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[after andreas and eric have send theirs, this is my contribution for the media revolution book, ed. by stephen kovats, which will appear this fall, as a wrap up of the ostranenie exhibits, the series of east european media art shows which took place in the bauhaus/dessau in east germany. the text is rather desperate, dark, written after the collapse of the international help b-92 campaign, before the first media/net initiatives in macedonia and albania took off. the real role of internet over these three months still has to be evaluated. a lot of what has been written in newspapers about the 'heroic role of the internet' is itself part of a larger

infowar. it is for sure that both the independent media in ex-yugoslavia (including B92) and their supporting NGO campaigns in the West (such as press now, here in amsterdam) were not at all prepared for this increasing role the internet played in the media wars. voices of kosov AT -albanians have virtually been absent on the net, and remain so. still, the amount of information, the sheer overload during these tense weeks has been impressive. the questions which have been raised this spring, from all sides, will keep us busy for a while, that much is clear. geert]

War In The Age of Internet
Some thoughts and reports, spring 1999
By Geert Lovink

What is (net)activism these days? Why wear a "Dazed and Confused" t-shirt? You know, the lifestyle magazine... Or "Help B92", the support campaign for the banned Belgrade independent conglomerate, for that matter? It is not the 'why' but 'how' which fascinates. Click here, order the t-shirt NOW. Engagement is a non issue for the Low Identity People, the High Intensity Crowds. Why wonder? Enjoy, get outraged. "Make War, Love Later." There are always some lost moments, not yet colonized by the cruelly true so-called 'economy of attention'. Enter vague terrains, free slots of good will, yet to be filled. Once we have left behind boring political principles, a universe of activism unfolds before our eyes. Cool data do not stick onto smooth surfaces. Unclassified resistance. Tell me,

was it two steps forward, one step back? Or one step forward two steps back? Little time for reflection, even less to concentrate and browse for new ideas. Let us move on.

A clever news analysis is by far the maximum we can expect these days from the pensee d'aujourd'hui. The few public intellectuals left, those who did not turn into TV personalities, have little on offer at the brink of the millennium. This is the post-media era with a technological imperative going way beyond broadcasting. News is just another option within a range of menus the networked economy has imposed on its clients/users. Sooner than expected, we have slipped into the Reality of the Virtual. No one Baudrillard anymore to upset liberals and alike. Simulation rules; so does reality TV. The heroic-Hegelian battle between the Real and its Virtual is over. Both are contained, subjected to the same cyber-synergetic forces.

"Kosovo n'existe pas." Not anymore. The dirty reality and its counterpart, the clean, surgical image are intertwined into one never ending stream of infotainment. Also the newly proclaimed infowar of hackers and secret services does not prevent any Kosovo-villagers from being expelled. It just opens a next, still insignificant, battleground. The yet unseen pictures from inside Kosovo will merely intensify the war. Even without shocking imagery we are faced with an evidence overload. There is no truth in the unseen. We are reaching here the point of equation: media=war.

Media never simply represent, or report. Its technological nature drowns out each signal. As spin-offs from the war machine, manipulation is just another technical feature: cut & paste, import-export. Erase and rewind. Media as an 'extension' of war: the mother of all media. It is a daily practice of media professionals, worldwide, getting lost in an uneasy propaganda theater. War as the continuation of politics with the same means: computers. The then authentic outcry in the aftermath of the Romanian television revolution can now be reinterpreted as a violent initiation into the technicality of today's live image production. The staged realities of 1999 have a similar docudrama touch, having to watch history at the speed of light, sending out very basic human impulses, straight through the postmodern surfaces.

Ten years after the Romanian television revolution: "The Internet is with us." Not quite. In the case of the Kosovo war, this new medium has proven particularly vulnerable. Not yet war proof. Not much 'routing around', as the official Internet ideology is stating it so simply. A clear lack of satellite telephones, crypto software, laptops and digicams, technophiles would say. With the armed uprising of the KLA almost 1 1/2 years under way, since late 1996, there are few or no signs of a clandestine press, on either side. No heroic attacks from Serbian opposition on government servers. Hackers are operating on behalf of Slav brotherhood, anti-NATO movements or pro-Albania, but from elsewhere (Russia, USA, Switzerland). With Serbian 'dissident' media being shut down, journalists being killed and intimidated, and Kosovo being destroyed and emptied of people, who is there to do the 'authentic' Internet reporting? It is therefor strange, saying that the Gulfwar belonged to CNN, with Kosovo now being the first Internet war. At least, the pop mythology likes to see it that way.

