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Geert Lovink on Fri, 16 May 1997 10:30:25 +0200 (MET DST)

[Date Prev] [Date Next] [Thread Prev] [Thread Next] [Date Index] [Thread Index]

<nettime> The ABC of Tactical Media

- *To*: nettime-l {AT} Desk.nl
- *Subject*: <nettime> The ABC of Tactical Media
- *From*: Geert Lovink <geert {AT} xs4all.nl>
- *Date*: Fri, 16 May 1997 09:38:11 +0200 (MET DST)
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(This manifest was written for the upcoming opening of the web site of the
Tactical Media Network, hosted by the Waag, the Society for Old and New
Media: http://www.waag.org/tmn). It will contain the archive of the web
site and on-line journal of Next Five Minutes 2, a database of addresses,
the archive of VPRO TVs "Worldreceiver" program and a new "broadcast site"
with samples of new work, made by tactical media groups from all over the
world. Contact: roos {AT} waag.org).

The ABC of Tactical Media
By David Garcia and Geert Lovink

Tactical Media are what happens when the cheap 'do it yourself'
media, made possible by the revolution in consumer electronics and
expanded forms of distribution (from public access cable to the
internet) are exploited by groups and individuals who feel aggrieved by
or excluded from the wider culture. Tactical media do not just report
events, as they are never impartial they always participate and it is
this that more than anything separates them from mainstream media.

A distinctive tactical ethic and aesthetic that has emerged, which is
culturally influential from MTV through to recent video work made by
artists. It began as a quick and dirty aesthetic although it is just
another style it (at least in its camcorder form) has come to symbolize
a verite for the 90's.

Tactical media are media of crisis, criticism and opposition. This is
both the source their power, ("anger is an energy" : John Lydon), and
also their limitation. their typical heroes are; the activist, Nomadic
media warriors, the pranxter, the hacker,the street rapper, the
camcorder kamikaze, they are the happy negatives, always in search of an
enemy. But once the enemy has been named and vanquished it is the
tactical practitioner whose turn it is to fall into crisis. Then
(despite their achievements) its easy to mock them, with catch phrases
of the right, "politically correct" "Victim culture" etc. More

theoretically the identity politics, media critiques and theories
of representation, that became the foundation of much western tactical
media are themselves in crisis. These ways of thinking are widely seen
as, carping and repressive remnants of an outmoded humanism.

To believe that issues of representation are now irrelevant is to
believe that the very real life chances of groups and individuals are
not still crucially affected by the available images circulating in any
given society. And the fact that we no longer see the mass media as the
sole and centralized source of our self definitions might make these
issues more slippery but that does not make them redundant.

Tactical media a qualified form of humanism. A useful antidote to
both, what Peter Lamborn Wilson described, as "the unopposed rule of
money over human beings". But also as an antidote to newly emerging forms
of technocratic scientism which under the banner of post-humanism tend to
restrict discussions of human use and social reception.

What makes Our Media Tactical? In 'The Practice of Every Day Life' De
Certueau analyzed popular culture not as a 'domain of texts or artifacts
but rather as a set of practices or operations performed on textual or
text like structures'. He shifted the emphasis from representations in
their own right to the 'uses' of representations. In other words how do
we as consumers use the texts and artifacts that surround us. And the
answer, he suggested, was 'tactically'. That is in far more creative and
rebellious ways than had previously been imagined. He described the
process of consumption as a set of tactics by which the weak make use of
the strong. He characterized the rebellious user (a term he preferred to
consumer) as tactical and the presumptuous producer (in which he included
authors, educators, curators and revolutionaries) as strategic. Setting
up this dichotomy allowed him to produce a vocabulary of tactics rich and
complex enough to amount to a distinctive and recognizable aesthetic. An
existential aesthetic. An aesthetic of Poaching, tricking, reading,
speaking, strolling, shopping, desiring. Clever tricks, the hunter's
cunning, maneuvers, polymorphic situations, joyful discoveries, poetic
as well as warlike.

