

A SELF REFLECTION THROUGH THE CYBER MIRROR: 28 BY KOMPLEX

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Introduction

Between the end of July and the beginning of October 2013 I, Mariano Equizzi, Paolo Bigazzi Alderigi and Luca Liggio, the three authors in collective KOMPLEX, carried out an online discussion with the aim of analyzing the design process that led to the creation and development of the project 28. We preferred an asynchronous dialogue, based on the exchange of comments, multimedia content, texts in review mode, so as to take the time necessary to identify together the topics of greatest interest and discuss it on several occasions, on the basis of the stimuli and doubts that emerged from time to time during the various asynchronous multimodal interactions. What emerged was a text in progress and here we report the current form that we have developed for simplicity in the traditional model of the interview, so as to return to the linearity and sequentiality of the multidirectional flow of thoughts mediated by different communication systems used in the process of self-reflection that I had the pleasure of moderating.

Project 28 was born through the work and experimentation consortium of Mariano Equizzi, Luca Liggio and Paolo Bigazzi Alderigi, who on this occasion, not properly filmic, take the name KOMPLEX. KOMPLEX is a live cinema team devoted to the investigation of new ways in storytelling, visualism technologies, and live music performances.

Mariano Equizzi, a producer and former student of the Experimental Center of Cinematography of class 1999, after a traditional experience as 1st Assistant Director with Michele Soavi, started to investigate Interact-with-Rome and the boundaries of media related to popular genre. So from 2003, he started to focus on the film industry in Italy, which suffers big limitations in terms of content and potential of expression. It's sort of complicated and sometimes inexplicable, like a stalemate. Now his aim with KOMPLEX project is to definitely create interactive experiences where a synthesis of many media is essential to engage the audience, which nowadays has readily technological access.

Luca Liggio runs the digital video production side of KOMPLEX to create interactive viral projects for the Web. He is a producer, director and film editor as well as an avid explorer and first adapter of new digital

technology applied to HD/3D video productions. He has a degree in New Digital Tools in Filmmaking at NUCT Rome. He is a member with Mariano Equizzi and Paolo Bigazzi of LebFilm devoted to classic linear media. He founded the web portal Filming a place where to find all information on the cinema industry, from the news to the box office with a special attention for tech-news related to cameras and new technologies for shooting.

Paolo Bigazzi Alderigi has always been interested in the sound culture of new wave-electronics. He founded, in the mid-nineties, the study Iter-Research. The necessary knowledge of sound engineering and synthesis characterize his instrumental research and production processes constantly hybridizing analog and digital worlds, synthesis and design of software programming and his expressive research. In his compositions he is always trying to set this pattern as a form of electronic luthiery.

Interview

The analytic process starts from the attempt, apparently assumed, to provide a definition of the work 28, whose structural feature is just the polymorphism and the ability to hybridize with different technological solutions. The one presented at the *Share Festival* is a possible variation, the last in chronological order, which injects the techno-noir narrative of 28 in an alternate reality game based on a technological multiplatform environment -which enables the transmedia story- and disseminates narrative segments between the buildings, streets and monuments of the city of Turin, thanks to augmented reality accessible through mobile devices.

[Mariano Equizzi] 28 is an ARG (Alternate Reality Game) that plants its roots in the literature of speculative fiction (Paul Auster, William Burroughs, Philip K. Dick, Thomas Pynchon). What I imagine is a city of secrets, a tech-noir Turin. It is a scene between Raymond Chandler, Max Ernst and Banksy. I use the architectural structures of Turin as a book with hidden pages, where there are media objects, videos, pictures, and lines of a script as the signs in a silent film. 28 is digital graffiti, land-art augmented reality with a narrative intent and exploration of the relationship between spaces, media and ancillary contents. The player becomes a *mobile* nomad who reads and discovers this hidden reality in the city area, guided by the Aurasma map, the augmented reality App needed to play 28. Obviously, the parts of the puzzle are disarranged, but how would you reveal a conspiracy if not through its pieces? The player is the centerpiece and must understand, move around and discover, not only avail oneself.