After the Belgrade 'Internet Revolution', with opennet.org (NOTE OR REFERENCE?) continuing the banned radio signal of B92, using real.audio (December 1996; see David Bennahum in Wired #5.04), we now seem to have the 'Internet War', with Chinese hackers in retaliation for the NATO attack on the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade, bringing down the websites of the US Ministry of Energy and Internal Affairs. In mid May even the rumor got spread that Internet as such would be shut down, which was later denied by American government officials. Internet is supposed to be good for the Yugoslav people! Slobodan Markovic, a young computer programmer, reporting almost daily to the syndicate and nettime mailinglists from Belgrade, puts the effort to shut down the Yu-Net in a broader perspective: "This attempt of shutting down Internet satellite feeds to Yugoslavia is a good reminder that Cyberspace is not situated in some kind of a vacuum and that our REAL governments CAN and WILL do anything that suits their interests. Just like corporate invertebrates, they will do all of that regardless of our communication customs and ethics we developed over years on the Net." (<http://www.nettime.org>)

To illustrate this Slobodan sums up the following incidents.

- Together with Radio B-92, their Internet division (opennet.org) also went down. All of Opennet's classrooms and New Media Labs (like cybeRex) are closed. All of their Internet projects (aimed to education about Internet issues and development of Yugoslav cyberspace) are put on hold or completely cancelled.
- When NATO destroyed the second bridge in Novi Sad one fiber-optic cable carrying Internet traffic was broken.
- When NATO hit one building in Belgrade downtown a great deal of computer equipment, belonging to BITS ISP, was totally destroyed.
- NATO is targeting Post offices in many large cities. Three days ago more than 18.000 people lost their phone connections in (THE) city of Uzice (similar thing happened in (THE) city of Prishtina).
- NATO is using graphite bombs to COMPLETELY disable major Serbian power plants. During five days, more than half of population in Serbia (approx. 5 million of people) did not have electric power.

(Tmhwk censorship! From: Slobodan Markovic <twiddle AT EUnet.yu>, Date: Thu, 13 May 1999 20:43:10 +0200)

It is hard to grasp that an entire region inside (South-East) Europe is being turned into an information black hole. Journalists should just do their job and go there, war or no war, some say. That may be the case for CNN or BBC, with all their resources, but specially these Western news organizations are particularly vulnerable for sophisticated forms of propaganda and manipulation with images. Small media may be 'tactical' (see: n5m conference, Amsterdam, March 12-14, 1999, <http://www/n5m.org>) but they are also easy to shut down. One of

the first things B92 stopped doing after being taken off the air was independent reporting. You need a lot of courage when fellow journalists get killed on the street because of their critique of the regime. Would you have it? Would you stay, not being able to do the work properly, or go in exile and not being in touch anymore with friends, family, events. Probably old dilemmas. Most Kosov AT Albanians did not even had a choice.

What we are left with, on the Serbian-urban side are individual witnesses, diaries, personal accounts. Immediately, even during the first bombs were coming down, they started to pop up, and have not disappeared ever since. Their psycho-geography is limited, by nature, by the very definition of the genre. This is not theory, or critical analysis of politics and the war situation. Add to this the semi-personal touch of e-mail, and presto, there you get an odd, once in a lifetime mixture of paranoia, reflexion, pathetic pity, waves of despair, worrisome productions of subjectivity, with here and there valuable pictures of the everyday life under extraordinary circumstances. Here are some fragments, posted to various mailinglists:

"YES - I AM angry and personally endangered... and not just physically...I have dedicated all my life to computer sciences. Without that what is left for me to do? And yesterday some idiot decided to bomb all the main electric plants in Serbia. When I woke up early this morning (around 4 am) I could only sit silent in the darkness of my room, the darkness of my city, watching darkness on my computer screen! What the hell - the army is using electric power, so let's cut it out COMPLETELY, right?!" (Date: Mon, 3 May 1999 19:47:31 +0200, From: Slobodan Markovic <twiddle AT EUnet.yu> Subject: A Just War, to: nettime and syndicate)

"Do you still believe that they are fighting for human rights? We are in terrible position. If they are fighting only against our government why are they attacking civilians? Do we really need this aggression? Don't they have any other way to persuade our president to negotiate? Do we, civilians, have to suffer because of wrong government on one side and aggressive ways of USA to realize their strategic and economic goals on the other? We only want to live our lives normally. To work, have fun, have families, have healthy children. We are normal people that is very tired of everything that is going on here in the last ten years. Please, help us, by spreading our side of the story all over the world. Tell this to your friends. Anything that you do can be helpful. Help us only by thinking. Remember, this can happen to any poor nation. The world should not be a jungle." (Subject: <nettime> (fwd) my side of the story, From: Marija Marjanovic <marija AT sezampro.yu>, Date: Tue, 4 May 1999 14:35:31 +0200)

