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Merel Willemsen in conversation with Agnese Trocchi, co-founder of Candida TV, featured in *Untitled Magazine*, no. 37, Spring 2006

A man, dressed in nothing but a pair of boxer shorts, is watching television in his living room. Piled into a chair – your average TV consumer – he is flipping through the channels. The homogeneous offer of cartoons and commercials eventually drives him to yell at and spit on his television screen. Angrily he leaves his house and meets a small group of people outside. A title card, much like those used in the silent movies, explains: 'We must make the television!' Next we watch the group working with cables, transmitting equipment, antennas and a computer, setting up their own TV station. A paper airplane flying in through an open window informs the neighbours that channel 26 is now being used for broadcasts. In the end, we see two men sitting on a couch, watching themselves watching TV on TV.

This is just one of the many short movies that anybody can download for free from the Candida TV website (www.candidatv.tv). Candida is one out of many groups involved in StreetTV in contemporary Italy. One of its initiators is activist, writer and media artist Agnese Trocchi who states, "Candida is a group of seven people with backgrounds in radio, professional video making, street theatre, Internet, illegal rave parties, queer activism etc. We were on air one hour a week for nine weeks in 2000. The aim was to allow everyone access to the audiovisual language and TV production. At that time, there were fifteen of us. Every week we would organize ourselves into groups to make short movies on diverse topics from independent cinema, to jail criticism, news, life on the Internet, entertainment and urban subcultures. After making the movies, we would lock ourselves up in a studio for two days to shoot the framework around this varied material, with four people introducing the issues. After editing it all together we always had to run to get the tape in time to the local TV station that broadcast Candida."

As the movie described above suggests, Candida TV aims to turn television consumers into the television producers. Passive spectators become active creators when handed the tools to produce spectacle. "Some individuals will take and use these tools, some will not. We don't bring people to our studio, but instead we create the studio in the street. Our aim is at least to give viewers the critical tools that will enable them to understand audiovisual language and how TV is made, to dismantle its mystification and open the way to the creation of everyone's preferred mystification. People like to make TV, as a game, and to be on TV. In the last year we shifted from teaching the tools of filming, to creating the setting in which to narrate everyone's soap opera with the Soapopia project - in which our 'doctor' approaches people in the streets, offering them a chance to heal themselves from the non-protagonist syndrome by starring in their own soap opera."

Candida TV has been using the streets of its own physical community as well as other streets in other cities and countries as a stage to perform their screenplays and “silently inviting power to walk on stage and show its real, repressive face”. “The broadcast in which we best succeeded in doing this was the Giubineon programme, which was part of our TV show in the year 2000. It was the year of the great jubilee in the Vatican. There was a group of us called 'Committee for the beatification of Antonin Artaud'. The group was in the streets collecting signatures for this aim during the days of the Giubileo in Rome. The committee set up situations that were incomprehensible for religious people or for the police, which we filmed for our weekly reports. Another short movie based on this concept was 'SuperVideo G8'. During the days of Genoa 2001 we had our SuperHero running his mission to bring as many voices as possible to the G8. We used the street of Genoa as a set for our screenplay even if reality went in a direction worse than that which we imagined, we found a way to narrate it.”

Candida TV is one of (close to) 200 self-managed micro television stations that use traditional terrestrial broadcasting methods - transmitting radio waves through open space - and together form the Telestreet network in Italy. These independent stations broadcast mostly in the shadow of commercial stations in areas where the signal, for geographical or other reasons, isn't used. Squatting or recycling commercially owned frequencies, so to speak. The relatively low-cost equipment that is being used allows the stations to reach a radius of up to (approximately) one kilometre, thus creating neighborhood television. When Orfeo TV was set up in 2002, based in Bologna and broadcasting in the shadow of MTV, it initiated a network of all these small stations, combining low-tech television with high-tech Internet, to share knowledge, material and experience - so Telestreet was born. It is a direct challenge to Prime Minister Berlusconi's dominance over ninety percent of the private and public airwaves. Or, to quote the opening sentences of Alessandro Ludovico's article *The revolution WILL be broadcast* - at least locally: 'Once upon a time there was a king who ruled over a country and its big television networks, controlling the screens and the minds of most of his people. Unfortunately, this is not just a fairy tale.' Till this date one of the best examples of Telestreet's dissident power was in 2003 when they intercepted and decrypted a football match signal, the rights to which were owned by a commercial network, and broadcast it for free. All could be reversed, following the discovery that their TV antennas could be transformed into transmitters.

But Italy has a long history of resistant media, from the seventies pirate radio stations, to the activists use of the Bulletin Board System (BBS) in the late eighties and hacking computers in the nineties. Agnese Trocchi herself has been involved in most of this. “In 1996 when I was born as a digital entity, I was 25 years old. Before that I was active in the university as a lot of students are. We were distributing free copies of expensive books that were being used in some of the courses, editing a small sized magazine of poetry and things like that. I was feeling constrained by every political identity and I met this group of insane people who were promoting the Psychic Nomadism through the use of the network. This was my first contact with AvANa BBS (the name originates in the special nautical weather reports on the radio to warn sailors), the first European Counter Network node in Rome. Internet was not yet as common as it is now. And the cyberpunk myth was running fast through the telephone line using the Bulletin Board System. AvANa BBS was spreading the concept of Subversive Thelematic: right to anonymity, access for all and digital democracy. AvANa BBS was

physically located in Forte Prenestino the older and bigger squatted space in Rome. So at the end of the 1990's I found myself working with technology and the imaginative space that it was opening in the young and angry minds of communities of squatters, activist and ravers. Not only BBS and Internet, but also audiovisual technologies were part of our exploration of reality. So we experimented with Close Circuit TV from 1997 in Forte Prenestino during the Overground Fiction Festival (OFF) and we did aesthetic research on the practice of video live sets in raves (illegal techno parties) from 1996 until now.”

Trocchi's primary interest is to develop this convergence between TV and Internet and to feed the visionary aspect of street TV and broadcasting technologies, as she believes that the subversion of the mediascape is one of the few ways to subvert society as we know it. “This is the new medium. People want to choose what to watch and when to watch it. And they also want to be part of a community. The convergence between Internet and TV opens up a lot of possible scenarios for creative, informative and entertainment topics. The local/global dialectic works well, as people know that their communities can be covered by a certain flux of information. For example, during global demonstrations you can stream news online which the local TV can receive and broadcast to the local TV audience. So even if the national news doesn't cover certain happenings, you can deliver it at least to your community. Also, the different local perspectives on global issues can give the audience a wider perspective on certain common questions.”

Television, like every other medium from painting to written text to the Internet, has its own way of coding reality and then, generating an 'image' that is mistaken for reality. But the media shows us the world as they see it. These activists or artists use the medium of television, on the one hand, to criticize and subvert society by broadcasting events and creating visions of possible worlds that otherwise would have escaped the media gaze and by this method, public awareness or common knowledge; but on the other hand try to dismantle its code and show us the way the media manipulates reality, by using the very same media. Equally interesting is the use of the much condemned mass medium television to create a form of mass art. Television is often criticized for being passive (compared to the mint flavoured chewing gum we all like), allegedly produced according to certain fixed formulas, thereby conditioning its audience and making this audience receptive to accept the status quo. When I confronted Agnese with these thoughts, she replied by quoting Marshall McLuhan: 'The next medium, whatever it is - it may be the extension of consciousness - will include television as its content, not as its environment, and will transform television into an art form.' And maybe this is true. Once you manipulate the manipulator - the medium - and start to code the de/coder, this may very well be called creation. Mass creation.

[<http://www2.cascoprojects.org>]