[Luca Liggio] 28 has made it possible for us, the working group, to step outside the usual patterns of production and propose a new and challenging project in a way that leaves the old media and comes closer to the technology and living spaces that our children will use and inhabit. I believe that an audiovisual experience as 28's augmented reality, together with the new tools available (iPhone, Android, iPad) can create new narratives and user friendly approaches needed to go beyond the limits of traditional media.

[Paolo Bigazzi Alderigi] 28 employs media, containers, and users to achieve a space-time dimension whose content is represented in various forms. The proposal is extended in various places such as Apps, augmented realities, mini albums, video clips, medium-length films, live cinema, evolving the content from a classically linear form to another that is determined by the actions of the user or randomly. It's a project that allows interception, creating an atmosphere that is then optimized by the narrative, visual and sound contents. 28 is connected, viral, narrative and offers an experience both in the augmented reality and in the APP, as a game

of combinations and meanings. The user can instantiate meaning through a lived non-suffering relationship between man and machine.

28 is a transmedia game in augmented reality, which creates an alternate world explorable through the web and through the mobile devices' interfaces. Storytelling and storymaking are strongly affected by the choices relating to the interface design and the use of the game. The narrative complexity and the simplification of the interfaces are two elements that characterize the most recent instances of interactive digital storytelling. The relationship between *transparency* and *hypermediation* is crucially important since there is a thin line between reality and fiction in alternate reality games, and since the content must be distributed through elements of the narrative between the online environment and the physical world. *Cloud media*, the story through a plethora of media used by the player daily, and *ease of use*, the search for the optimal systemic usability, represent not only expressions able to describe the interface requirements of an alternate reality game, but also a dyad essential for the design of alternate immersive realities, in which the user should not perceive obstacles or difficulties passing from one device to another. The choice of *Aurasma* as a platform for the story in augmented reality also depends on the willingness to enhance the system accessibility of use, so that players have the opportunity to immerse themselves in a nomadic experience, inside a fictional complex universe as that created in 28.

[Mariano Equizzi] I chose *Aurasma* for its popularity and easy access. I needed a platform on which we could focus on the content more than the form. There are very advanced proprietary tools, but also too confusing, especially for the end user. Augmented reality applied to entertainment, writing included, is too big to be thought of by individual investigators, return and metamorphosis of the user are profound. I see that film builds unity, augmented reality reports everything on the streets and widens the screenplay and the film shootings. A story of conspiracies should be written in a linear fashion. When I discovered augmented reality, I realized it was the best way to express the story. It isn't enough to tell stories. We had the chance to hide them in the city and make them cultic, as some street art based on subtraction of elements. I'm interested in the viewer who becomes part of the adventure and discovery. Augmented reality is closer to this type of interference than the arrogance by the monolithic media, such as film.

The nomadic experience of 28 goes through the territory, it contaminates it with the fictional reality through increased graffiti, it superimposes it on the daily techno-paranoid dystopia, making an argument for technologies through experimentation with non-linear narrative solutions. The multifaceted project 28 (live cinema, medium-length film, storytelling for augmented reality) has given rise to different forms of interaction between form and content, between narration and technological devices for the story and its fruition.

[Mariano Equizzi] The story has not changed one iota, but its recoding has changed it into a better tale, with tools that are the story in itself, and not mere tools of staging. Augmented reality has allowed us to find the right *screen* for the concepts that were expressed but trapped in unattractive forms to the content itself.

[Paolo Bigazzi Alderigi] Switching from linear to non-linear narrative is greatly served to separate elements and create their fruition. A progressive synthesis among story, suggestion and reality, through a sensory experience lived by means of mobile technology. Perhaps one of the leading results in 28 was to understand that describing and sharing the cultural background of the world of KOMPLEX are an integral part of the work in itself, a custom of *Cloud-Forms*. The aesthetics of 28 helped a lot since the beginning thanks to its comics and essential features. A simplicity that fits well even considering the average time granted by the user of mobile media, just a few seconds.

