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Media Hacking - What is it?

Today's media plays an important role to our society. Seen by most people as the only possibility to get news and information, it has grown to an institution which doesn't only inform us, it also forms our opinion and our way of thinking. Additionally today's mass media has gained a certain level of trust, the average consumer does not really scrutinize, does not validate.

This situation keeps some dangerous aspects within itself: First, the consumer lost the ability to think of his own, try to get to the bottom of a topic and to ask critical questions. Further the consumer got into a dependence to mass media so his focus on a certain topic will only be as far as mass media allows him to do. The conclusion: the consumer sets himself in a kind of censorship by choice, because it's way too comfortable.

At this is point, media activists join the game. They enter the field, present their topic in a very subversive way, mostly as shocking as possible, and disappear as fast as they rose up. Their aim is to get the regular couch-potato to use his own brain, and to spread their opinion.

The reason why people actually do media hacking isn't very clear. Most of the hacks happen just for fun, to create art, or they are driven by the fact of 'because we can', on the other hand it seems there are also some groups who have a serious ambition, for example anti-globalization, as seen at the Yes-Men.

Sometimes the Methods of media hacking are used to advertise, but as the art of making money has nothing to do with the art of hacking, advertisement is not seen as part of media hacking.

Media Hacking - How is it done?

There is no consistent way of 'how media hacking is done', but most media hacks follow a similar scheme:

First of all, you need a topic to work with. Either you are aiming a special goal with your work (given you are an activist) then the topic is already set. Otherwise some hacks also happen by opportunity. Setting up fake websites or taking part in announcement for interviews, or speaking as a fake person on conferences is a common method to get first in contact with the media.

Knowing your topic is an important fact for media hacking. You need to do a lot of investigation and preparation. The best way is to use a fake name, get dressed properly, be prepared and always be as kind as possible to fulfill a successful hack.

The moment you are actually in front of the cameras or the microphones deserves strong nerves and some acting talents: Stick to the topic, present it in a subversive way, and act natural just as your role you are playing would do.

The last point is to expose yourself afterwards, when the final hack is done. Either you are using your fake website to do so, leave traces in the media agency (forgotten memo), or just call the media to tell them it all was a hoax.

Some big media hacks last several years and lead from one to another starting at little conferences or at local basis where you can socialize with other conference members, until getting an interview announcement to one of the big media agencies.

The Yes Men

The Yes Men, often described as 'two gonzo political activists' are a group of media hackers who practice what they call 'identity correction'. For more than twenty years Jacques Servin and Igor Vamos (better known under the pseudonyms "Andy Bichlbaum" and "Mike Bonano") are hacking media as a part of their activities.

They have gained a lot of fame not only because of three documentary movies about their hacks, also for the delicate methods they chose to do so.

Speaking as fake spokesmen for the WTO they manage to criticize globalization on several layers.

At a TV live interview in the year 2001 at CNBC with anti-globalization activists, Andy Bichlbaum proposes as "Granwyth Hulatberì" a draft: It should exist a free market for human rights abuse, enabled by the so called "Justice Vouchers". The rich are justified to do so, because they own power, the poor doesn't have either power or money, so they are unlucky. Anti-globalization activist Barry Coates nearly lost control, CNBC sent a few days later a letter of thanks..

In the same year the Yes Men spoke in Tampere (Finland) at a conference about the future of textile trade. Andy Bichlbaum managed to glorify slavery and comes up with an idea: It would be much easier not to import the slaves in other countries (American history has proven), just keep the slaves in their homeland, it's cheaper for the company and the slave is more productive, because he feels himself as a free man but is actually still exploitable by the company. Based on this idea Andy Bichlbaum created a special need to keep the slaves under total surveillance. To solve that problem he presented a special suite for managers to keep the slaves under total control from anywhere on the world. As a reaction from the audience there was only applause, nobody had a problem with the topic of slavery..

Sources & further information

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Guerrilla_communication
- <http://youtu.be/XXSg8BApBwA> (Banksy uses Street-art for Media Hacking)

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- <http://www.digicult.it/digimag/article.asp?id=1675> (An Interview to the Yes Men)

- <http://www.gatt.org>
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 - <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/McLibel>

Movies:

- The Yes Men (2003)
 - [<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0379593/>]
- The Yes Men fix the World (2009)
 - [<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1352852/> | <http://theyesmenfixtheworld.com/>]