Transparent World

Minoritarian Tactics in the Age of Transparency

BY INKE ARNS

> Giedion, Mendelsohn, Corbusier turned the abiding places of man into a transit area for every conceivable kind of energy and for electric currents and radio waves. The time that is coming will be dominated by transparency (Benjamin, "The Return of the Flâneur").
>
> The coils of a serpent are even more complex than the burrows of a molehill (Deleuze).

During the Cold War, the unimaginable usually came in the guise of a threat from outer space (which in western science-fiction was not infrequently a code word for communism), whereas today the unimaginable has moved almost indecently close to us. It is in our immediate proximity, on and in our own bodies. The production of unimaginably small nanomachines equipped with all kinds of capabilities is not the sole evidence of this development, as the transformation of matter itself has become an 'immaterial.' The notion of 'immaterials' was coined by Jean-François Lyotard in 1985 with his exhibition "Les Immatériaux" at the Centre Pompidou in Paris. 'Immaterial' in his sense is not the equivalent of 'immaterial' (= opposite of matter), but denotes new extensions of material that exclude the possibility of direct human access:

> The good old matter itself comes to us in the end as something which has been dissolved and reconstructed into complex formulas. Reality consists of elements, organised by structural rules (matrixes) in no longer human measures of space and time.[I]

At first glance, these immaterials are indistinguishable from the materials we know of old. However, they are organised according to

wholly different laws, for example in the case of organisms manufactured with the techniques of genetic engineering. This is completely in line with the definition of the 'Unheimlich' (uncanny) formulated by Sigmund Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920: it is the formerly long known and familiar that recurs in unintentional repetition (217-56). Today, not just the matter but also the realms that surround us have become uncanny. The notion of transparency, still so esteemed by Walter Benjamin in 1929, has long acquired a dystopic flavour. That change is evident both in the popular fears surrounding the transparent citizen and in the fact that the architectural rooms now indeed distinctive for their great transparency are no longer visible (to everyone) and therefore no longer controllable, either.

In a software or interface culture, transparency is a central concept; in fact software and interfaces play a central role in the general political and societal move towards transparency. However, transparency has different and divergent meanings, as will be clear in the following, where I will also outline how artistic strategies can critically discuss the age of transparency.

An expedition with Deleuze into the swamps of Louisiana

In his film *Down by Law* (1986), Jim Jarmusch delivered a highly precise picture of the paradigm shift that is now becoming reality: the change from the enclosing milieu of the disciplinary society (Foucault) to the flexible modulations of the society of control (Deleuze).

Jarmusch's cult movie shows three smalltime crooks – Jack, Zack and Bob – who happen to be sharing a prison cell in New Orleans. Zack (Tom Waits) is an unemployed DJ, Jack (John Lurie) an occasional pimp and Bob (Roberto Benigni) an honest, kindly, if somewhat naïve, Italian who is doing time for manslaughter. They jointly manage to escape and via the swamps of Louisiana head for a new life. Along with their flight through the swampland, the 'window scene' is especially significant for our context. Roberto 'Bob' Benigni is chalking a window onto the cell wall, and because his English is rather shaky he asks Jack whether one says, "I look at the window" or "I look out of the window." Jack chuckles at the Italian's question,

but in view of their hopeless situation his response is cynical: "Well, in this case I guess you would say I look *at* the window." Today, the scene can be read as an uncanny pre-anticipation of current developments.

The concept of transparency plays an important role in the above *dispositif*. In Jarmusch's bleak prison situation, which corresponds to Foucault's system of enclosure by the disciplinary society, the normally transparent – and invisible – window (or interface) suddenly becomes visible itself as a window, or a boundary or demarcation. The simple fact that it is chalked out on a prison wall means that it can be experienced in its materiality and facticity. The chalk window can be read as a metaphor for software or programmed environments and their interfaces, which have become the new, 'post-material' foundations of the contemporary information societies.

While the disciplinary societies described by Foucault are characterised by built enclosures (the prison, the school, the factory, the hospital), these rigid structures have given way to continuous modulations in the control societies of today. These 'soft' modulations resemble a "self-deforming cast that will continuously change from one moment to the other" (Deleuze 185). This supple mould, which in *Down by Law* is represented by the image of the swamps of Louisiana, has three distinctive attributes:

1. Transparency (diaphanousness or invisibility that eludes direct sensory perception)
2. Immateriality (as the connection between individual materialities)
3. Performativity ("Code is Law" (Lessig, *Code and other Laws of Cyberspace*) – computer code becomes the law)

In contrast to the opaque prison walls, the swamp is 'transparent' (metaphorically speaking, of course, since briny water is seldom clear). Unlike solid matter, the swamp is fluid, a dangerous attribute enabling it to change shape at any time, to fill up cavities as they form and to envelop bodies and objects whenever required. The enveloping of such perfection hinders (and this is where performativity comes in) forward movement at least as efficiently as constructed fortifications and perhaps even more so.