[Luca Liggio] *28* was born in Mariano Equizzi's garage, we saw through a monitor the live effects that we later built in postproduction. We have created immediately a short-film but we saw that it was not enough and that the images and the implied story we had realized had a much higher potential. Hence we had the idea of making them live around Italy, with KOMPLEX *live cinema group* and also with an app. Then came the augmented reality and we realized it was the media to use to propose not only that story, but also a way to break the limitations of industrial reality, limits that have previously even struck YouTube.

In *28* the legacy of cyberpunk and industrial culture manifest their presence with an attitude to critically interpret and decode the present by manipulating technology in an unconventional way, pushing the limits.

[Mariano Equizzi] Cyberpunk culture is the hacker culture inclined to use tools, originally with a purpose, but totally used subversively for another one. Augmented reality is a military comeback that has been assimilated by marketing often linked to very large brands. Through our hacking, we brought it within certain aesthetics and use it as an experimenting narrative tool. We do not see the messianic and the Carroll's influence as in *Matrix* when we think of cyberpunk, but we remember the narrated experiences much more concretely in the books of Bruce Sterling. The industrial is similarly invoked as reading and critique of everyday life. The industrial was a music synthesis, poor but efficient, and the tape cassettes' covers were photocopied. While Emerson Lake and Palmer played millions of pounds synthesizers, Throbbing Gristle played cassette tapes. *28* seems photocopied, with a more economic street-art printing form. The main industrial element in *28* is now linked to the realization that, with augmented reality, a means and a process such as film, mockingly industrial in our country, has amply proved its limits, as if video games were not enough to show it. Augmented reality allows you to build worlds within the world. Augmented reality is so advanced as to be revolutionary, miraculous, and shamanic.

[Paolo Bigazzi Alderigi] The legacy of cyberpunk and industrial culture reside in a constant research on the perceptive ability of the information flow and its quality. In the container-contained relationship. The only transposition in different devices of the same content doesn't add value but banally duplicates. The content care is therefore the real added value, as well as its cost. The cyber and industrial attitudes seem in this sense necessary inputs through which to interpret the technology. Such inputs are inherently expressive.

In her book *Networking*, Tatiana Bazzichelli cites a passage from a text by Mariano Equizzi which speaks of *Anime 28*:

**"In this journey back into the abyss of artistic practice and in the dark horizons of the modern arts Industrial marks I think the lowest point is also questionable / uncivilized. We're swimming in this 'abyss' since we started the project *Revenge*, with the approval of foreign operators, especially Eastern noiseofili. And I'm postulating the *Anime 28* on the basis of just such a drift towards artistic uncivilized"
The new form of *28* maintains the relationship with a drift towards uncivil art.**

[Mariano Equizzi] After making 250 four-second-clips each on the textual contents of *28*, I can say that *28* is uncivil as it was Elio Petri or some certain street art forms which from the walls try to make us overcome, with an uncivil game, the limits of the collective surfaces, using the space as an average parallel intended for the tail of the eye or in this case to experimenters of space. Days ago I was pondering how *fn de siecle* culture and advertisements were born in the same period and both with the same aim of mind-control practice. *28* hacks augmented reality without damage and tells equivocally an ambiguous story of control. Yes, it is uncivil as punk, the *Satyricon* and *Investigation of a Citizen Above Suspicion* were. On a second thought, the *rave culture* hid information in the urban area in the same way. Only the right eyes could see them. Contrary to

the industrial, 28 is not threatening nor necrophiliac. If at all it is *moorcockian*, but it is not and does not want to be Gothic. It is industrial in its use of impoverished elements for its visual and non-auditory appearance, but you can't say that those are already underground. We think that 28 is in a chaotic balance among different currents of what ten years ago was called underground culture, now it might be called *Cloud Culture*.

The production flow of a transmedial work involves a series of challenges that require the coordinated and complementary use of different distribution channels in one direction, production and intertextual post-production.

