

The Viral Knitting Project
An (Ongoing) Collaboration

Kirsty Robertson and Roberta Buiani, Matt Soar (video),
Max Haiven (sound), and countless knitters

The viral knitting project grew out of a desire to bring together the viral communication possibilities of the internet with the anti-war movement and Revolutionary Knitting Circles. The collaboration between art historians, communications scholars, activists and artists resulted in a project that took the binary code of the Code Red Virus, a virulent computer virus that exploits a bug in the indexing system of Microsoft Windows, and turned it into a knitting pattern. The binary code, made up of zeros and ones, was easily translated into the P(purl) and K(knit) stitches of knitting patterns. Once knitted, the virus became a scarf, something that was comforting, giftable, but intrinsically dangerous – a latent virus that could be easily transported over borders, into restricted areas, across threatened territories. In turn, because it was a virus, we hoped that the pattern/idea would spread, that people would pick up on the viral pattern and begin to knit it, or would take the idea and translate it to other codes.

The Viral Knitting Project will hopefully mutate and travel over the internet, either through individual knitters using the pattern, or through the performance of the project itself. The performance consists of four downloadable videos, any number of knitters, and re-claimed yarn, wound into balls made from the unravelling of “exhausted commodities” – the used sweaters that no longer play a role in the circulation of capital. Knitters gather in front of the videos (one or all may be shown), knitting the pattern of the virus in red, yellow, orange, and green, each colour in proportion to the number of days since September 11th that the United States has been under Code Red, Code Orange, Code Yellow and Code Green terrorism alert. The idea is to bring together a number of issues under one performance (in a manner similar to the affinity groups at global justice protests), but also to highlight some of the links between technology, culture, capitalism and war.

The videos – there are four of them, one in each colour, are projected on the gallery wall in a loop – the knitting never actually goes anywhere – it is strangely comforting, yet strangely insufficient.

The red video can be viewed at: <http://mattsoar.org/knit/knit2.swf>

The Viral Knitting Project picks up where the Revolutionary Knitting Circles leave off. The Calgary Knitting Circle, begun in 2000 in preparation for anti-G8 protests in Kananaskis and Calgary in 2003, is the largest and most active branch in Canada. Consisting of up to 50 members, the Knitting Circle uses knitting and crocheting as ways of highlighting the media exaggeration of violence among protesters, of creating community-based, collaborative and grassroots actions, of crossing lines of age and gender, and of highlighting a feminine/feminist project in what some see as a male dominated global justice protest movement. Drawing on a rich history of material protest and women’s actions, the Knitting Circles insert themselves into the male-dominated spaces of the city – knitting on the doorsteps of corporate headquarters and outside the storefronts of the worst users of sweated labour.

The Viral Knitting Project attempts to push these ideas further, incorporating knitting as protest into the realm of knitting as communication. As a collaborative and interactive project, the Viral Knitting Project changes with each performance, constantly accruing new interpretations and participants.