If It’s Too Bad To Be True, It Could Be DISINFORMATION

As you read these words, the Information Age explodes... inside and around you... with the Misinformation Missiles and Propaganda bombs of out-right Information Warfare (OW, English “pro-situ” zine). “Information” is chaos, knowledge is the spontaneous ordering of that chaos; freedom is the surfing of the wave of that spontaneity (Hakim Bey, The Information War).

In today's overload of information, elementary truths are easily buried and biased editing easily slip under the motto “all the news that’s fit to print.” According to Paul Virilio, the media industry benefits “from a curious depravity in the laws of democracy.” While not entitled to provide false information, current legislation allows the media to lie by omission, by ruling out news that might damage its interests. The fourth estate (defined as the media) is, according to Virilio, the only institution that functions outside any effective democratic control, since the public does not get to hear any independent criticism of these media. This is simply because such criticism does not stand a chance of being broadcast.2 Surely, as Noam Chomsky argues, one can always access information. To which Hakim Bey incisively contests “provided one has a private income and a fanaticism bordering on insanity.”3

Chomsky has denounced disinformation as the “manufacture of consent.” In an indoctrinated society, he argues, it is crucial to “prevent understanding,” to “divert attention” and to “conceal what it is happening before our eyes,” so that the elite groups, meaning the state and corporate powers, can act without public constraints to achieve their goals in the name of “national interest.”4 In a democratic society, unlike a dictatorial regime where control is exercised through violence, it is necessary to control not only what people do but what they think.

Not submitted yet to the interests of corporate media, the Internet has arguably been regarded as a truly democratic instrument for the dissemination of alternative information. However, free access to the Internet and the ubiquitous nature of cyberspace have come to represent a threat as well. The “information bombs” or “the weapons of mass disruption”5 threaten to attack communication systems bringing financial and military instability by making it impossible to differentiate between information and disinformation. This demonizing of information puts at risk the freedom of the Internet with a new security paradigm as measures of control are being considered.

The first World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS), held by the United Nations in 2003, talked about the digital divide, knowledge dissemination, social interaction, political engagement, media, education, and health. Yet according to alternative groups, it was used to mystify the continuing use of information to protect and advance the interests of global capital.

Artists, activists, grassroots media and hacker collectives have emerged to bring awareness and transparency to the control of information flows. They deploy an array of different tactics (satire, documentary expose, fictionalization of news, simulation, disruption) and media (installation, poster, video, radio, or internet) to demand freedom of information, and bring forward omitted information.

Terror as a psychological phenomenon has entered the Information Age where everyone becomes a suspect. The ongoing project of Julia Meltzer and David Thorne's The Speculative Archive draws on the production of documents, their collection, circulation and reception, and their socio-political effects. Not conceived as a physical site with historical static truths, the project is one in an evolving process of transformation. In there may come a time when these places will be no longer and all we will have left are the pictures: a selection of incidents of photographing or videotaping by persons of interest at various sites of interest, referenced with images from other sources, 2005, digital inkjet prints, 12.5 x 8.5 in.

its content. The controversy arose by the fooled visi-
tors entering the fake website. The BBC broke the
news and set off worldwide exposure, damaging
Dow's stock market. Relying on similar cybertactics,
the Italian collective 01001011010101.org stirred
a great deal of confusion and controversy when in
2003 news went out nationwide that
Karlsplatz, one of Vienna's main squares, was soon
to be renamed "Nikeplatz." The guerrilla campaign
was announced through a plagiarized version
of Nike's website (www.nikeground.com) proving in
a reverse of fortune that
the more corporations
rely on media the
greater their vulnerabil-
ity. These artists use tac-
tical media to expose its mechanisms.

in the format of the left documentary expose,
Marcelo Exposito's Radical Imagination (Carnivals
of Resistance), 2004, presents an alternative view from
those opposing the turn of global capital, that is often
omitted or falls in the interstices of mass media. Paul
Chan's The Question of Democracy is an extremely
complicated one. 2005, poses a criticism on the care-
less slogan use of democracy by which the US adminis-
tration has built its campaign on the war on terror.
Chan's gesture of bringing to light a peculiar text,
Saddam Hussein's speech on the subject of democracy
dated 1977, cries out for its paradoxical oddity and
poses a more complex reflection on the current political
and ideological state of the concept of democracy.
Martha Rosler's If It's Too Bad to Be True, If It Could Be
DISINFORMATION, 1985 - the exhibition's homonymous
title - serves as the framework for the exhibition. Still
under the backdrop of Cold War politics and a pre-
Internet technological era (in which information relied
on TV, radio or newspapers, had less volume, and was
more localized), Rosler's work res-
On with a renewed dualistic rhet-
oric (of us and the enemy, good
and evil) and is a precursor of the
tactics of deconstruction of news
widely deployed today, vividly show-
ing the currency and common prac-
tice of disinformation in today's media.

In an attempt to bypass and
subvert the mass media, a number
of indymedia collectives have
sprung with a common belief in
what Charles Esche has called the
"modest proposal," and claimed
their right to exercise free expres-
sion. The collective neuro-Transmitter has rekindled
the power of the mini-FM. Using a portable radio broadcast
unit last year during New York's Republican National
Convention, neuroTransmitter 'mini-cast' in the streets of
Times Square, where the top media corporations have
their headquarters. They provided informa-
tion on the media's corporate partnerships in an
attempt to bring to the attention of passersby the leg-
eggacy of their biased news. In Frequency Allocations,
2005, neuroTransmitter explores and exposes the
Federal government's control and regulation of the air-
waves and questions the recent Federal licensing of
Lower Power FM. A poster and handouts show how to
produce DIY radio within and outside the federally
established limitations and illustrate the possibilities of
tactical frequency jamming.

Jean Baudrillard in the early 90s conceived
Stealthy Agency, “an invisi-
ble, anonymous and clandes-
tine agency” that would seek
to track down unreal events
with which to disinform the
public. This was based on
the principle that there were
no longer ideas that had
anything to do with facts—a
“utopia” of the sixties and
seventies—but instead, an
upheaval of events without
real actors or interpreters.
Ultimately, the Agency aimed
at countering this simulation
with a radical dissimulation, to lift the veil from this
non-happening of events, to respond to the strike
of events and of history. Like history, wrote Baudrillard,
"It, too, subscribed to absent events, looking for a
way to furnish the most exact non-information on
the absence of events." 

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1. Title of Martha Rosler's work shown at the exhibition
Disinformation curated by Gina Rodriguez at The Alternative Museum in New York in 1985 (and in this exhibition).
2. Haim Biny, The Information War, published online by CTHEDORY texts.
8. Charles Esche introduces the concept of “modest proposal” as one that articulates around “what might be, rather than what it is.”
Essentially speculative in the sense that a modest proposal imagines how things could be other than what they are and relying in creativi-
ty, it is also very concrete and actual in order to deal with real existing conditions and what might be necessary to change them. This con-
crete necessity is what gives it the term “modest.” They depart from existing conditions and are aspirational and purposeful in nature.