[Paolo Bigazzi Alderigi] The main challenge is the creation of the Cloud. It is a blend consisting of: content produced for each device, access to resources for further study, cross reference to additional content, possibility of sharing. In both experiences the mobile a-geographical of the App and the geographically indicated of augmented reality, there are several ports for receiving additional resources which alternatively lead to the *YouTube* channel, *Apple store*, *Beatport*, *Google Play*, *Amazon*, *Soundcloud's* podcast, *Spotify's* playlists, and the KOMPLEX cloud culture in *Pinterest*. The challenges were generating a series of pathways that are taken by the user according to his desire for deeper investigation, hiding *Lombardian* plot (as in narrative structures by Mark Lombardi) designed with links. The presence of different formats like the App and the mini album requires coordinating a promotional effort insisting on reference channels, making even this step essential to form the project. Targeted and viral seeding, following a well calibrated map, are an integral part of the transmedia project both in the production and post production phase.

[Luca Liggio] My specific work is related to the audio and video rhythm, mixing and distributing media in any form or by any means, facilitating the information flow towards the outside regardless of their matrix: html, video, php, clip, blogging. We receive anything in our studio and I have to connect things with each other, format them so that they are not too alien but neither too usual.

An interesting aspect of KOMPLEX work is the integration of old and next media. There is direct evidence of this contamination, even in the technological environment of 28, in which this debate is metaphorically extended to an interaction between the meanings associated with the consolidated urban spaces and monuments (and the stories they tell) and new meanings projected upon them through augmented reality.

[Luca Liggio] We have always loved to mix various types of technologies from *super 8mm* to digital, to cameras that give us the opportunity to express, even with the kind of right shooting, the specificity of a story, a game, a video clip. With 28, the traditional system comes alive. Hybridizing the language of the Blog with urban spaces is a choice in between the installation and an alternate reality game. Of course it is pioneering but not so much; the new media, and the technologies with which they are implemented, in fact are too big to be able to be simply transferred in monolithic-TV or in the sacral places such as cinemas and theaters. I think of certain industrial archaeologies, that, despite being historical and rhetorical, are now just museal, traditional, simulacra of a past in search of new future.

[Paolo Bigazzi Alderigi] The assumption dead / next media, from the point of view of technology and the sonic dimension of 28, could be reversed, considering the use of instruments which in fact were considered dead in the second half of the eighties. In literature, 1989 is considered the golden year for the purchase of an analog synth. The next music media (software synth) for about twenty years often does nothing more than replicate the same structures of analog machines, adding only a certain degree of procedural flexibility. The

relationship between dead and next, is a hybrid that intercepts the computing power of some programming softwares (definitely *next*) and the ability to characterize analog tones (*never dead*).

The nomadic experience of 28 is accompanied by a soundscape ideal how is it defined by KOMPLEX?

[Paolo Bigazzi Alderigi] Dark, dingy, elegant, refined. The Patrick Bateman in American Psycho on crack playing the sax of Ornette Coleman, accompanied by synthesizers and harmonies by Recoil (Alan Wilder). Let's say that it approaches Massive Attack, Portishead and Andrew Parker. It is easy for me to think of a sound-landscape able to support a continuous and fluctuating tension. Mesmerizing the viewer is what I find most fun and rewarding in terms of music and sound effects. The creative effort is designed to catch the attention paid during the playing, in an effort to grant even inviolable and inevitable distraction, to name it entertainment.

Let's talk about the sound dimension of 28, the workflow and the difficulties encountered in the design of the soundscape and the soundtrack of the project.