Transparency

Today, the age of transparency[2] that Walter Benjamin optimistically considered to be emerging in the glass buildings designed by his architect contemporaries seems to be ambiguous. For one thing, not only light waves pass through the transparent buildings but any number of electromagnetic waves deriving from a very diverse range of technical sources (Medosch, *Waves – The Art of the Electromagnetic Society*; Medosch *Waves*). For another, the notion of transparency – with its double -meaning of visibility and invisibility, or with the ambivalence of the panoptical and the post-optical – turns out to be very suitable for the characterisation of contemporary performative (information) architecture and spaces (Arns, "Read_me, run_me, execute_me…" 197-207).

Foucault's notion of panoptism (Foucault) is derived from Jeremy Bentham's 'panopticon,' the blueprint for a perfect prison that makes the inmates of a circular prison permanently visible to a warden placed in the middle. However, I use the term 'post-optical' to denote all the digital data streams and (programmed) communication structures or architectures that are monitored at least as easily as such prisoners, yet consist of visual information in only a very small part (keyword: 'dataveillance').

While in everyday usage 'transparency' stands for simplicity, clarity and controllability through viewability (for example in the name of *Transparency International*, an organisation combating corruption worldwide), in computer science the term means the very opposite, namely invisibility and information concealment. A 'transparent' interface is one that the user can neither detect nor notice. While this concealment of (superfluous, excessive) information is often expedient in terms of reducing complexity, it can also lull the user into a false sense of security: the invisibility of the interface suggests a direct view of something, an unimpaired transparency in which it would be foolish, of course, to believe. For that reason, Lev Manovich writes: "Far from being a transparent window into the data inside a computer, the interface brings with it strong messages of its own."

In order to make this 'message' visible, attention must be directed to the transparent 'window pane' itself. Just as at the press of a but-

ton the transparent glass facades of buildings can be transformed into translucid or semi-transparent surfaces, and thus become visible, it is a question of wrenching the transparency out of post-optical information-technical structures. Applied analogously to communication networks, it would be a matter of making the transparent distribution structures of economic, political and social power opaque, and therefore perceptible. It is ultimately a matter of restoring to the IT-based notion of transparency the original meaning of clearness and controllability through visibility.

Immateriality

The more regulated by software everyday things become, the less accessible they are to sensory perception in our everyday dealings with them. However, the fact that they are vanishing from sight does not mean that they are not there. On the contrary: the increasingly programmed world surrounding us means that rules, conventions and relationships, which are basically changeable and negotiable, are being translated into and fixed in software. Recorded in software, immaterial structures are at least – and herein lies the paradox – as permanent as, and perhaps even more powerful than, material structures and architecture.

The secret (and uncanny) making invisible of the world through software deployment does not only lead to a withdrawal from visibility and perceptibility but also means that structures become immaterial. In this case, however, 'immaterial' does not imply that these structures are any less effective than their solid counterparts. To take 'immaterial' to mean the opposite of 'material' would be to wholly misread the term (Terranova 31). Rather, one must learn to grasp the immaterial as something which turns "qualitative, intensive differences into quantitative relations of exchange and equivalence" (ibid.). It establishes relations between isolated materialities – things and people, wares and individuals, objects and subjects – and in this way is able to compute profiles, for instance, of consumers or movements at very high speed.[3]

At every given second, the immaterial is somewhere (as opposed to nowhere), between things. It encloses the materials, elastically changes shape, agilely follows objects and bodies, and constantly establishes connections. Admittedly, the immaterial is not that

'which holds together the world in its innermost place,' but it forges together the things in the world by interrelating them and does so more efficiently than rigid structures were ever able to. Thus, software turns out to be a very hard substance and immateriality to be quasi-factitious materiality that, however, most of the time eludes our (visual, tactile) sensory perception.

Performativity

Programmed structures consist of two kinds of 'texts': a visible 'front end' (the 'window') and an invisible, transparent 'back end' (the software or program code). These texts are to each other as phenotext is to genotext in the sphere of biology: the surface effects of the phenotexts (graphical user interfaces) are called up and controlled by the genotexts (program codes or source texts) effective below the surface. The characteristic attribute of program code is that it unites saying and doing (action), in other words, code as an action-capable act of speaking is not a description or representation of something, but instead affects directly, sets in motion, times effects. Code does what it says.

