

harce

**An analysis of relations between
corporate and independent media.**

Introduction

My work deals with what I consider one of, if not the most, important issues of our times. There is the global warming, people starving, wars, all that crazy stuff around us, which obviously needs consideration, is important, and so on, but as I think it's smarter to rather disarm somebody pointing a gun at another person, then to try to stop the bullet in the air, so I won't bother about them. In my consideration the gun, actually pointing in *our* own head, (with *us* meaning the north/western societies) are the media. Obviously not too many people die hit by a newspaper (though a TV set might do the trick) but the media carry the ideas, and quite everything is dependant on them. Especially with some particular people having some big red buttons quite close to them, or at least good few thousand armed people who, because of the same ideas, tend to listen to them. My work is meant to analyse the relations between two kinds of media, but the analysis itself is pointless, without the context, which sadly doesn't seem to be understood by most. Otherwise (without giving the context) it would be appropriate to ask a question like „but what could You actually do with the computers?“ just after somebody explains what a computer is, 30 years ago...

So, my work consists of two parts; fluent, not split by half or any other „border line“, as that would just make things harder to understand, but as it may seem going „off topic“ at some points, it's mostly to explain the „why?“ behind the „what?“.

At this point I would like to underline one thing – I consider myself a part in the conflict that I'm describing, so by no means this work should be read as objective, despite the fact that I'll try to do my best in achieving the half-mythical „objectivity“... I assume that it is impossible to put any and all personal beliefs aside, as they influence what we do on the lowest, subcounties levels of our activity(1). I'm a Indymedia editorial collective (imc-pl) member, video activist, blogger, independent journalist, political and union

activist and above all, a social anarchist. I got arrested for my activity and spend nights dreaming about the final end of the corporate system and capitalism in general, even the sheep's that I count are black and don't follow the rest. Please keep that in mind while reading further on.

Last thing that I would like to note here is in my bibliography which looks rather as a „internetography“. The reason is practical. I read most of the books and scripts that I base my knowledge on back in Poland, and they happen to still be there, so using-citing them, in an acceptable manner becomes a problem, just like bringing about 20kg of books in a backpack, or finding every one of them in a library and finding the right parts. So my work might seem to be based only on materials published in the Internet, because I'm only crediting them... but even at the moment, as I think it wouldn't be a problem to actually learn it completely off the Internet, I ask for forgiveness when it comes to my poor bibliography. To fix that I'll rather focus on real life examples instead of theory. As well this way I'll write „Chomsky“ few dozen times less...

Term introduction

There are three terms in my work, that need to be explained in the beginning, as there won't be a page without them further on.

Corporate Media – media meaning TV, newspapers, radio's, magazines and Internet portals, and sites are quite obvious, but I think that „corporate“ might need a bit more explanation; the word corporation comes from Latin *corpus* meaning body, a human body. During the centuries „corporations“ were brought into existence as a form of organisation for a particular purpose – like let's say, building a bridge, and were closed after their reason of existence was fulfilled, just as their contract said. Probably they would keep their good name till today, if not that around 19th century a small thing changed. Instead

of a relatively small thing. their only interest, became earning money, and as their rights were altered to look just like the ones of a human being, („an artificial legal entity (technically, a juristic person) which, while made up of a number of natural persons or other legal entities, has a separate legal identity from them."(2)), soon they evolved into „beings” - as Chomsky points out „Corporations, which previously had been considered artificial entities with no rights, were accorded all the rights of persons, and far more, since they are "immortal persons," and "persons" of extraordinary wealth and power. Furthermore, they were no longer bound to the specific purposes designated by State charter, but could act as they choose, with few constraints.” If we add that the corporations, „when considered as natural living persons, exhibit the traits of antisocial personality disorder or psychopathy” as Joel Bakan (3) shows in his documentary and book „Corporation” (being one of the best popular critical analysis of corporations by the way) we get the idea why generally people don't like them... If they think of things like that, off course.

