

The Art of Security

Culture and 21st Century Risk Management

Konrad Becker

konrad@t0.or.at

www.t0.or.at

world-information.org

[Compiled a while ago for a Global Security Alliance project – that has not been realized yet – for your safety and pleasure...]

Global-Security-Alliance.com

Ever since the end of the Cold War, culture has made a dramatic return to the international stage. The predictions are that its presence will be even more widely felt in the new millennium [...] displacing military coercion as a political tool.

“Culture, Identity and Security”

Project On World Security, Rockefeller Fund, Amir Pasic, 1998

A new security culture is emerging in key sectors of society. Security has become a central economic, societal and political issue and has reached deep into the sphere of art and culture. While culture increasingly receives the spotlight in International Relations studies and military strategy documents the OECD calls for a “Culture of Security” and encourages the development of a mindset to respond to the threats and vulnerabilities of Information Systems (1), Raoul Vaneigem in “The Revolution of Everyday Life” (2) pointed to the importance of an assurance of security for the project of cultural self-realization by providing energy formerly expended in the struggle for survival. Although this need for safety can get in conflict with the need for freedom of art and expression, this freedom is itself based on security for the arts. As the traditional discourse on the freedom of art has slowly faded to the background it has given place to thinking about the role of art in a security culture. It therefore seems appropriate to look at the relation of art and security and the role and service that art can offer to security issues.

In a changing world of insecurity and threats which is based on politics of mediated reality control, artists are forced to adapt their role in society. The politics of creative industries have been criticized for endangering democratic struggle against the

“reduction of inequalities and of various forms of subordination” (3), as a result of privatizing the public sphere. By shifting “democratization in the realm of aesthetics and taste” (4), the ideology of a commercially driven culture of creative industries is opposed to an understanding of culture as central to social justice and self-governance, but a security driven global cultural environment raises new questions regarding dissent, resistance and autonomy. Security seems to know no ideological boundaries; from the manuals of the Brazilian Urban Guerrilla to those of the School of Americas, never the slightest sign of laxity in the maintenance of security measures and regulations was permitted. In Security Culture the concept of creative industries, to bring the fine arts in from the cold into the productive forces of industry and thus bring security to the artists and culture to the machines of capital is advanced into the understanding of the arts becoming a security force by itself.

The word “secure” started to find its modern use in the 14th century, when the securing of roads, in particular for merchants and pilgrims, became a major concern. The Emperor, and more importantly, the respective princes declared the protection of the highways and signed treaties to this effect. 1375 the Dukes of Austria and Bavaria agreed “that they will protect and secure the roads everywhere”. While classic ideological assumptions hold that liberal freedoms in culture are by necessity bought with blood and that liberal values can only be uphold through lethal force, Paul Virilio claims that what drives our technocratic societies is not capital but militarism and the security complex itself. The culture that develops out of this dromological movement and permanent state of crisis is fixated on security and speed, on who can protect themselves best and fastest. Thanks to this, technological production attains a new dimension, and capital can be invested in weapons, tools and even more security. The age of computing brought about the control revolution but as every cryptographer knows, security is an illusion.

Security has complex dimensions in informational societies and is strongly based in subjective experiences. Personal feelings of fear and safety are grounded in multiple unconscious causes and composite experiences. The ‘fear of death’ combines the abstract, empirical fact of biological death, subjective emotional fear of ceasing-to-be and ontological anxiety itself. This sense of ‘ontological insecurity’ is intensified by an increasing awareness of ‘risk’ in society at large. Ulrich Beck divides modern civilization into three epochs of pre-industrial, industrial, and “global risk society” (5) suggesting that individuals have all become increasingly aware of the dangers that face them in both the social and the natural environments and feel powerless to minimize them. But in a culture of fear, public perceptions about risk cannot only be understood as reactions to a particular incident or technology and anxieties are not necessarily correlated with the scale and intensity of a specific real danger. The social changes of this ‘politics of uncertainty’ (6) have reached every sphere of our lives and every context of social interaction and have led to what Lasch (7) called the ‘survivalist mentality’. Although society at large is affected by the pervasive effects of ontological insecurity, survivalism, millennium angst or whatever it is called, the crisis remains to a large extent only indirectly visible at the societal level. In a cultural narrative of a world of fear and impending catastrophe, survival is the best possible outcome for the individual and experiments or aspirations for change appear dangerous. While the advocacy of safety and the rejection of risk-taking are now seen as positive values across the entire political spectrum, avoiding injury and encouraging passivity becomes an objective in itself and dissent a security concern. But risk avoidance has not only become an important theme

in political debate and the issue of safety thoroughly politicized, risk has become big business from “risk analysis” to “risk management” and “risk communications”.

In the “The Culture of Control” (8) David Garland describes the shifting policies of crime, punishment and security in a rapidly changing world. He predicts that this new control culture guarantees to provide an “iron cage” for all, a dark age of fear that serves the informational datalords controlling the security zones. In the USA, besides the “virtual prison” or prisons without walls made possible by the Global Positioning System (GPS), there are already more than 2 million people in prison and two executions every week, Europe’s prison population is growing faster than ever, as are the numbers of surveillance cameras on city streets. Public police is increasingly replaced by private security corporations, public prisons by private corrections management facilities and state armies by mercenary forces. This privatization has a direct effect on concepts and practices of security and creates new forms of war and peace both within and between states.