However, code affects not only the phenotexts, that is to say the graphic user interfaces. "Coded performativity" (Grether) has equally direct, even political, effects on the (virtual) realms through which we move. According to the American lawyer Lawrence Lessig, "[p]rogram code increasingly tends to become law" (Lessig, "Stalin & Disney – Copyright is Killing the Internet"). Today, control functions are integrated directly in the architecture of the network, namely in its code. In *Code and other Laws of Cyberspace*, Lessig uses the Internet provider America Online (AOL) as a compelling illustration of the way in which program architecture can hinder, with the aid of the code that defines it, any form of virtual 'rebellion,' for instance, and largely control the users. Therefore, Graham Harwood describes this transparent world as an "invisible shadow world of process" (49).

It is a world with direct, and also political, consequences for the virtual and real spaces in which we move today: by stipulating what is possible in these spaces, and what is not, it mobilises or, as applicable, immobilises its users. The question of permeability – access? when and for whom? – is central for contemporary spaces and closely linked to the notion of performativity (Arns,"Texte, die

(sich) bewegen…" 57-78; Arns, "Read_me, run_me, execute_me…" 197-207). Gilles Deleuze writes that:

> The conception of a control mechanism giving the position of any element within an open environment at any given instant (whether animal in a reserve or human in a corporation, as with an electronic collar), is not necessarily one of science fiction. Félix Guattari has imagined a city where one would be able to leave one's apartment, one's street, one's neighborhood, thanks to one's (dividual) electronic card that raises a given barrier; but the card could just as easily be rejected on a given day or between certain hours; what counts is not the barrier but the computer that tracks each person's position – licit or illicit – and effects a universal modulation" (186).

So-called Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) technology, for example, makes possible tracking of the very kind described above (*Radio Frequency Identification Technology*; *How I learned to love RFID*). RFID tags are tiny radio labels, passive wireless transmitters which are able to send and save information, and which are expected to become replacements for barcode labels.

They are already in use in goods logistics, human surveillance and anti-theft protection. In response to a weak wireless energy pulse, RFID tags return to a reading device the information stored on them. This is already possible over a distance of up to several hundred metres – without the bearer of the tag even noticing. In addition, the technology enables objects to be unambiguously identified worldwide; in addition to the unnoticed reading out of information, this capability is a further significant attribute distinguishing RFID from conventional barcodes. RFID allows the flow of goods to be re-traced without gaps, and thus opens up whole new dimensions of data mining (for instance through the compilation of consumer profiles). If one considers the potential deployment of RFID technology on and inside people – via passports or health-insurance cards provided with RFID chips on which biometrical data are stored, say, or via RFID tags with biometrical data implanted below the skin (*Wo gibt es RFID?*) – then new forms of ubiquitous control are conceivable.

British artist Chris Oakley graphically illustrated this possibility in his short video *The Catalogue*.

ILL. 1: **Chris Oakley: Still from *The Catalogue* (2004).**

The age of transparency is marked by a dual structure of the panoptical and post-optical. On the one hand, we are confronted with a *dispositif* of total, panoptical visibility that began in the 1980s, if not indeed earlier, with the installation of video-monitoring systems and it is now being perfected in state and private-sector structures of surveillance satellites (Parks; Hunger). With a fictitious newspaper notice allegedly appearing in the year 2067 – "Anna Kournikova Deleted by Memeright Trusted System" – David Rice thought in 2001 to a logical end the *dispositif* of transparency coupled with the ever stricter persecution of copyright infringements we are witnessing today. Smart activists, advertising agencies or religious fundamentalists already devise targeted advertising for *Google Earth*: Gigantic Land Art projects are coming into being, visible only from airplanes or to the cameras of satellites (Waldt).

ILL. 2: *Smart* Google Earth graffiti.

Disse to illustrationer kan desværre ikke blive større pga. mangleden opløsning.

ILL. 3: *We love aircraft noise* Google Earth graffiti.

In parallel with this panoptical visibility, the technical structures that observe and act performatively have increasingly withdrawn into invisibility. In many cases, performative structures, whether unimaginably small, immaterial or remote, are recognisable only by their effects but are no longer necessarily visible. Satellites, for instance, are so far from the Earth that they can scarcely be detected with the naked human eye, miniaturised nanomachines are simply too small, and most software eludes human perception because it involves 'inconspicuous' performative (geno-)texts lying below the visible surfaces (pheno-texts) that generate them. In the age of transparency we find ourselves dealing with a fundamental de-coupling of visibility and performativity/effectivity.

While many things are being subjected to the paradigm of permanent visibility, the performative structures that truly act are with-

drawing from precisely this visibility, and thus from our direct control. These structures have become transparent. Invisibility is equally becoming the *privilege* of acting, performative structures. It is in this sense that I refer to the present as a post-optical age in which program code – which might also, with reference to Walter Benjamin, be described as the post-optical unconscious[4] – is becoming 'law' as a performative text.