Propaganda and Propaganda Model – propaganda, despite it's „nazi connotations” is actually a invention that might be credited to the British (which might seem obvious from the Irish perspective) and its short story looks more or less like that: first the Brits use it to drag the Americans, or the „intellectual” part of them, to be exact, into the 1 World War gig, then, the American politicians, use it to convince their citizens, disgustingly pacifist at the time, to join in the whole war thing, then Hitler notices that its a quite good idea, and adapts it in Germany, meanwhile the guys who succeeded in convincing fellow citizens that dying in Europe might be a good idea, decide to make money out of this, and go in to advertisements with Bernays as the front man(4). Now the *Propaganda Model* is more then that, its a name that Chomsky and Edward Herman coined describing a certain phenomenon in the book „Manufacturing Consent” (where the title is actually a phrase created by the USA propaganda and advertisement guru Bernays, mentioned a second ago). They claim that the idea of most people, of what the product is in the media, is quite wrong, as its not the newspapers, that usually actually cost to more print then people pay for them, but the people, or „the audience” themselves, as they are sold by the media to the advertisers – segregated by

their intellect, attitude, as the content of the „media“ is directed to particular people that the advertisers want to reach. Further more the content itself isn't good as well as its mostly propaganda for consumerist culture... So whatever it is, it goes throo 5 filters. The filters are;

1. Ownership of the medium – most of the people like to earn money, and obviously telling bad things about your boss in a mass media isn't exactly the best idea. And as it happens the news company's are owned by bigger corporations, like General Electric for example. So You don't write about them... oh, and they, the big corporations, tend to be quite big, and own some more company's like food production, arms production, chemical production, and often enough actually every possible part of buissnes and production around...
2. Mediums funding sources – I'll just use the words of the main French television station TF1 president: "... the job of TF1 is to help Coca-Cola, for example, to sell its product. [...] In order for an advertising message to be perceived, the brain of the television viewer must be available. Our broadcasts are aimed at making that brain available: i.e. by distracting it, by relaxing it and preparing it between two messages. What we sell to Coca-Cola is time with this available human brain."
3. Sourcing – it's cheaper to just check the official press releases, then to actually send a reporter to the spot, a company has to be cost effective... and who can You trust if not the police, government and the big, well established business?
4. Flak - the newspaper/show wont earn any money if the advertisers wont want to put their adverts in... „so we better like it“
5. Anti-communist ideology or anti-ideologies – ther's nothing better then a good enemy, one that would allow exploit peoples fear, doesn't mather if hes real or not... red scare, green scare, terrorist threat, and if you don't cooperate with us, maybe it's because your with them?(5)

The „filters“ explain why and how any information can, and a hour with FOX NEWS(6) proves, is changed into propaganda broadcast that suites two purposes – to entertain so the advertisements got a nice background, and to teach the audience what is right.

Independent or Citizen Media – stretches to sites like Indymedia, blogs,

v(ideo)logs, podcasts, generally „digital storytelling” - basically its media created and spread by the people themselves, and as there's a wide range of them, for the purpose of my work I'll focus on Indymedia (aka IMC – Independent Media Center) as an example. Established in 1999 during Seattle protests against the WTO - there were meant to serve as an alternative source of information, alternative then the corporate media of course, (it wouldn't be so smart to protest against somebody and then hope to be properly presented in the media owned by him). During the protest imc got 1,5 million hits - more than BBC or CNN, which was an astonishing success, currently there's bit less than 200, with 2 in Poland (general and Toruń) and one in Ireland. The basic way Indymedia works is that anybody can publish anything - photos, video, text - if it breaks editorial policy which is created by the editorial collective it gets hidden but is still accessible if anybody wants to see it. Nobody gets paid and all the work is voluntary, there's no „chief – redactor”, all the decision is made on the basis of consensus (for which reason most editorial collectives consist mostly of anarchists as it's hard for authoritarian left to organise in an egalitarian manner), and of course there's no commercials.

The relations between them could be divided into two basic groups: good and bad ones, but as it's a love hate relationship (mostly hate thou) it's hard to put a straight line between them, especially when it comes to the „web 2.0“ which I'll explain in due course. I'll do my best to divide them into basic groups of issues, with the bad ones upfront, and the „good“ ones at the end, still it's a bit like informing somebody that his house got set on fire but the white fence is ok. Mostly.

Stilling materials. While doing research I didn't find cases of „stiling stories“ from the Irish indymedia, where's some of the mainstream press like The Village magazine frequently „pick up“ subjects raised on indymedia, in Poland, we had few cases of copying out information without appropriate source information (as all materials, unless stated otherwise, are published on creative commons licence(7), its only about putting a line where does it come from) in this case, the corporate media are taking advantage of the fact that the independent media are far less popular and even if they would want to, couldn't afford a solicitor.

Fighting independent media – which splits into two again: it's either direct - attacks on particular sites or groups that use or run them, or indirect - mostly by being passive when they should react, like when the state breaks the freedom of speech.

