Transparancy
Publicity and Secrecy in the Age of WikiLeaks

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Taking WikiLeaks as an illustrative example, *Open* 22 investigates how transparency and secrecy relate to one another, to the public and to publicity in our computerized visual cultures. This issue continues to explore what for *Open* are fundamental themes such as privatization, mediatization and the demand for the communal. In the more general sense, it examines transparency as an ideology, the ideal of the free flow of information versus the fight over access to information and the intrinsic connection between publicity and secrecy. It also tries to come to grips with the social and political implications of the phenomenon of WikiLeaks, which, with the illustrious Julian Assange as front man, produces an effect on a global scale. While most people would agree that WikiLeaks has started something that is unstoppable; there is hardly any consensus on its morality, effectiveness or strategy, neither in conservative nor in progressive circles.

WikiLeaks, as the counterpart of the 'transparent' citizen or consumer, expresses a growing public desire for openness and transparency as regards the state, businesses and administrators – a demand for publicity that is continually fed by floods of sensational social and political revelations. And whereas people often consider secrecy within the public sphere to be inadmissible and clandestine, transparency is associated with democracy, participation and accessibility. But does transparency only work in a liberating way? Can it not equally have a concealing or controlling effect? Aren't certain forms of transparency actually the manifestation of the banality of the contemporary spectacle, which revolves around pure display and the production of affects?

In any case, with their capacity to immediately reproduce and disseminate information, the media play a crucial role in the social process of displaying and disclosing. But on behalf of whom are they doing this, and for whom? Do they not increasingly form an abstract power?

Two introductory essays explore political and social notions of transparency and secrecy. Media theorist Felix Stalder searches for a form of transparency that is not employed as a means of power and control, such as in neoliberal market thinking, but that can express and strengthen social solidarity. Stefan Nowotny, philosopher, goes into publicity and openness as a modern myth in relation to the production of affects and the exercise of power, and finds that secrecy and publicity are intertwined more than ever.

Other pieces directly examine WikiLeaks and its implications. Philosopher and media theorist Boris Groys argues that WikiLeaks' democratic universal openness is based on the most absolute secretiveness, and as a matter of fact is a conspiracy. The American political theorist Jodi Dean shows herself to be extremely critical about WikiLeaks, stating that too much information is a greater handicap than too little information in 'communicative capitalism' and that Julian Assange, by becoming a star in his own story, takes attention away from the political issues he says he wants to bring to the public's attention. The interview conducted by Willem van Weelden, researcher-publicist on interactive media, with media theorist Geert Lovink and political scientist/sociologist Merijn Oudenampsen goes into the question of whether and how WikiLeaks brings about social and political

change, and what the platform means for contemporary forms of art and activism. In the column, Jorinde Seijdel wonders where WikiLeaks and Facebook converge, seeing as both avow transparency as their ideology but apparently out of very different motives.

Transparency and secrecy are also relevant concepts in art and architecture. The art historian Roel Griffioen posits that, analogous to social developments, the ideal of the glass house in modern and contemporary architecture has made way for the house of one-way glass, in which concealing has become just as important as displaying. Art theorist Sven Lütticken discusses how the structure of the modern art work offers the perfect means of gaining insight into the dialectics of opacity and transparency in this age of public secrets. The work of Amsterdam-based American artist Zachary Formwalt, who also made a special visual contribution to this issue, is one example of this.

This issue features a number of excerpts from *Failed States*, a manuscript-in-progress by American artist Jill Magid that investigates transparency and secrecy out of Magid's desire to be an eyewitness to the 'war on terror' and the media's representation of it. British artist Heath Bunting contributed a fold-out flowchart that explores the porous borders between the individual, their 'data body' and corporations.

Illustrations of a project by designer Floor Koomen and graphic design students of the Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam can be found throughout this issue. The assignment consisted of selecting a leak from the WikiLeaks website and editing and designing it for a print-on-demand publication, thus providing us with a critical look at WikiLeaks as a medium and the current position of journalism. (see: www.orderyourwikileak.org)

Jorinde Seijdel is an independent writer, editor and lecturer on subjects concerning art and media in our changing society and the public sphere. She is editor-in-chief of *Open! Platform for Art, Culture & the Public Domain* (formerly known as *Open. Cahier on Art & the Public Domain*). In 2010 she published *De waarde van de amateur* [The Value of the Amateur] (Fonds BKVB, Amsterdam), about the rise of the amateur in digital culture and the notion of amateurism in contemporary art and culture. Currently, she is theory tutor at the Gerrit Rietveld Academie and Head of the Studium Generale Rietveld Academie in Amsterdam. With Open!, she is a partner of the Dutch Art Institute MA Art Praxis in Arnhem.

Tags

Aesthetics, Art Discourse, Control, Media Society, Public Domain, Transparency

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