Minoritarian tactics in the age of transparency

> The vocation of an art of the kind that reflects on electronic crowds and networks is not the representation of the visible world but the visualisation of what is otherwise inaccessible to perception and is difficult to imagine because of its cosmic or microscopic scale, its discontinuity in space and time, or its impenetrability – from the insides of the body, the atom or the black box to the outside of our galaxy and our universe (Morse 192).

How can political and/or artistic action be articulated in such spaces that have become imperceptible, withdrawn from the direct view? In view of this software-assisted disappearance of the world, where and how can potential spaces of the political (re-)emerge? Various media and net art projects as well as software-art projects (i.e., *Wo gibt es RFID?*) have in recent years developed approaches that make the structures of economic, political and social power distribution in communication networks opaque (= visible). The concern of such projects is invariably to transpose information-technical structures from a state of transparency to one of visibility or perceptibility.

In an age of software-assisted implosion of the political, this first step alone is eminently political. Almost twenty years ago already, Deleuze asserted: "There is no need to fear or hope, but only to look for new weapons" (187).

Are resistant tactics[5] even feasible in this transparent world? And if so, what do they look like? Two tactical directions will be described in the following: a) that of viewing, mapping and intervening, that is to say the making visible of structures of the surveillance and/or information landscape; and b) that of vanishing and becoming

invisible through maximum visibility (over-identification with, and deployment of, the panoptical regime).

Inspecting, cartographing, intervening

Projects that point to the existence of concealed structures of the surveillance and/or information landscape belong to the above category. A media-artistic and -activistic analysis of the subject of video surveillance is a current topos in media art[6] – in the 1990s, for example, Yann Beauvais (F) and the Surveillance Camera Players (US) performed plays for the operators of surveillance cameras and in this way focused attention on the video cameras scattered around cities. The works of the French artist Renaud Auguste-Dormeuil should be mentioned – as should the *track-the-trackers* system developed by the Swiss artist Annina Rüst in 2003, which identifies the locations of CCTV cameras in public space by using GPS. These locations are stored in a database and the camera sites acoustically signal to users of the system moving through the city.

Beyond this, however, there are also projects that want not merely to alert us to the existence of video cameras in public spaces but aim to make visible the transparent (power) structures lying behind them. One example is the work of Canadian artist Michelle Teran, who pulled a strange-looking trolley-suitcase through the streets of Berlin in 2005. Her performance *Life: A User's Manual*[7] made visible on a television set the footage of surveillance cameras installed in public and private locations. She used a commercially available video-scanner which was able to intercept radio signals emitted by cameras transmitting on the 2.4 Ghz frequency band. In this way, a stroll through the city became a "shared experience in visualizing the invisible" (Teran).

In her video *Faceless* (2007, 50 min.), the Austrian artist Manu Luksch goes one step further than Yann Beauvais and the Surveillance Camera Players. While producing the video in London, Luksch posed in front of countless CCTV cameras and then invoked the British Data Privacy Law (which guarantees one's right to one's own image) to demand that the operators furnish her with the footage. She used this material (on which the faces of everyone except the artist had been made unrecognisable for data-privacy reasons) to assemble a

ILL. 4: **Manu Luksch: Still from *Faceless* (2007).**

disturbing science-fiction tale that "thanks to the single-frame aesthetic dictated by the nature of surveillance footage is reminiscent of Chris Marker's groundbreaking film-comic *La Jetée* (1962)" (Keuschnigg).

The French group Bureau d'Études has for several years been cartographing contemporary political, social and economic systems. These visual analyses of transnational capitalism are the product of elaborate and painstaking research, and are mostly presented in the form of large-format wall paintings. *Governing by Networks* (2003) is a chart that visualises the reciprocal shareholdings and transnational interconnections of global media conglomerates. Because these visualised representations depict relations that normally remain in-

visible, through channels that usually remain singular and unconnected, and because they are being linked up in order to form a great whole, the charts function like "resymbolizing machines" (Bureau d'Études, "Machines de Resymbolisation... ").