[Paolo Bigazzi Alderigi] For three days we scanned images of about 8 cubic meters of old magazines from the 60s. To these we joined short video clips, giving shape to a medium-length film, for which I composed and produced the soundtrack. The mood was immediately set with a very ironic feeling through a series of clichés that typically characterize a certain film noir, but surrounded by a dark and dingy halo. Aware that the project 28 could take multiple appearances, I started to make a mini album featuring seven instrumental tracks which could accentuate a sound more articulated between wave and funk influences. I practically produced the tracks simultaneously, using the sequencer *Sony Acid* and *Fruity Loops*. Through the latter one, I produced a series of sound sketches, like pieces of a puzzle that I put together in each of the seven projects, starting from analog timbres (*20 ms Korg, Yamaha Cs 80, Prophet 10*) and digital processing (*Reaktor, Kyma*). This has allowed me to organize the workflow in a very instinctive way, opening and closing the various projects after adding a piece, emptying my memory from the previous sounds in order to better judge the next project. It was very natural and technically effective to transfer these contents in a live form first and then for the App. I was able to prepare a large sample library to compose different sound objects and connect the *one shot* experience fruition of pages in the app, with the flow created by the sequence of pages viewed by the user. The library thus produced will be part of an upcoming product of *American Twisted Tools* (San Francisco), a manufacturer of software written for and with *Reaktor (Native Instruments)*.

The design of sensory and emotional experiences is very important in dystopian sci-type storytelling as understood by KOMPLEX. We explore the land where the sounds of 28 take root.

[Paolo Bigazzi] The electronic nomadism of Klaus Schultze, relived in the timbric orchestration of Future Sound of London, the harmonies of Depeche Mode and the processing of Amon Tobin. KOMPLEX is sufficiently omnivorous and finds its balance in the hybridization of cross-media and technology, composition and sound design. Many of the assumptions of cyberpunk and partly of the industrial have occurred over time as a constant demonstration of technological re-interpretation or of underground involvement. I refer to the use of a small machine, the *Roland's TB-303*, at the end of the 80s, as a practice tool for bass players, which later became the basis for creating the Acid-House sound. This attitude finds new territories of investigation as the study of the programming software (*Kyma, Reaktor* and *Max*), with the sensors, to reach to a man-machine expressively rewarding interaction, since the expressive ability of the medium and therefore of its content inevitably come from its simplicity in allowing exploration, reinterpretation, and full participation. The interface becomes transparent and allows a full exploration of the content.

In the KOMPLEX experience, the interaction between sound and video technologies is fundamental, as well as the experimentation in the integration of different technological solutions, in particular in the experience of Live Cinema.

[Paolo Bigazzi Alderigi] We wondered how to perform and interpret 28 live, and what would have been the most expressively valid means, aiming at presenting a live non-linear film-format. We then divided the whole story into various audio and video clips, creating a library that was uploaded in *Ableton Live* for the audio and in *Resolume Avenue* for the video. We also assigned values from several sensors (4 flex sensors) worn during the performance, in control of some processing parameters, giving a dynamic feel both to the sound and the video. This data stream, run with the hardware interface osc/midi wireless *Kroonde*, is directed to the control of some *Reaktor* parameters, through a patch written with *Max*. The data fluctuation, partly also their randomness, participate in the dynamic timbre, a fundamental concept for me. We will always tend more and more to connect the bi-directional audio and video software, identifying the parameters that can dynamically and expressively tell the story and its pathways. I consider *Touch* designers such as *Reaktor*, *Resolume* and *Kyma*, and interfaces being a form of electronic string instruments. I found very interesting to treat some sounds by controlling parameters of audio processing using as a modulation source some video data, such as gray scale or number of lines, from clips analyzed with the tools *Jitter* of *Max* (*Cycling '74*). During the live then there is a dimension of real-time video editing, sound design, and re-interpreted parts, which require a certain degree of improvisation.

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Biography

Domenico Morreale after graduating in *Communication Sciences* at the *University of Turin*, he obtained his doctorate in *Sociology of cultural and communicative processes* at the *Politecnico di Torino*. He is a researcher at the *Department of sociological and psychopedagogical studies, Guglielmo Marconi University* where he teaches *Theories and techniques of mass communication, Theory and philosophy of language of media and entertainment and Literature and audiovisual Communication*, within the degree course in *Film & TV Production* (in collaboration with the *Full Sail University* in Orlando, Florida, USA). He is teaching assistant for the course *Social sciences and crossmedia* and *Film Production, Master of Science in Cinema and media engineering* at the *Politecnico di Torino*.