



# STRATEGIES FOR CONCEALING

隱蔽的策略



# The Age of Concealing

A discussion of what camouflage means now can get very far without engaging the question of the role and the sense of concealment in our society.

The huge offensive of digital technologies in all the areas of life has tremendously expanded the field of visibility and the very structure of visual cognition and recognition systems have been resized according to new visual parameters. Despite these developments, one of the main paradoxes of our times is that the visible is no longer important. Instead, the invisible and the so called "selective detection of unfolded surfaces of unfolded information" became the dominant model we have to cope with and take into consideration. This process of folding and unfolding information (in Deleuzian's pleas of the visible) - is a key issue for understanding the major transformations we have witnessed over the last decade. Everything around us has become more and more invisible: from military to technology, financial institutions and the move of capital, nanotechnology and bio-cybernetics. And the list could continue indefinitely.

The power has shifted to those who are able to bypass the classic ways of transmitting information and who have the means and knowledge to develop these invisible modes of communication and enfoldment.

Defining the terms of invisibility became an issue only after the 9.11 Al Qaida attacks. The so called "war on terrorism" requested the public acknowledgment of the existence of invisible media, but it has also made visible which strategies for concealing the Western camps use in order to contra-attack potentially dangerous elements of Western democracy.

It is not my aim to engage a discussion on the military techniques of coding and decoding the vast amount of collected data or to detect who is the enemy of Western Democracy, but to point to the essence of recent developments, underlining that under such circumstances we have to radically change our approach in comprehending the actuality.

"No technique is innocent, no technique is good in itself", remarks the distinguished researcher in invisible media-Laura U. Marks. She is precisely referring to the fact that these new media are deeply embedded in their commercial exploitation and that is very hard to use a new medium differently from the way that it was designed for us to use it.

In this respect, creativity now means either to intervene on the level of the code or to escape the limits of representation. I assume that one of the reasons that we are returning to so called "traditional" modes of expressions is because most artists have experienced for themselves the limits of these new media technologies. Despite the huge amount of labor that has been used in writing computer code, technology remains just technology, it is only a tool, it does not provide any room for a true expansion of creativity and content.

I will not go further in explaining what creativity means now, but I would rather try to draw a possible framework for a better comprehension of the visual construction of 'the social' as revealed by contemporary artistic expression.

While tackling the issues of concealment another aspect that is essential is media's failure in ensuring the right critical climate within society. Not only that critique itself has become a lifestyle, a kind of fashionable, superficial activity that is drafted and prepared for sale, but the ethical has been completely subsumed by a consumerist society.

Behind the (iron) curtains of our ignorance and with our own consent, the so called "libidinal capitalist economy" is about to become the new rule of the world. Within this new phase of the capitalism—as it has been defined by Bernard Stiegler, the uncontrolled desires and behaviors are immediately saturated through an offer that will over satisfy any need. This perverse mechanism of oversatisfaction creates only more distance between us and the real world, and at the same time it neutralizes, tames and defeats everything that is against the mainstream. Within such a generalized context of oversatisfied desires, critique has completely lost its voice and those who still dare to criticize the state of things are as rare as the most endangered species.

One of the reasons I have decided to start an investigation on the artistic critiques and reactions to the various forms of camouflage is because I would like to draw everyone's attention not on the concealed issues that are contained in artists' works, but on the great importance of these ambivalent revealing / hiding and folding / unfolding processes.

However, this process of de-camouflaging the power strategies and cleansing cosmetic technologies can harm and is almost always wrongly perceived. "Unmasking could turn out to be just another deceptive technology leading to a new idolatry" - the philosopher Emiliano Cioc observes.

"This could be another reason for imagining a way of thinking and practicing existence without the claim of purity, authenticity or hidden truth but asserting its priceless precariousness. The task of existential technologies consists from now on in making bearable this time of absence, this experience of destitute times"<sup>2</sup>. The dramatic truth is that the truth itself might be perceived as the biggest lie. A sort of re-fictionalization of reality it seems to be always necessary in order to accept not the entire truth but a certain form of it.