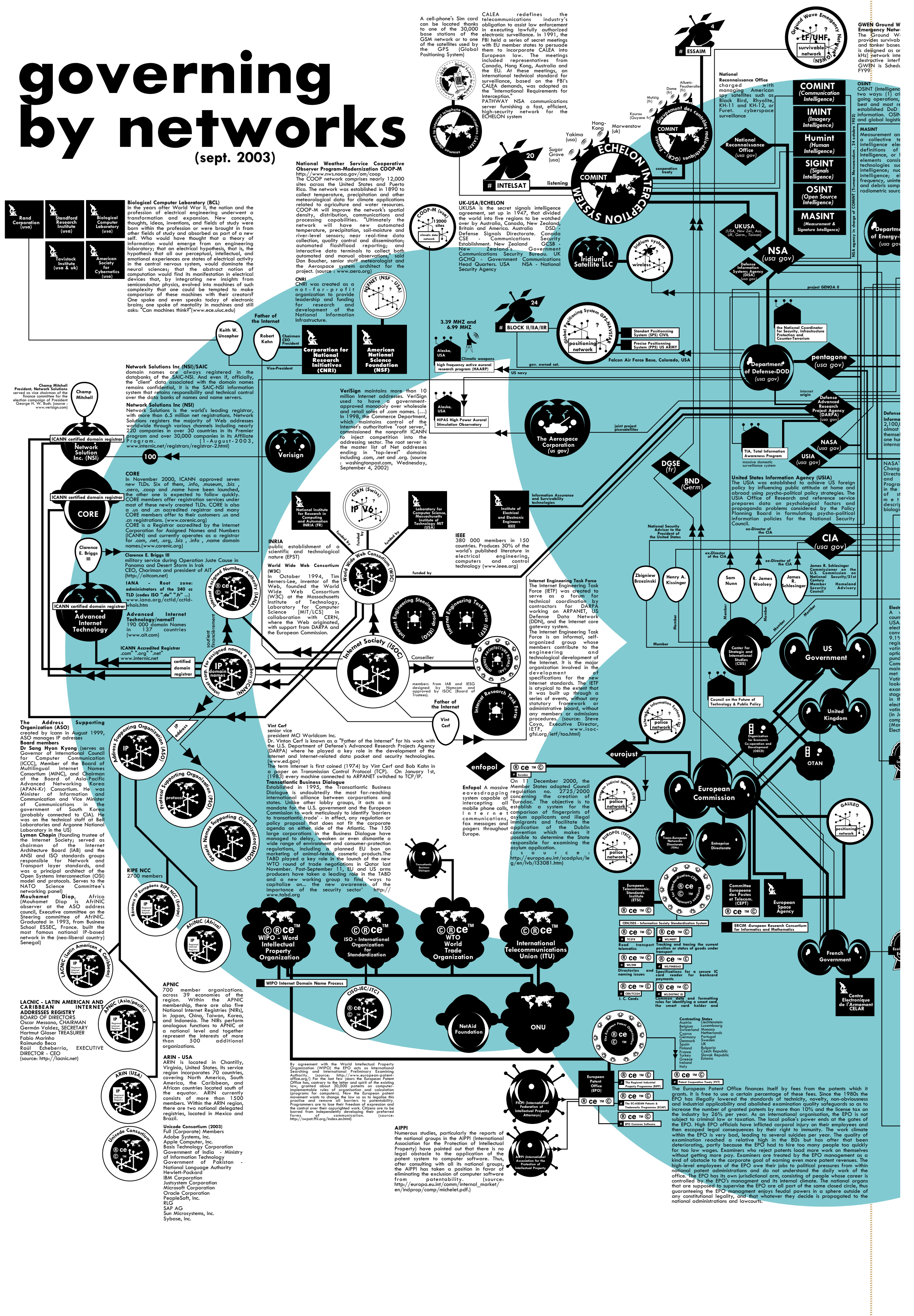
Bureau d'Études uses the term to describe the resistant process of stringing together and representing that which is no longer perceivable as a whole, namely global capitalism, due to the intricacy of its branches and capillary structures. Bureau d'Études, whose conceptual forerunners include the artists Öyvind Fahlström (1928-76) and Mark Lombardi (1951-2000), produces a sharp analysis of the present in its visual dissection of contemporary business conglomerates.