Awareness of this tactical/strategic dichotomy helped us to name a class
of producers of who seem uniquely aware of the value of these temporary
reversals in the flow of power. And rather than resisting these
rebellions do everything in their power to amplify them. And indeed make
the creation of spaces, channels and platforms for these reversals
central to their practice. We dubbed their (our) work tactical media.

Tactical Media are never perfect, always in becoming,
performative and pragmatic, involved in a continual process of
questioning the premises of the channels they work with. This
requires the confidence that the content can survive intact as it
travels from interface to interface. But we must never forget that
hybrid media has its opposite its nemesis, the Medialen
Gesamtkunstwerk. The final program for the electronic
Bauhaus.

Of course it is much safer to stick to the classic rituals of the
underground and alternative scene. Bu tactical media are based on a

principal of flexible response, of working with different coalitions, being able to move between the different entities in the vast media landscape without betraying their original motivations. Tactical Media may be hedonistic, or zealously euphoric. Even fashion hypes have their uses. But it is above all mobility that most characterizes the tactical practitioner. The desire and capability to combine or jump from one media to another creating a continuous supply of mutants and hybrids. To cross boarders, connecting and re-wiring a variety of disciplines and always taking full advantage of the free spaces in the media that are continually appearing because of the pace of technological change and regulatory uncertainty.

Although tactical media include alternative media, we are not restricted to that category. In fact we introduced the term tactical to disrupt and take us beyond the rigid dichotomies that have restricted thinking in this area, for so long, dichotomies such as amateur Vs professional, alternative Vs mainstream. Even private Vs public.

Our hybrid forms are always provisional. What counts are the temporary connections you are able to make. Here and now, Not some vaporware promised for the future. But what we can do on the spot with the media we have access to. Here in Amsterdam we have access to local TV, digital cities and fortresses of new and old media. In other places they might have theater, street demonstrations, experimental film, literature, photography.

Tactical media's mobility connects it to a wider movement of migrant culture. Espousedby the proponents of what Nie Ascherson described as the stimulating pseudo science of Nomadism. 'The human race say its exponants are entering a new epoch of movement and migration. The subjects of history once the settled farmers and citizens, have become the migrants,the refugees the gastarbeiters, the asylum seekers, the urban homeless.'

An exemplery example of the tactical can be seen in the work of the Polish artist Krzystof Wodiczko who 'perceives how the hordes of the displaced that now occupy the public space of cities squares, parks or railway station concourses which were once designed by a triumphant middle class to celebrate the conquest of its new political rights and economic liberties. Wodiczko thinks that these occupied spaces form new agoras. which should be used for statements. 'The artist', he says, 'needs to learn how to operate as a nomadic sophist in a migrant polis.'

Like other migrant media tactitions Wodiczko has studied the techniques by which the weak become stronger than the opressors by scatering , by becoming centreless, by moving fast across the physical or media and virtual landscapes. 'The hunted mustdiscover the ways become the hunter.'

But capital is also radically deterritorialized. This is why we like being based in a building like De Waag, an old fortress in the center of Amsterdam. We happily accept the paradox of *centers* of tactical media. As well as castles in the air, we need fortresses of bricks and mortar, to resist a world of unconstrained nomadic capital.

Spaces to plan not just improvise and the possibility of capitalizing on
acquired advantages, has always been the preserve of 'strategic' media.
As flexible media tacticians, who are not afraid of power, we are happy
to adopt this approach ourselves.

Every few years we do a Next 5 Minutes conference on tactical media from
around the world. Finally we have a base (De Waag) from which we hope to
consolidate and build for the longer term. We see this building as a
place to plan regular events and meetings, including coming The Next 5
Minutes. We see the coming The Next 5 Minutes (in january 1999), and
discussions leading up to it, as part of a movement to create an antidote
to what Peter Lamborn Wilson described, as 'the unopposed rule of money
over human beings.'

- Prev by Date: **Re: <nettime> re: As Above, [So Below] - Critical Art Ensemble**
- Next by Date: **<nettime> zkp4 table of contents**
- Prev by thread: **<nettime> sexriot in amsterdam**
- Next by thread: **<nettime> zkp4 table of contents**
- Index(es):
  - **Date**
  - **Thread**