Surveillance to control persons and their behavior is a prime method to gain security. In western liberal societies that have undergone processes of steady privatization surveillance is primarily viewed in terms of privacy or an intrusion on intimacy and anonymity which fails to identify the key aspects of contemporary surveillance ‘social sorting’ and exclusion. “The increasingly automated discriminatory mechanisms for risk profiling and social categorizing represent a key means of reproducing and reinforcing social, economic, and cultural divisions” writes David Lyon in “Terrorism and Surveillance” (9). Foucault described surveillance as a social technology of power in “Discipline and Punish” (10) and his thesis that western societies can be characterized as ‘disciplinarian’, as a strategy for normalizing the individual or managing social collectivities, has become a widely accepted formula of domination in these societies. Although the Orwellian or Foucaultian perspectives provide a largely centralized understanding of surveillance, given the technological capacities for decentralization Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in “A Thousand Plateaus” suggest that the growth of surveillance systems is a loose and flowing rhizomatic set of processes rather than a centrally controlled and coordinated system (11). But the more networked modes of social organization with their flexibility and departmental openness, the surveillance assemblage, can still be co-opted for conventional purposes although as Guy Debord mentions in his Treatise on Secrets “The controlling centre has become occult: never to be occupied by a known leader, or clear ideology” (12).

Secure hegemony and information dominance needs to embrace culture, art and ideology to subdue criticism and resistance, extending mastery to the symbolic level, what Max Weber calls “charismatic domination”. Even when coercion or force remains necessary, culture can intensely support security operations. Like game rules, culture also defines value and constitutes interests by delineating what is worth pursuing and what must be avoided. The rules of a game do not simply tell a player what kinds of moves can and cannot be made, they indicate what the game is about; they reveal its purpose and objectives, and how a player is expected to behave. Culture not only keeps actors in line, and through this eases the work of the sanctioning agent, but it can legitimize security enforcement, thereby reducing resistance to it. As “the infosphere imposes itself on the geosphere” (13) and propelled by the dynamics of international security threats we have entered a new era which mirrors the hegemonic instrumentalization of culture in the bipolar “Cultural Cold War” (14) on the level of

global Empire. “We are attempting to influence a global mix of emotions and cultures to join in the creation of a new world order.” (15)

In analogy to the military Information Peacekeeping and psychological stability operations in so called Other Operations than War, artists can increasingly play a role in Cultural Peacekeeping reinforcing values and counter general disorientation of the population. The tactical and strategic use of cultural symbol manipulation by trained artists can be most successfully applied to cultural security management. The artistic intervention at the interface of fear and longing, the personal desires among which physical and psychological security rank highest, can be extremely effective. Along with the culturalization of security we are facing what Franco Berardi Bifo calls the “militarization of the general intellect” a militarization of the intellectual capacity created by the development of collective intelligence, and supported by the technicalities ICT.

An increasing convergence of security and culture and the rise of the so called Military Entertainment Complex or MIME-Net (Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment-Network) have been described by James Der Derian and Bruce Sterling amongst others. Virtual War has gone to Hollywood where the boundaries between computer simulations for military purposes and computer games and entertainment graphics have long dissolved into mutual cooperation. What John Naisbitt dubbed the Military-Nintendo Complex refers to an increasingly intense collaboration of high tech, media, military and the intelligence sectors involving personnel and technologies from both the security and the entertainment industry in cooperative ventures. This development creates a fusion of the digital simulation and the factual, of the virtual and the real and with it the disappearance of the borders between fantasy and reality.

In the widely discussed Chinese strategy paper on the 21st century Global Security Environment by Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui (16) the boundaries lying between the two worlds of military and non-military will be totally destroyed. This matches US concepts of Total War without a defined stage or theater of battle. The war of the future is described as non-war actions on a battlefield that will be everywhere. Using the term “Omnidirectionality” as the starting point of an “Unrestricted Warfare” culture based on information technology and unconventional warfare in low-intensity conflicts. “The direction of warfare is an art similar to a physician seeing a patient” (Fu Le) and an artistic tradition of security may well be proven by Sun Tzu’s famous treatise on War as an Art (500 BC). Guy Debord, in *Methods of Detournement*, strictly denies the justification of any traditional practice of art and positions the artist in societal conflict that he defines as civil war: “where all known means of expression are going to converge in a general movement of propaganda which must encompass all the perpetually interacting aspects of social reality.” (17)

This principle of omnidirectionality extends to the conquest of outer space. By 1968 space has been declared “Today’s Front Line of Defense” and the extension of military systems beyond the lower atmosphere as “natural and evolutionary”. Three decades later “Space is a real priority for national security” (18) and the ground for exotic weaponry like directed-energy weapons, such as space lasers, is prepared. At the same time as, for the first time in history, the arena of human conflicts is extended from the planets surface into outer space the colonization of inner space, the internalized pacification and the policing of the cognitive act is accelerated. The programs for colonization and

militarization of outer space in the sixties have gained momentum at the same time as the search for counterintelligence truth serums led to exotic psychological experiments with the side effect of a massive diffusion of psychoactive substances in the US. Advanced technologies of the Star Wars program and space-based weapon systems are also applied to the most internal security issues of the imagination and desire. "Communication and control belong to the essence of man's inner life, even as they belong to his life in society," said Norbert Wiener and what used to be called the "colonization of the mind" is now more aptly described as the encoding of the mind. Thus creating the class of code warriors in the psychological war zone of "bunkering in and dumbing down" (19).

