

INFORMATION TAKEOVER

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"The proliferation and convergence of communication channels is a technical revolution. It's also a political revolution."

That's Stewart Brand's explanation of the sustained fervor infusing a loose underground of social visionaries, artists and maverick hackers. As our society shifts from one governed by materials to one regulated by information, those who control information have political power. But controlling information is a slippery thing. The technologies of camera, copier, computer dismantle the time-honored notions of ownership. When

ideas become the coin of the realm, and ideas can be multiplied and spread to the masses in the miraculous way of fishes and loaves, then paradoxes reign, and paradoxical will be the politics.

Almost every claim about the information revolution is steadfastly true. Small computers inevitably combine into oppressive big brothers; small computers inevitably empower individuals. Global communications make the world smaller; global information makes the universe bigger. Art is stunted by machine; artists are liberated by machines. The paperless office in the backwoods generates more tree-fed paper than ever. All true. All contributing to a fluctuating reality.

The bugaboos about copyright and who owns ideas (see "Bettered by the Borrower," p. 104) is one example of this oscillating signal. Being first with an idea doesn't guarantee power. Neither does being the largest. Big

government and the military-industrial complex are amazed, confused, and anxious because they can no longer control the course of information any more than the little guy can. The circuit has its own life. The political revision begun by a communication underground like computer networks (see "The Bulletin Board Proletariat," p. 77) is to acknowledge the standing of this other thing now living among us: the circuit of information.

Charting the current is partially what Jeanne Carstensen (managing editor of the *Essential Whole Earth Catalog*) and I have done in this issue. We've used the most versatile technology we have to date, paper and ink. You'll notice gaps in our crude survey. When the current comes your way, send a signal back with what we've missed.

New York publishing doesn't see anything of this invisible uprising. We sent a couple of proposals to Publisher's Row, and got back a shrug. We're sitting on three times the amount we could fit into 144 pages. Perhaps it's time we slapped it all into a rough, home-brewed, reader-written, self-published, funky, over-size Catalog. Again.

Perhaps we are whistling in the dark. If the task of providing access to a knowledge economy strikes you as necessary, write us.

I WANT TO XEROX MY DREAMS

JEANNE CARSTENSEN

It's a new society of the senses, a free poem of confusion and all possibility. Ears, tongues, eyes, fingers, noses, brains: our sensory range is stretching into space. We're hearing more, seeing more, saying more, to more people — faster — across airwaves, wires and screens.

Information travels so fast that space is obsolete, as McLuhan pointed out. We "are" wherever our sensory extensions are awake — the London stock market, the war in the Persian Gulf, the person next to us in bed. The trick is not to lose oneself in the wires, not to slip away on the perpetually rolling airwaves. To always feel the warm breath stretching out to you from across the pillow.

Far from making communication easier, the new media of the "information age" demand more work. How can we make ourselves heard through

the riot of signals that assault us every day? New skills must be learned and the ever-evolving context in which we communicate must be reevaluated almost daily.

I'm a little afraid of my own culture's love affair with communications technology. The medium, after all, is not the whole message. It's what we say, and how well. It's the soul we bring to our machines that will change the world. An old lesson?

But there is much fun to be had in this churning of the senses. I want to xerox my dreams. And why not? Each medium is a new language with which to understand ourselves. Xerox

discovers new surfaces. New containers. New skin. It's by "playing" that artists and other innovators eventually coax the real languages out of media, so that media keep on working on a human scale.

So SIGNAL is about exploration; in the communications grassroots users try to perfect their understanding of their tools, and so not be used by them.

Hello. ■