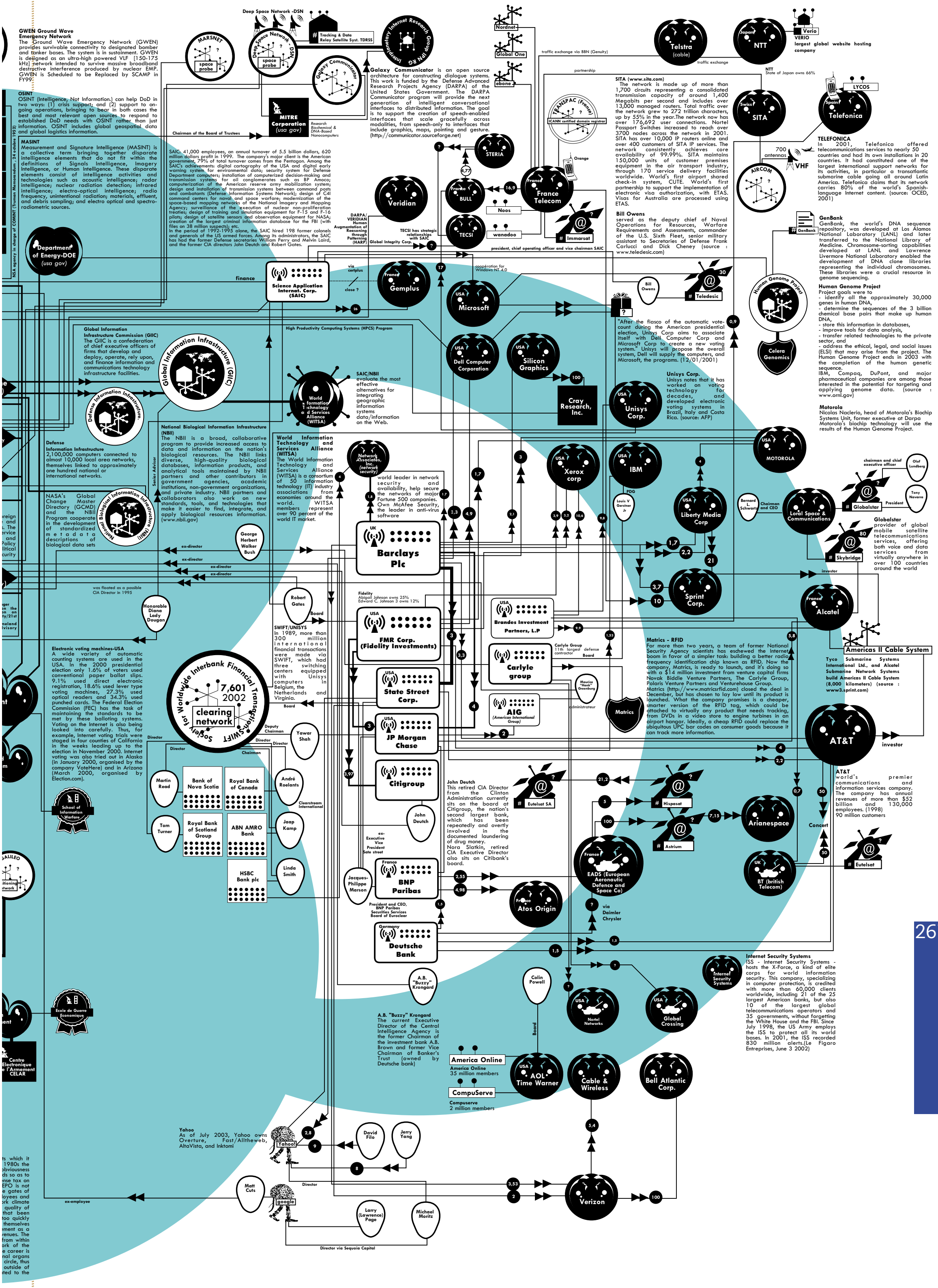
Over the past few years, the so-called plane spotters have vividly demonstrated that transparent structures can be disclosed through simple observation. Aviation enthusiasts were able to uncover the 'Guantanamo flights' of the CIA by closely observing the take-offs and landings at various places in the world and continuously comparing this data with civilian flight schedules. Although the US secret service uses civilian aircraft to transport suspected terrorists to prison camps like Guantanamo, the flights do not appear in civilian flight plans and for this reason the secret activities eventually became conspicuous.

With *Terminal Air* (2007), the American experimental geographer Trevor Paglen and the Institute for Applied Autonomy have developed a system (software and database) which is able to display almost in real-time these illegal CIA flights. Paglen is primarily interested in exploring and documenting "military landscapes" like military installations hidden deep in the American desert. In order to photograph these concealed and remote sites, and thus make visible the "optical unconscious" (Benjamin, "A Small History of Photography"), Paglen uses in *Limit Telephotography* outer-space photography techniques deploying tele lenses with focuses between 1,300 and 7,000 mm, an enlargement that makes visible to the human eye invisible aspects of the landscape. *Missing Persons* (2006) for its part deals with the transparent surface of the (letterbox) companies that own the aircraft used to make the Guantamo flights and exhibits the signatures of the fake CEOs.

governing by networks

(sept. 2003)





ILL. 5: Bureau d'Études: *Governing by Networks* (2003).

ILL. 6: Trevor Paglen: *Large Hangars and Fuel Storage* (2005), from the series *Limit Telephotography*, courtesy of Altman Siegel Gallery, San Francisco, and Galerie Thomas Zander, Cologne.

Marko Peljhan and Mario Purkathofer investigate in their work the material structures on which the regime of transparency is based. While Marko Peljhan's autonomous mobile research laboratory *makrolab* (1997-2007) hooked up to the communications streams from changing sites on various continents, and in this way cartographed the territory of signals over a specific geographical point (Arns, "Faktura and Interface…"), the Swiss artist Mario Purkathofer's travel agency *sofatrips.com* offers "trips into the information land-

scape." Conducted since 2006, his *couch trips* are movements through virtual and physical realms, for instance the on-foot tracing of the route taken by a text message within Zurich, coach trips to Geneva to the European research centre CERN (the site where the World-Wide Web and Mosaic, the first graphic browser, were developed in the early 1990s), walks through the city or human data processions through the information landscape – up to the network boundary of Zurich. The routes inevitably pass by public telephone boxes, providers, computing centres, webcams, WLAN hotspots – in short, they traverse the infrastructures of old and new forms of communication. *Sofatrips* direct our attention to the material basis of our otherwise increasingly virtual world.

