

# AGLIOMANIA

## eating and trading my stinky roses

In 2002, Cheang launched *Garlic=Rich Air* with a fictional “after the crash” scenario in which organic garlic was ordained as new social currency, serving as *credito* for a global shared network. The garlic banknotes, the G currency, were custom-designed, modified for each city/country where the project was exhibited. From 2002 to 2010, *Garlic=Rich Air* revised as *AglioMania* travelled through New York, Venice, Naples, Novi Sad and Bristol, mocking the real-life trading system and with this fake but surreal alternative system.

**■ Checking in on the timeline**  
Year 2001 marked the Argentina peso crisis and the popularization of “Los clubes de trueque”, a micro-monetary system that employs an internal paper money, *Credito*, against the defunct macro-peso economy. Year 2001 marked the major collapse of dot.com bubble. The boom of internet-based companies during the years 1997-2000 suffered major setbacks.  
Year 2001 marked the harvest of 10,000 garlic, multiplied from the initial 10 planted in

1991, for my farmer friend Tovey Halleck in upstate New York.  
Year 2001, I travelled high and low plugging into the rich air that offers free open wireless network access.  
January 1, 2002, euro coins and banknotes entered circulation.

\* Garlic is the golden bulb, the stinking rose. \*

In 2002, I launched *Garlic=Rich Air*<sup>(1)</sup> with Creative Time in New York City. “Creative Time presents *Garlic=Rich Air* the second and third phases of *St(r)eaming the Fields*, a field harvesting and public network project conceived by Shu Lea Cheang with funding provided by the “Challenge to the Field” award from Lyn Blumenthal Memorial Fund for Independent Media.

“In a fictional ‘after the crash’ scenario, organic garlic has been recently ordained as new social currency, serving as ‘credito’ for a global shared network. In the first phase of this project, Cheang organized the harvesting of 10,000 garlic plants, cultivated by organic farmer Tovey Halleck in upstate New York, by generations of old and new media artists this summer. These organic cloves, which took

10 years to multiply, constitutes the garlic standard in this artist initiated economy.” [Press release, 2002]

**Garlic Credito Trueque Club**  
Starting September 1<sup>st</sup>, the Garlic Credito trading system was launched online where market denominators include digital bytes, bandwidth, domains, URLs, network, system and software. This second phase of the project invited public audience to join the *Garlic Credito Trueque Club* by signing up for online trading with the digital commons. Members accrue garlic credito by investing digital images, programming code scripts and other virtual items for trade. In this participatory economy, the value of the credito is created by the Trueque Club community.

**Get Garlic=Go Wireless**  
Wireless network nodes as Mobile Urban Farm Stands.  
Once the valuation of the garlic credit has been established, the third phase of the project focuses on enacting a virtual to physical commodities exchange through New York City’s wi-fi network. “On September 27, 28, 29, 2002 a designer truck equipped with loads of garlic and wireless technology serves as a mobile urban farm stand. The truck utilizes selected New York City wireless network nodes for online and onsite street trading activities. Members of online *Credito Trueque Club* can exchange virtual garlic with edible organic garlic at the designated truck posts. Passersby are welcome to participate in garlic trading with their own offers.” [Creative Time press release, 2002]

In 2003, *Garlic=Rich Air*<sup>(2)</sup>, reloaded in year 2003, was presented at the 50<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennial and in ARTPORT at the Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC. “*Garlic=Rich Air*, dated 2030, anticipates a post-capitalist society where the global economy and currencies collapsed, network media crashed. The work envisions organic garlic as the new social currency—bought, sold, and traded to establish a new and free media trading system. *Garlic=Rich Air* sets forth a monetary relationship between URL information and virtual garlic. Visitors are invited to participate



Aglio Credito: Italia, Serbia, UK.  
Design: Fabio Lapiana

online and submit various URLs in return for virtual garlic, ‘G’. At the close of the G-Mart, virtual ‘G’ is cashed in for real farm-grown organic garlic; a commodity that is desired and wholly revered in the year 2030.” [Creative Time press release, 2003]

**After the Crash: Final Liquidation Sale**  
Join the G-mart (Garlic Mart) online where the commodity is network media and the currency is Garlic, “G”, G as credito. Sell your dot.com, dot.net, dot.org, dot.us, dot.uk, dot.info, dot.TV... If it is still worth anything, earn “G” with it.

**Rules of the Game** were established for G-trading.  
(1) Upon SIGN ON, you are awarded 10,000 G as GARLIC CREDITO.  
(2) SUBMIT websites (URLs) as SYMBOLS for the trading floor.  
(3) SET value, shares and price per share for your submission.  
(4) THE Gmart FLUCTUATION is determined by clickstream data.  
(5) Keep a personal PORTFOLIO for Gmart tracking.  
(6) The personal GAIN & LOSE of G is calculated as per trading activity occurs.  
(7) ALL Gmart tradings are VIRTUAL.  
(8) ALL symbols are COMMODITY COMMONS.

(9) G volume TOTAL determines the exchange rate of G and GARLIC.  
(10) END GAME: redeem GARLIC with your G total.

**By year 2008**, commissioned by Palazzo delle Arti for its *L'Impresa dell'Arte* exhibition in Napoli, I launched *AglioMania.com*<sup>(3)</sup>. “*AglioMania* refers to *TulipoMania* that took place in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century Netherland. During this time, tulip bulbs were traded for enormous prices and eventually crashed, thus the term bubble economy. *AglioMania* intends to recreate the same maniac trading phenomena with aglio produced in Italy during the 6 weeks of Enterprise of Art exhibition at Palazzo delle Arti Napoli.  
Bulbs of aglio framed as art objects enter the bidding market. A trading system with garlic credito is established for the public to bid, own and trade the desirable aglio bulbs. *AglioMania* takes the public on a rollercoaster enterprise ride by engaging the public in market frenzy of an illusionary boom. Ultimately, the get rich aglio schemes are smashed when farmers march into the Palazzo delle Arti with trucks of aglio. For the closing of the show, a popular uprising liberates the aglio and invites the town people to feast on *AglioMania*.” [Concept notes, 2008]

Invited to participate in the Wealth of Nations exhibition, *AglioMania* went on to tour Novi Sad (Serbia, 2009) and Spike Island (UK, 2010). For these two shows, Serbia’s 1000 dinar bill and the one pound note from Bank of England’s wartime emergency release were modified as garlic credito. One fabulous garlic bulb was designated as the object of pursuit to mobilize bidding frenzy. A la Joseph Beuys *Kunst = Kapital*, *AglioMania* proposes *Friends = Kapital*, mocking the social network’s circle of friends. The garlic credito are earned by signing on your friends to join the bidding scheme. More friends, more money, more power to bid. The highest bidder finally gets the desired garlic bulb on display in the gallery. ■

Shu Lea Cheang

- (1) <http://garlic02.worldofprojects.info>
- (2) <http://garlic03.worldofprojects.info>
- (3) <http://agliomania.com>

<http://creativetime.org/projects/garlicrich-air/>

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