1. Laura U. Marks, *Invisible Media- New Media: Theories and Practices of Digitextuality*, Anna Everett and John T. Caldwell ( eds) London, Routledge, 2003, pp33-46

According to Neil Leach, the culture of the bearable, the so called "aesthetical camouflage" has a tremendously positive role in helping us relate to the world and overcoming feelings of alienation<sup>3</sup> But again as Stiegler has already warned us, within the over consumerist society and in complicity with media and creative industries-these tactics are mainly oriented to mislead. The beautiful has always been a natural reflex of society, but now it seems that it became the tool for deception and manipulation rather than a positive element of individual reinsertion in society.

The contra-argument of Neil's Leach thesis of cultural camouflage is that "ideology itself can be characterized as a form of camouflage that veils the manufacture of consent behind a screen of misinformation, media distortions and affective manipulation"<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, the camouflaging techniques are alternating from violence to aesthetics, from politics to daily life and finally from defensive tactics to large scale processes of social leveling. If we take into consideration the fact that the structural relation between the bios and the cyber is under the pressure of a constant renegotiation, then we might get the right picture of the ambiguous context in which these practices are experimented.

It is precisely through the acknowledgment of such seeming contradictions and ambiguities that this exhibition proceeds. My aim is to investigate to which degree artists reflect in their works these dual relations, and to what extent they accentuate and reveal the actual situation of visual incongruity.

Therefore I propose a different reading of this topic through the eyes of the artists I have invited to participate at this exhibition.

The reason I conceived this exhibition in this particular way is that I consider art as the single and the most privileged area where certain truths can be revealed. Digging through the thick strata of historical lies and providing a deep cleansing to shiny sparkliness has been a favorite sport of artists throughout all epochs worldwide.

2. Emilian Cioc- Metaphysical Make-up, pp. 7-9. Speak Up magazine, edited by Grete Aagard and Tanja Nellemann on the occasion of the exhibition Locked In, Casino de Luxembourg

3. See Camouflage by Neil Leach. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, U.S.A., 2006

4. Comments on the book Camouflage by Neil Leach. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA, U.S.A., 2006 by Wilfred Niels Arnold, Leonardo, June 2007, Vol. 40, No. 3. Pages 311-312



One of the great things about art is that it fights against the instrumentality of vision and resists all kinds of leveling and regulations. Many things that are taken for granted by the mainstream media are always questioned. If nothing else, it may shake up our senses, obliging us to look at our world with fresh eyes and cope with the most uncomfortable problems with an open mind.

This exercise might awaken our sense of wonder and make us aware that the world we live in is not only idealistic and cynical, thoughtful and thoughtless, brave and fearful, strong and vulnerable but enormously beautiful.

My gratitude goes to Melle Hendrikse, the owner of C-Space gallery in Beijing and a great friend, whose personal support and financial contribution was essential in putting together this exhibition. I highly appreciate his commitment in presenting such kind of international exhibitions that gathers artists from so different areas of the world.

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Special thanks to Arne Hendriks, Irina Cios, Daria Ghiu, Cecilia Alemani, Manuela Lietti for their text contributions to this catalogue.

Last but not least, I would like to address my heartfelt thanks to all the artists involved in this exhibition: Emily Bates, Alexandra Croitoru & Stefan Tiron, Xing Danwen, Boukje Janssen, Sagi Groner, Chris Jones, Iosif Király, Ana Maria Micu, Sebastian Diaz Morales, Cătălin Petrișor, Victor Răcățău, Kathrin Schlegel, Marike Schuurman, Levi van Veluw and Carine Weve.

**Maria Rus Bojan**

# Shaping the Void

We live in a panoptical environment, surrounded by and embedded in its mediatized matrix. Media facilitate the new-found land we stand on. Meditated representation has replaced the represented. It is the truth. Not as a metaphor, not as a warning, but more real than the soil we grow our crops on. Complex unknowable matter and emotion is replaced by easily mediated sound bytes and video clips. It has become our primary source for knowing.

