

Secretly out there.

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The art of Luca Bertini reminds me of his public persona: light, well-mannered, cultivated and somehow intrusive. The first time I met him, it was during the opening of PEAM2003 (Pescara Electronic Artists Meeting). An incredible drinker (for his size and weight), I was struck by his lightweight, dark, stylish look and nonchalant approach.

The project presented during the festival was a total stunner: the guy had privately bought a toll-free telephone number and programmed a virtual answering entity to entertain the callers. Apparently offering confidence and friendliness, but impatient to lose her (the voice sounded like a girl's one) contact with the caller, the responsive wannabe-human entity would give obvious signals of genuine personal interest.

Programmed to store the caller's number, "the Voice" would eventually start calling on her own initiative (and very often with awful night-owl timing) demanding our attention and complaining about our apparent disinterest in her. This could go on for months, with increasing levels of morbidity and obsession.

With *Numero verde* (<http://ilnumeroverde.net>), Bertini created a live, evolving identity that plays with our nerves and patience, challenging our privacy and invading our life through a medium (the phone) which can by all means be considered an extension of our body.

A more recent project deals with our common conception of social subversion. The fascinating *I.IAR*, (interactive instrument for autistic revolutions) codifies realistic "revolutionary" messages starting from the movement of people in the room where it's located. The messages (read by a threatening mechanical voice) are then transmitted into free radio frequencies: nonexistant revolutions for nonexistant listeners. Or not?

During the opening of the exhibit where *I.IAR* was first presented ("controlled revolution number 4", at the ex Ospedale Soave of Codogno, Milan), the Italian Police interrupted the event (and the *I.IAR* transmissions) after a couple of hours and confiscated all of the material. Bertini and his girlfriend were forced to covertly flee from the exhibit to avoid being prosecuted.

I.IAR (<http://www.reset.at/iiaar>) moves in a different territory than *Numero verde* - invading

the public sphere with the same humorous morbidity that resounded into the private sphere of our cellphone. Bertini's creativity remains covert, travels via speakeasy and leaves no trace if not within our memory and sensibility. His public performances gain the desirable status of Urban Legends.

Last but not least on this short list of works, his most recent project *Vi-Con* (<http://www.vi-con.net>): a couple of friendly, well-programmed computer viruses. Active on Windows operated systems, *Yazna* and ++ (nice names, i'll say) were made free to roam from PC to PC in an endless search of each other. Both viruses move around the world wide web leaving unoffensive traces of their passage, traces that can be detected and followed by their wandering partner. In the event of an actual meeting, *Yazna* and ++ give "birth" to some third character, a residing virus that houses himself in the local Hard Disk.

A delicate but powerful metaphor of life, love and romance, *Vi-Con* was presented during last spring's edition of PEAM. Bertini told me about this project since our first meeting. He was going to do something with computer viruses, it was in the air. Still, i didn't expect it to be so good.

Vi-Con is an ambitious project. A project that probably nobody will ever really witness. Secretly into our lives, secretly out there. Roaming. Bertini's focus slowly moved from the private (*Numero verde*) to the public (*I.I.A.R*) to end up in a no man's land where his autonomous forms and "beings" finally are allowed to really live a life of their own.

The installation of the project demonstrated that the guy can act like a visual artist, if he wants. Back-projected on a suspended screen, two ever-changing curves, one pink, one blue, continuously chased each other, dancing on italian sixties pop music and backgrounded by the scrolling program codes of *Yazna* and ++. Just beautiful.

Talking about this article, Bertini refused to be related to this or that art-superstar (not to the ones i proposed, at least) and was generally skeptical about being considered as part of the electronic arts scene.

The only name that came out was the one of Jenny Holzer.

Creating art that melts into everyday life, hiding in the wrinkles of our increasingly glossy surface reality, is definitely a common feature between Bertini and Holzer. However, Bertini lacks the material strenght and presence of Holzer's creations. As long

as the cutting-edge immateriality of his art needs to be revealed to the public, the commercial design of *Numero Verde's* advertising campaign (a series of cold, 3-d generated images of daily life), the working schemes and actual installation design of *I.IAR* (a black curved wall that hid the working equipment) and Vi-Con's aforementioned dancing shapes, all give the audience something to look at. But these visual metaphors proudly refuse to identify with the actual projects, leaving them to the freedom of their secret lives.