A good example of activist *intervention* in the invisible, flexible modulations of the control society – the code – is provided by the *insert_coin* project of Dragan Espenschied and Alvar Freude. Using the motto "Two people control 250 people," the two students working for their diploma thesis at the Merz-Akademie in Stuttgart installed unnoticed a web proxy server that used a Perl script to manipulate in the academy's data network the entire web data traffic of students and teaching staff. As Espenschied and Freude noted in a text on the occasion of their winning the International Media Art Award in 2001, their goal was to "examine the users' competence and critical faculties in relation to the everyday medium of the Internet."

The manipulated proxy server diverted the URLs entered to other web pages, modified HTML formatting codes, used a simple search-and-replace function to alter current reports on news sites (for instance by swapping over the names of politicians) as well as altering the content of private e-mails retrieved over web interfaces like Hotmail, Yahoo! or gmx. The manipulated web access was in operation for four weeks without being noticed by students or staff. When Espenschied and Freude made their experiment public, hardly anybody was interested. Although the duo published a set of simple instructions for switching off the filter, only a tiny number of those affected took the time to deactivate the settings and in this way restore the flow of unfiltered data.[8]

ILL. 7: Dragan Espenschied and Alvar Freude: Screenshot from insert coin

Vanishing and becoming invisible through maximum viewability

Spaces of inaccessibility and invisibility are becoming increasingly rare. That they should completely vanish from the practices of recording is a utopian wish, or even indeed potentially suspicious. The second category therefore encompasses projects that favour over-identification with the system and serve and confirm the pan-optical regime with its demand for permanent viewability. This category runs under the motto: Invisibility through maximum visibility; system overload through dissimulation.

The German artist Andreas Peschka occupied a very early and determined position in the above field. For the exhibition *un.frieden. sabotage of realities* (1996), he ordered a stamp with the print of the index finger of his right hand (*Stempelset für Attentäter*) and sold the stamp together with a tin of Vaseline. The purchasers were required by the contract of purchase to disseminate Peschka's fingerprint as

widely as possible. The aim was to paralyse the system by making the artist's absurdly self-reproduced fingerprint crop up simultaneously at different (crime) scenes around the world. A similar principle, incidentally, was behind "Metamute Meets Echelon – A Literary Competition," which in September 2001 called for the submission of literary works deploying the entire vocabulary of the Echelon system. The aim was to overload the US surveillance system by flooding the networks with Echelon-related search strings.

Since 2001, Annina Rüst has been dedicating her work – both in her own right and as a member of the group Local Area Network (LAN) – to the theme of surveillance on the Internet and in public space. With *TraceNoizer – Disinformation on Demand* (2001/2002) LAN produced a tool intended to help users protect their online identity. The work blurs traces left in the Internet by algorithmically generating and automatically putting online a cloned home page with misleading personal information. In view of the vast quantity of 'authentic' person-related information already accessible on the Internet, the need for such an instrument would seem to exist.

In protest against the paranoia and the rhetoric with which politicians increasingly legitimise the surveillance of e-mail traffic and the Internet, Annina Rüst and LAN launched the *SuPerVillainizer* in 2002. With the aid of this conspiracy generator, any Internet user can in a few steps create 'villains' who exchange subversive mails (generated automatically and peppered with suspicious keywords) intended to confuse the Carnivore, Echelon and Onyx surveillance systems used by intelligence services around the world. Since 2002, the users of *SuPerVillainizer* have created 1,345 villains, who have communicated 1,137 conspiracies over 205,146 mails.

Since early 2001, the Italian net.art duo 0100101110101101.org has been working on the implementation of its largest and most elaborate project to date. Running under the title *Glasnost* (Transparency), it is a self-surveillance system that unceasingly collects information about the life of the two members of 0100101110101101.org and publishes the uncensored data. The first step toward realising *Glasnost* was the project *life_sharing* (2001), whose title is an anagram of 'file sharing.' It permits Internet users direct online access to the artists' computer. The storage content of the machine's hard disk – texts, images, software, private mail and so forth – is subject to the

Gnu Public License (GPL), so it can be freely accessed, copied and manipulated: "*life_sharing* is a brand new concept of net architecture turning a website into a hardcore personal media for complete digital transparency."