Personal representations are overtly available. You can find photos of my family, you can see where I live, you know what I like and dislike, you know what work I do and when I'm on the move. And I know about you. Democratic models for designing media turn everyone into an accomplice. The dialectical model of the watcher and the watched is outdated. Everybody is watching everybody. Power relations and its inherent oppression have also been democratized. It is also no longer valid to presume that conformity becomes the normal behaviour for individuals who wish to remain unnoticed, nor that the culpability of oppression shifts from the watcher to the watched. Everybody's been given shared responsibility for the design that facilitates our gaze. We're all guilty.

This mutually inclusive panoptical village creates panoptical behaviour. Since representation replaced the represented, media-attention is what we desire. We need to be seen on-screen. We need to be universally visible, findable and understandable and in order to accommodate this need, we need to be simplified. The immense popularity of reality TV, talent shows, cosplay, live action role playing, online communities, and other forms of direct mediation of the individual is a direct consequence of the fact that in order to be part of life we need to be part of the mediated world. Life is there.

We discarded our desire to be unseen, and yet a strategy of camouflage lies at the very heart of all this; just not in a traditional twigs-and-leaves kind of way. Camouflage is a method of concealing yourself from an enemy by making yourself appear to be part of the natural surroundings. The difference now is that our natural surroundings, the surroundings in which we are born, are a landscape of meditated representations, and in the participatory democratic model we are our own enemy. We show ourselves so that we remain unseen. We are in a state of post-camouflaged invisibility: the visual void in total presence. In the slipstream of total visibility arrives its inevitable consequence: the more we see, the more we are not seeing. Reading the visual becomes almost an impossibility in a world where one image-cloud is replaced by the next image-cloud ever quicker. The overwhelmed eye is an indifferent eye. The art of being unseen and thus indefinable has transformed into the art of being definable in infinite variations. Information is evolving as we watch, and thus it is in a constant state of incompleteness. It is not an accumulation of facts but of alterations, re-calculations and re-interpretations. It never is. In this situation what we cannot see becomes what we are most obsessed with. And as in any good horror movie, what we don't see drives our imagination and actions. It is the paradox of this time that with all that we know our actions are still driven by that which we don't.

It is precisely the point where the artists of this exhibition make their entry. The works, all in their own way, play an intelligent game with the fact that people can only see what they know, and fear, fantasize about, and project what they don't know. Here the artist functions like a shaman who stands between the represented and representational and communicates its own emptiness. It communicates its own waste of time, its own unimportance. It copies the facade of the Hollywood star but fills it up with negation. They are shapers of negative space, of what we cannot yet see and know. In their disappearance they become visible to the other, by triggering what we think we know what they should be. The camouflaged skin is the perfect projection screen for what we fear, love and believe. Believing is seeing.

As this negative space enters the fantasy of democratized power, it starts to shape events. It is a game of coding and decoding. How serious it gets, depends on where the game is being played and what's at stake. The artists in this exhibition try to find the glitch in the omnipresent matrix by scripting their own unknowable environment. Interpreting what is not known is the greatest challenge of any surveillance-specialist. We project a reality on top of things. The artist is a shaman/hacker voluntarily stuck in a wormhole between positive and negative space, between the represented, and the representation. By suggestion, omitting and abstracting the artist makes the absence felt. Perhaps because he instinctively want us to remember that once we were godlike beings that deserve more than a TV dinner.

### **Arne Hendriks**



EMILY BATES / 16 -17

Dr. ȘTEFAN TIRON & assistant researcher  
ALEXANDRA CROITORU / 18 -21

SAGI GRONER / 22 -23

BOUKJE JANSSEN / 24 -25

CHRIS JONES / 26 -27

IOSIF KIRÁLY / 28 -31

ANA MARIA MICU / 32 -35

SEBASTIAN DIAZ MORALES / 36 -37

CĂTĂLIN PETRIȘOR / 38 -41

VICTOR RĂCĂTĂU / 42 -43

KATHRIN SCHLEGEL / 44 -45

MARIKE SCHUURMAN / 46 -51

LEVI VAN VELUW / 52 -53

CARINE WEVE / 54 -55

XING DANWEN / 56 -59

# Ana Maria Micu

Ana Maria Micu's works shares the idea that concealment by camouflage, in its truest sense, is of necessity passive rather than active, and in this regard, the purpose of camouflage might not be one of persuading, but of rendering the enemy unaware.