An example of a direct attack on an IMC might be last year's front offensive of Sunday Independent against Irish Indymedia and in person one of the editorial collective „Chekov“, in their article(8), which as well presented a link to a far-right orientated blog(9) gathering, and offering money for private data of people active in the editorial collective(10). The traces found later in the investigation by indymedia activists connected the blog with Sunday Independent redaction. The problem with situations like this one is that often the activists might be considered to react aggressively, as most of people couldn't put themselves in a position of an activist „standing alone against the mechanisms of global capitalism“ as well people consider the press „objective“ (if they like it) so all too often they won't check if there is another

version of how the things look, or a reply. Another example of that might be Polish public television reportage(11) presenting Polish IMC as a site on which „red skinheads” threat to launch further attacks against fascist, all without even one bad word about the fascists themselves [sic!]. In this case its not such a problem as hardly anybody believes the public TV as the viewer can observe how it changes after every elections.

Sometimes its hard to determine when the reaction of the corporate media is a planned action taken against indymedia on purpose, or is it just that the people working in thous fall victims of the rules in charge „on their side” - I found two good examples of that, with first one pushing it to the limits, as police massacred the IMC in Genoa in July 2001, during a counter G8 summit(12). Police raided a school used by the media activists as a sleeping place and a media center. They beat people still lying in their sleeping bags, smashed the equipment and took their press materials. 31 people had to be hospitalised. Next day both Italian and British informed the public about a successful action against „rioters HQ”. Where „healthy” media should spread the thure information which without any doubt they had, what thy did could not be called otherwise then „state propaganda”. Well.. that's how it works if the main media are owned by the president or prime minster.

The second example would be the case of the Indymedia Server Seizure, where FBI sized servers from Great Brittan, turning off over 20 IMC's in that Poland for few days. The Indymedia network was never officially informed of the reason for that, and the case received barley any attention of the mainstream media. Again its a case of a foreign government's police operating in another country, taking down servers of over 20 media sites... and non of the „corporates” notices that?

Corporate media „boarding” citisen jurnalism – anybody who takes the „web 2.0” into his or her consideration, has to admitt that the idea behind such services as myspace, flickir, youtube, google video, blogspot and so on is quite brilliant. The user provides a company with daily new content, for free, the company gives it a nice packing, adds a bit of advertising, sends it back to the users all with costs close to nothing, and huge profits. At this point I base my critique mostly on Dmytri Kleiner and Brian Wyrick article(14) which tries to show more ways of „corporates” or capitalism in general use to still both

the ways of communication and the audience. The main problem is that people don't think about the fact that even in internet they get most of their information from sources owned by very few, and it gets to the level where anarchists use Fox owned „myspace” for communication, or Google owned blogspot to publish their movies, which is what my video collective is still doing at the moment (not much longer thou). Meanwhile it's not so hard to create one's own website, even to get free server space, which is provided by many collectives world and internet wide. Cases of bloggers being handed out to governments they criticised, by the corporates that they trusted, should give everybody an idea of how „safe” it is to collaborate with them.

Another side of that is how the media pretend to be „open” - asking audience to call in, send email, pictures, videos, and so on, hoping to merge independent media/journalists in to themselves and to give a feeling that people can actually influence them. It may seem that this is a step forward in democratisation of the mainstream media, but I think that it's just a proof that they feel sure of their control mechanisms over what gets on the air. Just like the media coverage of the invasion on Iraq where in the USA on every 100 guests 2 were anti war(16).

Of course as I mentioned before, some parts of relations between the corporate and independent media could be thought of as positive, despite the fact that mostly they emerge from competition and not cooperation, which makes them a part of the same system, based on „darwinist” ideology, which as Kropotkin proved(17), couldn't be considered a better way of development than cooperation which is the main factor of evolution and development in their wide meaning.

Fighting. In the meaning of fighting over a subject, in places where the IMC's got greater audience it often happens that whenever either independent media or corporate media pick's up subject in the area of interest of the other one, they tend to fight to prove that their information is better and that the other side shouldn't be trusted. The perfect example for that is the World Economic Summit in Warsaw, Poland, in 2004. Despite the fact that the organisers, all of them starting from greens, through lefties to anarchists, informed that it's going to be a peaceful counter-summit, of which the demonstration is only a small

part, as there were numerous alternative conferences, screenings, theaters and all sorts of other activities, the mainstream media tried to prove and convince people that the alternative media are lying even on the number of protesters and the truth is that hundreds of thousands of raging with fury anarchists are going to demolish the city. In the end the demonstration counted 6 to 7 thousand people and the official number of police forces in the city brought specially for the summit was 13 thousand. The only positive action of the police that the corporate media could show was a police officer saving small ducklings, as the only breach of peace that was noted by the independent media was police raiding activists' private homes, which the corporates didn't notice.