With the end of the bipolar world of the Cold War nuclear deterrence, where the fear of total annihilation kept the "peace", it seems now that terrorism, a rhizomatic omnidirectional network of fear, is the pivot point of global security. This ubiquitous low intensity conflicts with decentralized structures of flat hierarchies corresponds to the postmodern theories of geopolitical conflict management and security policies. But statistics of terrorism are fundamentally meaningless because to say that no definition has gained universal acceptance is an understatement. The expression "One man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter" indicates that the term is usually applied on the basis of whether one agrees with the goal of the violence, and terrorism is the violence committed by the disapproved other. The first use of the term "terrorism" in 1795, related to the Reign of Terror instituted by the French government while any use in anti-government activity is not recorded until 1866 (Ireland) and 1883 (Russia). But since then it has been not only an instrument of the armies and the secret police of governments but of political, nationalistic or ethnic groups with most diverse objectives. In contrast to the attack on military targets, state- or guerrilla terrorism actions are directed at civilian targets. Terrorism's intent is to change behavior by inducing fear in someone other than its victims. The US DOD definition of terrorism is "the calculated use of violence or the threat of violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological". These indirect attacks create a public atmosphere of anxiety and the need for publicity in the economy of attention usually drives target selection. Terrorist violence is neither spontaneous nor random but intended to produce fear, a psychological act conducted for its impact on an audience. Thus despite its violent character terrorism can be understood as a psychological discipline and the concept of terror can be extended to manipulation based on fear without physical damage or violence against persons.

Although the term "Propaganda by Deed" coined by Serge Nechayev originally refers to the acts of violence used against the representatives of political and economic repression in the late 19th century, since then many have begun to redefine Propaganda by Deed to incorporate more than simple acts of violence. Like terrorists, artists are asymmetric and unconventional in their actions, choosing unorthodox methods of operation. These ideas in the cultural field became visible in movements like Berlin Dada or the Situationists whose members have been described as intellectual terrorists or authors like William Burroughs who described tactics of psychological attacks (The Electronic Revolution) and cultural sabotage in the 60's. In the influential work on the Temporary Autonomous Zone (20), the concept of art as poetic terrorism has been introduced to a large audience and continued to be an important source for urban cultural vigilantes. With the aim to change someone's life, poetic terrorism does not necessarily target feelings of angst but tries to achieve the emotional intensity of terror through other powerful psychological agents like disgust, sexual arousal, superstitious awe or identity deconstruction. Advanced artistic

and cultural practice has increasingly shown an affinity with the operational mode and analytical thinking that is related to the counter-terrorist and special operations units. In *Mind Invaders* (21), a reader on contemporary psychic warfare, cultural sabotage and semiotic terrorism, of a multitude of cultural terrorist groups that are dedicated to attacking some of the very foundations of “Western Civilization” are portrayed. This vortex of free association and continuously dissolving and regrouping anonymous cells spontaneously organizes collective psychic attacks and tactical operations against repressive notions of identity while moving in several directions at once.

A new security culture emerges in this economy of fear and it is critical for artists to analyze the issues of perception and representation in a technologically accelerated risk society. A convergence of security industry and culture based on the overlapping of psychological and emotional motives becomes evident and not surprisingly artists and cultural workers have been the first to realize this and put it into practice.

There is a high investment into the new security culture which makes it well worth to look into the underlying premises and constituting influences of this culture. The transfer of desire to the informational security apparatus, the machinery of control, creates a new market for art and culture where secure imagination and secure imaginary environments are best selling propositions. But the extended subjective experience of instability and personal insecurity is increasingly shaping society in its relation to authoritarian implications of psychological states of regression and dependence. Artists and cultural workers could bring diversity to some of the a priori monolithic concepts of an inherited ontotheology of security and reverse the survivalist security impulse into a refined art.

Notes

- 1) OECD August 7, 2002
- 2) Vaneigem 1967
- 3) Mouffe 1997
- 4) Osuri 2001
- 5) Beck 1994
- 6) Marris 1996
- 7) Lash 1984
- 8) Garland 2002
- 9) Lyon 2001
- 10) Foucault 1979
- 11) Deleuze, Guattari 1987
- 12) Debord 1990
- 13) Virilio, *Der Derian* 1996
- 14) Stonor-Saunders 1999
- 15) “Art Fighting Terror”, website now defunct
- 16) Liang, Xiangsui 1999
- 17) Debord 1956
- 18) Ride 2002
- 19) Kroker 1996
- 20) Bey 1987
- 21) Ed. Home 1997

G.S.A. Int. www.global-security-alliance.com