For Ana Maria Micu, concealment is both a medium and a social practice. By exploiting concealment's regulatory function, she insures control over what is revealed and magnified, while keeping the invisible or shadowed in the background. Concealment become thus a new tool for creating indiscernible identities, and, on a metaphorical level leaving room for new methods of communication.



"No title" 2008, oil on canvas, 26.5 x 32.5 cm

"无 题", 布面油画





"Which are 6 sides ...Wow so I wasted two", 2008 oil on canvas, 21 x 26 cm

"哪些是六个面的？哦！这么说我浪费了两个。" 布面油画



## 安娜·玛丽亚·米库

安娜·玛丽亚·米库的作品与我们分享了这样一种理念，即：以伪装的方式进行隐蔽——从其最真实的意义上说——具有被动的而非主动的必需性。在这一点上，伪装的目的可能不是使敌人信服，而是使敌人毫无察觉。

对安娜·玛丽亚·米库来说，隐蔽既是一种媒介又是一种社会实践。她通过发掘隐蔽的调整功能，从而确保对被揭示、被放大物的控制，而背景则保持不可视状态或处于阴影之中。因此，隐蔽成为了一种用来制造隐形特性的新的工具，并且，在隐喻层面上给新的沟通方式留下了空间。



“But now I know ... But it is so crucial” 2008 oil on canvas, 49.5 x 59 cm

“但我现在知道了……但那太重要”，布面油画



“to find a way to live...A man” (Hans) 2008, oil on canvas, 53 x 58.5 cm

“寻找生活之路…… 一个男人” (汉斯), 布面油画

## Ana Maria Micu

Born 29 March 1979, Botosani, Romania

Lives and works in Craiova, Romania

### Solo Exhibitions

2007 Ideal Spleen, Anaid Art Gallery, Bucharest, Romania

2006 Bloom, Anaid Art Gallery, Bucharest, Romania

### Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2008 "Strategies for Concealing" C-Space, Beijing, China  
Scottish National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh, UK (catalogue)
- 2007 Urban Art, Architectural Projections Festival, Bucharest, Romania  
BP Portrait Award, National Portrait Gallery, London and on tour; at Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne, UK  
Royal West of England Academy, Bristol, UK
- 2006 BP Portrait Award, National Portrait Gallery, London and on tour;  
at Aberdeen Art Gallery, Aberdeen
- 2005 I Love Painting, under construction space, Hotel Continental, Cluj, Romania
- 2004 Airbag, National Art Museum, Cluj, Romania  
DWS Art Award exhibition, Bruckenthal Museum, Sibiu, Romania
- 2003 Urban Emotion, Galeria gallery, Bucharest, Romania  
Skin, Atas Gallery, Cluj, Romania
- 2002 Ana Maria Micu & Cătălin Petrișor, Atelier 35 gallery, Bucharest, Romania

## Sebastian Diaz Morales

Born in 1975 in Comodoro Rivadavia, Argentina

Lives and works in Argentina and Amsterdam

### Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 2008 Ecole de Beaux Arts, Grand Galleries, Rouen, France
- 2007 "The Means of Illusion", carlier | gebauer, Berlin, Germany
- 2006 "The Man with the Bag", Miro Foundation, Espai 13, Barcelona, Spain
- 2005 "Dependencia", Attitudes, Geneva, Switzerland  
"Prototypes", Galery carlier | gebauer, Berlin, Germany  
"Lucharemos Hasta Anular la Ley", Yvon Lambert Gallery, Le Studio, Paris  
"N O W H E R E", Experimental Space, Le Plateau, Paris, France  
"The Man with the Bag", Imagespassages, South American Films, Annecy, France  
I I BIM, Biennial of Moving Images, Geneva, Switzerland



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