserve, exhibit, enjoy and exchange on the art market. Moreover, the artists developed fragile and reproducible artworks in order to communicate their will to disrupt the art market system and to produce art made for everyone.



Fig 1. *Scultura da prendere a calci* (Sculpture to be kicked at), 1959, Gabriele Devecchi, Synthetic sponge, elastic thread, weighted base, CC BY NC SA.

Re-enacting and open-sourcing as method

On September 1-7, 2014, five groups of artists, designers and researchers, together with two members of Gruppo T, gathered at SUPSI FabLab in Lugano. The goal was to build prototypes of kinetic artifacts that would translate the main principles of Programmed Art into the codes of contemporary culture, following the tenets of peer production, namely open source hardware and software and digital fabrication technologies.

The workshop was based on action research through making, with a view to updating Programmed Art by reprogramming the artworks with new tools, using the techniques and processes of interaction design and maker and DIY culture.

The workshop initial concepts reside in the key changes in the field of participative creation and development of

interactive artworks: open source hardware and software, open design and the use of Creative Commons licenses all foster collaborative design processes, and the users/co-creators are members of widespread, networked communities which share knowledge in order to complete or expand on the work of artists and designers [3]. Fab labs and the various kinds of distributed infrastructures for DIY and peer-to-peer production mean that anyone can now benefit from the constructive and creative potential of technology that for a long time was too complex for the lay person.

Looking at this context, we envision the possibility to resonate with the utopia of Gruppo T about a multiplied art made for all and highly reproducible by using the model offered by open source development: we open sourced the parts and the files of derivative artworks that are built upon Gruppo T's utopia. Opening the artistic practices of re-making masters' artworks in our case became the act of re-programming them with open technologies and principles [4].

Experiencing the utopia

During the workshop "Re-programmed art", each artist set about translating Gruppo T's artworks into a form that would enable anyone to reproduce, repair or subvert it, in order to elicit reflections on the practices involved in creating visual effects, visualizing physical phenomena and interactions, manipulating mechanisms and playing with materials and technology.

The results of the workshop are five artworks whose specifications and source files are released under open licenses and Creative Commons licenses. They are artworks, but also experiential prototypes that allow the public to comprehend Programmed art through a direct interaction. The prototype *Esacono*, for example, is a translation of the concept that generated the series *Strutturazioni cilindriche virtuali* by Giovanni Aneschi (1963-1966). The concept is described in issue no. 22 of the magazine *il verri*, but it was never produced due to the limits posed by the technology of the period. It is a cube suspended by one corner which has six motors embedded into each side. The motors drive two rotating rods that draw six truncated cone shapes in space, creating virtual volumes. The speed varies from motor to motor, and as a consequence so does the effect of the six shapes drawn in the air at the sides of the hanging cube. The prototype *Magnetic Drawbot* stems from the principles of the work by Davide Boriani, who in the series *Superfici magnetiche* presents machines that perform a single program, generating changing, developing images. *Magnetic Drawbot* is the result of a research project with a playful element: ferrofluid unexpectedly turned out to be an unpredictable sort of ink, which when animated and magnetized by hand, created very distinctive graphic effects.

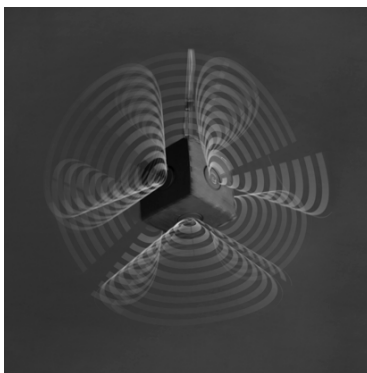


Fig 2. *Esacono*, 2015, G. Aneschi, S. Cangiano, D. Fornari, plywood, DC motors, Arduino, CC BY NC SA.



Fig 3. *Magnetic Drawbot*, 2015, Giorgio Olivero, Fabio Franchino (TODO), various media, CC BY NC SA.



Fig 4. Giovanni Aneschi, Gruppo T's member, working with young designers at the Fablab Lugano during the workshop, CC BY NC SA.

Conclusions

Remaking or reprogramming works by Gruppo T might sound subversive in the context of the art world and its market rituals, with their reverence for what is historicized and rare, and obsession with originality and the unique work of art. Yet in our view this project resonated with the poetics of Gruppo T, and various statements and episodes involving members of the group. The 1960 limited edition of Miriorama objects for Danese heralded a vision of art as multipliable and portable, like Bruno Munari's *Sculture da viaggio* (Travel Sculptures), with the addition of the kinetic elements and transformations that characterized the work of Gruppo T. In our view the Alessi 2010 re-edition, in full agreement and collaboration with the artists and archives of Gruppo T, was a significant confirmation of the initial idea of re-programming, not just re-making, because every remake based on new technologies and new materials entails a radical process of re-design. And while on one hand this betrays the uniqueness and originality of the artwork, on the other it answers new questions concerning the conservation of artworks that cannot be simply contemplated, but call for active audience participation.

After a week-long workshop spent translating and subverting the artistic concepts of Gruppo T's work, we realized that applying the new paradigms of collaborative development, augmented by the Internet, helped us to understand how to achieve the distributed, everyday aesthetic action that was part of the Gruppo T's utopia [5].

Through the open making of derivative works we learn how to liberate the artwork and to ensure that it lives on: once it is part of the commons, it is not a case of granting everyone the right to reproduce it, but rather conferring the responsibility to preserve its essence.

References

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