

Art, information, paranoia

by Ina Blom

Paranoia strikes deep in the heartland

But I think it's all overdone

Exaggerating this, exaggerating that

They don't have no fun

This is the voice of Paul Simon ca. 1975, a Paul Simon momentarily impersonating the happy-go-lucky slacker who tells all those post-Watergate paranoiacs out there to just *relax*. The laidback blues harmonies underscore his case. This is the aesthetics of rock realism, the aesthetics of all those who refuse to read the big picture in the small detail, who maintain that things are generally what they seem to be, no better, no worse.

And what if, *contra* rock realism, *contra* the studied American coolness that turns to bitter parody at the end of Simon's song, an aesthetics of paranoia could be said to exist - what would it look like? It might look like the work of Gardar Eide Einarsson: indecipherable signs and logos traced on a monochrome canvas, snippets of televised information running over and over on a monitor, inexplicably bleak furniture arrangements, idiotic sentences caught as if "in the air", at the bottom of a zillion web pages or from some instruction manual. No color, no apparent demonstration of technique, in fact, very little of anything at all - less an experience than an irritant scratches at the outer edges of your conscious knowledge. Thus, spectator paranoia is triggered. It could of course be another case of WYSIWYG: no more, no less. God knows modern art has accustomed us to that particular experience. And yet, there is the lurking suspicion that all these insignificant-seeming bits and pieces really *mean* something, that, in some larger scheme of things, there exists a marginal public for whom these are genuine signs, opening onto a dense and complex reality. It's just that *you* lack the information. And so the reasoning goes, inside the loopy world of serious art production, where lack of information is at once celebrated and decried, where one person's sublime obliqueness is another person's suspicion of hype and hoax, of self-serving "expert" conspiracies. Gardar Eide Einarsson's work provides direct access entry to this particular social world.

At this level it is basically insignificant whether or not the bits and pieces *actually* signify anything in particular. Yet Einarsson's aesthetics of paranoia is a double entry system: Through the initial triggering of the paranoia of the art spectator and the public who *does not know*, it evokes another paranoid system: The paranoia of those who *think they know*, who organize their more or less secret, more or less illicit forms of knowledge and systems of communication against that of dominant others whose specific position of power depends on a systematic collection and organization of information according to the principle of undercover strategies and an ideal of total control. For both parties the rule holds that no detail is too small, no snippet too insignificant. There is, in short, nothing that is not a sign. Information is everywhere. In a peculiar take on the formal strategies of 1960's and 70's conceptual art, Gardar Eide Einarsson thus manages to tap into a little-discussed undercurrent in this form of art. The emphasis on informational systems and quasi-bureaucratic forms of communication earned conceptual art the name "the aesthetics of administration": it was essentially seen as an art catering to the sensibilities of the rapidly growing class of post-war functionaries and administrators.ⁱ And so it probably was - except for the fact that in a number of cases these informational forms had become the artistic language of a paranoid countercultural underground engaging in a highly ambivalent mimicry of the very power structures it was fighting. Here, the aesthetics of administration had, for all means and purposes, turned into an *erotics* of administration ... and the most precise thing one can say about the work of Einarsson is probably that it plays off the chaotic erotics of political paranoia in analogous ways.

ⁱ Benjamin Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions, in *October* 55, Winter 1990, pp. 141-142