After commencing the *VOPOS* project in January 2002, the duo have carried GPS (Global Positioning System) transmitters that send the coordinates of the artists' locations to their publicly accessible website at regular intervals. The data transmitted is transferred to city maps, thus making the current location of the artists permanently visible.

The Italian duo's project today seems almost like a prophetic, and possibly frivolous, anticipation of what happened to Hasan Elahi,[9] assistant professor in the Department of Visual Art of Rutgers University, in the immediate aftermath of Nine-Eleven. After he was anonymously accused of possessing explosives, the FBI placed this American citizen of Bangladeshi origin under observation. Returning from the Netherlands in 2002, he was arrested by FBI officers at Detroit Airport and learned he was suspected of terrorist activities (an annual total of more than 100,000 air miles made him even more suspicious). Six months of permanent interrogation followed, after which the FBI finally accepted the detailed information he had provided.

For fear of eventually being incarcerated in Guantamo in spite of his release, Elahi then went on the offensive. *Tracking Transience*, the website on which he documents his entire life, has been online since December 2003. Thanks to a GPS transmitter, his location can be detected at any given time. Moreover, photographs meticulously document his daily life: meals, shopping, meetings with friends, bank transactions, even visits to the toilet.

The coils of the serpent

The three protagonists in *Down by Law* discovered outside the prison walls in the swamps of Louisiana nothing other than the 'self-deforming cast' of the society of control. These uncanny spaces are characterised by transparency, immateriality and performativity. Like a finely meshed net or sieve, whose weave alters from one moment to the other, they permanently envelop the bodies and objects moving inside them. These supple, constantly self-adapting

modulations are invisible, transparent. They elude human perception – yet, because they are everywhere at once they are more impenetrable than any enclosures built before them. The coils of the serpent are indeed even more complex than the burrows of a molehill.

The age of transparency is distinguished by the decoupling of (panoptical) visibility and (post-optical) performativity. The truly acting, performative structures are now transparent – and thus elude our direct control. In that sense, the window that Roberto 'Bob' Benigni chalks on the wall of his cell should be seen as a metaphor for Windows (or for any proprietary – or even non-proprietary – operating system, along with its interfaces), and the program code that brings forth these interfaces should be viewed as the new, 'post-material' basis of contemporary information and control societies – as their invisible, immaterial law. It is a question of closely observing these complicated contortions of the snake – and of disputing, when the occasion demands, their privilege of transparency.

Notes

1. Stated in Jean-François Lyotard's press release for "Les Immatérieux" of January 8, 1985.
2. While the term 'society of control' was coined by Deleuze, the terms 'age of transparency' and 'the post-optical age' are my creations. In this article all three are used synonymously. According to Deleuze, the disciplinary society is superseded by the 'society of control'. While the disciplinary society is characterised by (permanent) visibility and material structures, the society of control exerts power through invisible (= transparent) and immaterial environments – which are no less effective than their material predecessors.
3. "The numerical language of control is made of codes that mark access to information, or reject it. We no longer find ourselves dealing with the mass/individual pair. Individuals have become 'dividuals,' and masses, samples, data, markets, or 'banks'" (Deleuze 185).
4. In his essay "A Small History of Photography" (1931), Walter Benjamin defined the 'optical unconscious' as an unconscious visual dimension of the material world that is normally filtered out from people's social consciousness, thus remaining invisible, but which can be made visible using mechanical recording techniques (such as photography and film: slow motion, enlargement): "For it is another nature that speaks to the camera than to the eye: other in the sense that a space informed by human consciousness gives way to a space informed by the unconscious. Whereas it is a commonplace that, for example, we have some idea what is involved in the act of walking, if only in general terms, we have no idea at all what happens during the fraction of a second when a person *steps out*. Photography, with its devices of slow motion and enlargement, reveals the secret. It is through photography that

we first discover the existence of this optical unconscious, just as we discover the instinctual unconscious through psychoanalysis" (243).

5. Unlike a strategy, a tactic acts not from its own place (of power) or from its own basis, but always within the terrain of the enemy. Strategies and tactics differ in their types of action. While a strategy can produce and impose its own spaces, tactics can merely use, manipulate and rededicate these spaces. The tactic "operates in isolated actions, blow by blow, takes advantage of 'opportunities' and depends on them, being without any base where it could stockpile its winnings, build up its position, and plan raids. What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment, and seize on the wing the possibilities that offer themselves at any given moment" (de Certeau 37).
6. Many of these projects are documented in the exhibition catalogue *Ctrl_Space. Rhetorics of Surveillance from Betham to Big Brother* (Frohne et al.).
7. http://www.ubermatic.org/life/ (last accessed August 11, 2009).
8. Even several months after conclusion of the experiment, web access from most of the Academy's computers continued to be filtered.
9. http://elahi.rutgers.edu/ (last accessed August 11, 2009).

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