"good fucking morning to you too. fucking fucking fucking! early morning, 4.50, all fucking windows were shaking fucking strong, fucking close if anything

happen to my son, i will fucking do something nasty, really nasty i am fucking scared, i am fucking angry, i must be fucking dangerous and do not anyone EVER dare to fucking brainwash me about fucking military targets NEVER FUCKING AGAIN i am dangerously fucking scared and ANGRY! who of you have visited novi sad and who fucking can remember the old bridge, near the fucking oldest bridge which is in danube, as remembrance of fucking WWII and thousands of jews, serbs and others fucking thrown alive in january cold water under the fucking ICE by fucking nazi destroyers? (..) we are still not stinking but shall!!! we shall be fucking stinky, and all fucking picture about fucking stinky serbs will fit finally! but

it will fucking not destroy my fucking memory about the bridge and fucking fear of my little son, NEVER! there are fucking demonstrations everywhere, find a first square and START opposing madness and destroying, fucking NOWNOWNOW NOW NOWNOWNOWNOWNOWNOWNOWNOW NOW NOWNOWNOWNOWNOWNOWNOWNOWNOWNOW lots of love and all the best (just to the friends) and the rest of you-happy fucking 1st of april fucking world joke fucking day (From: baza <baza AT eunet.yu Subject: Syndicate: fucking 1st of april day of fucking joke)

"nato prevents humanitarian catastrophe in kosovo by creating a more grave humanitarian condition in serbia and montenegro. now it is our babies that are short of milk, now the whole population of serbia suffers from food and petrol shortages. this is no way to spread democracy. if it is, democracy is a virus that kills! i am the assistant professor of american and english literature at the university of novi sad. i have visited states and seen myself that it really is a land of opportunities. i am not one of those people who mocks american dream. still, now that i am so tense after spending two days in a damp shelter with a swollen tooth (not being able to visit my doctor in all this mess), now that i am quite tense

and near the end of my tether, i do not want to be harsh, or to use harsh words on anybody. just, please, do not turn american dreams into yugoslav nightmare! (Subject: <nettime> serbian diary, 26 march, From: insomnia <insomnia AT EUnet.yu>, Date: Wed, 31 Mar 1999 14:47:52 -0800)

There has been a fierce (mainly financial) repression of (independent) media before March 24, 1999, the day NATO bombing started (<http://www.dds.nl/~pressnow>). Yet, the belief in civic structures remained amazingly strong. And still does. That's what all these accounts have in common: a strong anger, disbelief, completely unprepared for the 'clean bombing'. Throughout april 1999 the then banned radio station B92 worked on a law suit against the Serbian authorities to get back their radio station, building and equipment, which had been confiscated by a leftist patriotic student organization, Milosovic puppets (see: <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/b92files.htm>). Perhaps a naive, optimistic view, believing in the final victory of Law? The problem here, in my view, is the not any longer existing distinction between war and peace. It seems hard to acknowledge for the advocates of independent media and free

cyberspace that in times of war there is little or no role to play for this famous 'civil society'. Besides buildings, roads, bridges and of course lives of people, the military logic is also destroying civil structures, media first and foremost. Obvious, one would stay. Still, we have got rather high expectations, for example from B92 or even from Kosov AT -Albanians hiding in Preshtina, or somewhere in the mountains. With the vanishing of the very real distinction between civil and military (rule) it is specially the smaller broad/netcasters, local radio and television stations, magazines, newspapers, rooted in the local and national social structures (including its building and technological structure) which are the easy targets. Not the established global news corporations. And the individuals, or communication guerilla units, but that concept is not (yet?) operational within Deep Europe (the former East..). Stuck in the middle of some 'transitions', longing for some basic 'normalization', it seems inappropriate to demand for a militarization towards 'underground' media. In wartime, all media will ultimately surrender to the military logic and will cease to exist. Specially the civic, open and experimental parts of the Internet. Unless its users are prepared, and give up their universal right to communicate random data. Only after such metamorphosis we enter an entire (ENTIRELY) different mediascape, filled with secrecy and distrust. But that's a different track, way beyond, or rather besides, the now historical 1989 paradigm of 'independent' media.

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