Another example may be the „dublin riot“ - last year's „Orange Order“ march, or rather attempt of march through Dublin. After the riots, the media tried to do everything to find a scapegoat and victimise whoever they could, trying to portray people taking part in the blockade and riots as racists after an incident where 3 Asian shop workers got beaten after somebody stole some beer, what media didn't say was said by independent journalists(19), in this instance Revolt Video Collective, after the independent media proved that the attack was a media disinformation, and nobody from the mainstream press didn't bother to go to the shop to ask what actually happened, there were no followups on the story. The same is true about the riots in general – both the information what happened and who could be found guilty was shown from completely different angles if one read both the mainstream coverage and the independent one. Another example would be the attempt to put the Independent Workers Union (IWU) in the role of a scapegoat, publishing an article claiming that leaflets signed by the IWU and arguing that the march should be stopped by „any means“ were circulated two weeks before(20). The only place where the IWU could defend itself against the scam were the indymedia(21).

The second „positive“ effect of having both independent and mainstream media is the fact that it's harder for both to hide anything – in case independent media the readers-creators of them would publish the materials themselves as the recent „digg uprising“ showed, where the readers/publishers revolted against the group running the service where,

threatened by one of the copyrights agencies they decided to hide a special code of HD-DVD(22). In case of mainstream media, as the audience couldn't influence the content, the main reaction is moving to the independent media which cover the story better, and judging by the sites popularity which grows continuously (both in Ireland and Poland) that seems to be the case.

The last point is a second side of a one that I already mentioned before – the supposed „democratisation” of the corporate media. Even as I consider it mostly a facade behind which they remain the same old bad corporates, the independent media forced them to change their image and at least tell people to get involved, which is a step forward compared to when all they wanted was that the audience sits down and doesn't think too much, as they are the ones who think and investigate for us. Hopefully that is going to have a positive long term effects.

Summary

I think that thanks to the new technical possibilities, like the Internet, mass distribution of information, without high costs, torrent distribution of video content and Podcast technologies, the establishment of media was puted againsts something that could be considered a popular uprising, on top which they still manage to surff, but only as long, as people accept their role, and more and more, people see, that they don't really need to, as the ones they listen to are just like themselves and they as well can gather, publish and check information. Currently the mainstream media are already losing the battle as it gets harder for them to stigmatise users and creators of such media, as they themselves got drug into the user created and orientated web 2.0. So despite the attempts to destroy them, I think that the independant media are here to stay, and their part in the media is going to grow.

- 1) In the Freudian way, just without all the sex, further on I assume that the basic concepts of Freud's thought are known, just to get few pages of this work
- 2) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/corporation>
- 3) Legal Scholar and Professor of Law at the University of British Columbia
Joel Bakan
- 4) depicted in "the century of the self" (bbc series, accesible only thru the internet) and mentioned in Chomskies article "What Makes Mainstream Media Mainstream" that I'm going to mention again
- 5) anty eco advert
- 6) "Outfoxed" documentary
- 7) www.creativecommons.org
- 8) <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/75645>
- 9) <http://indymediawatch.blogspot.com/>
- 10) <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/75664>
- 11) <http://ww6.tvp.pl/video/2007/04/18/118037/film.asf> no translation
- 12) <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/free/genova/sky.htm>
- 13) <http://www.indymedia.org/or/2004/10/112047.shtml>
- 14) <http://www.metamute.org/en/InfoEnclosure-2.0>
- 15)
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yahoo21#Chinese_dissident_imprisonment_controversy
- 16) dokumentalny z dysku o wojnnie w iraku i mediach
- 17) Peter Kropotkin „Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution.”
- 18) <http://www.pl.indymedia.org/pl/2004/03/4649.shtml>
- 19) <http://indymedia.ie/article/74637>
- 20) <http://www.indymedia.ie/article/74562#comment141802>
- 21) <http://indymedia.ie/article/74562>
- 22) <http://enigmacurry.com/category/hd-dvd/>